ANIMAL DESIGNS ON SAMOAN SIAPO AND OTHER THOUGHTS ON WEST POLYNESIAN BARKCLOTH DESIGN

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While looking for Tongan barkcloth with naturalistic designs in the Smithsonian Institution for an essay on Tongan barkcloth, I found a beautiful barkcloth with fish designs (Fig. 1) that had an earlier accession date than all of those I had seen previously. On closer inspection and further research in the accession records, it turned out to be from Samoa. This was a surprise to me, as most Samoan barkcloth with which I was familiar had designs that could be characterised as geometric or plant-like. On searching further in published sources and in the museums that I have visited during the past several years, I found a few more barkcloths attributed to Samoa that had animal designs. But as the Smithsonian piece was so early, it made me think again about the interaction of West Polynesian women with each other and outsiders, and about the origin and sharing of designs and the intercultural dialogues that they express. We know that Tongan barkcloth design influenced design in some parts of Fiji, especially in the Lau Islands. It is also likely that there were design influences between Samoa and Tonga and between Samoa and Niue. But what were they? This short paper cannot answer this complex set of questions. Instead, it looks at one aspect of barkcloth design—animal motifs, and especially fish, as a design motif in West Polynesia with a focus on Samoa.

Attempting to identify pieces of West Polynesian barkcloth and assign them specific provenances has always been problematic—especially deciding whether a piece is from Tonga, Samoa or Niue. Although there are some designs that appear to be more characteristic of one of these places, there are also those questionable pieces that do not seem to fit. This became even more apparent to me while assisting in the barkcloth exhibition at the Peabody Museum, Harvard, in 2002. Some pieces appeared to be Samoan, or were they Niuean? Some appeared to be Tongan, or were they Samoan? This paper explores whether animal designs can be used as a clue to the provenance of some pieces of barkcloth. Pieces of barkcloth from West Polynesia with animal designs derive primarily from the last quarter of the 19th and first quarter of the 20th centuries. Why was this promising design feature introduced and then abandoned?

After a summary of animal designs on Samoan barkcloth and a summary of fish designs on West Polynesian barkcloth, I explore the possible significance and meanings that fish and other animal designs may have held for late 19th century Samoans.
Important cultural forms of Samoa are oratory, poetry with its attendant music and dance, houses with lalava sennit designs, ritual sites with raised mounds, barkcloth, mats, baskets, ornaments, canoes and weapons—the production of some of these is ongoing.1 Fine mats, ‘ie tōga, plaited of prepared pandanus leaves by Samoan women, are still made for and used on a variety of occasions, especially weddings, funerals and the investiture of titles. These mats have changed over the years from fine-strand rarities to wider-warped treasures in quantity. They are, however, still held in the highest esteem and finely woven ones are paraded on completion. Other
plaited items characteristic of Samoa are ‘ie sina, made from the inner bark of hibiscus, usually white or brown. Women also traditionally made barkcloth, known as siapo, from the inner bark of the paper mulberry plant. Only small quantities of barkcloth are made today and this leads me to ask why siapo manufacture has declined, particularly since their Tongan neighbours have increased their barkcloth (ngatu) manufacture and their use of this traditional West Polynesian necessity. The Smithsonian Institution has hundreds of pieces of barkcloth said to be Samoan and it is important to find out how one identifies and separates Samoan barkcloth from the barkcloth of their neighbours in Tonga, Niue, ‘Uvea, Futuna and Fiji.

Samoans apparently made siapo only from the inner bark of the paper mulberry plant and produced it in relatively small pieces (that is, compared to their Tongan and ‘Uvean neighbors). According to Roger Neich and Mick Pendergrast (1997:14, 16), siapo is decorated in two ways: by rubbing dye over the cloth that is placed on a ‘upeti ‘design board’ and highlighting parts of the rubbed design by overpainting, called siapo tāsina, or by freehand painting, called siapo mamanu. They also include a third category, called siapo vala, that is used for a wraparound skirt. These pieces are rubbed on the ‘upeti and the design is finished by creatively highlighting aspects of the design transfer by overpainting.

In examples from the 19th and early 20th centuries, the designed area is usually divided into squares that are filled with geometric motifs often based on floral patterns. This designed area was sometimes bordered on two sides by a plain brown strip about the width of the squares. An uncoloured border that surrounded the whole was usually cut off, but occasionally left intact (it was not numbered, as is the case with Tongan barkcloth).

Besides the ubiquitous floral design motifs, other motifs are geometric squares and triangles—divided and decorated in various ways with circles and/or dots, and crescents. Some of these motifs were (and are) given names, such as a pinwheel, known as pe‘ape‘a; flying fox, pe‘a; jellyfish, ‘alu‘alu; star, fetū; and plaiting of coconut leaf ribs, fatatuāniu (see Krämer 1995 [2]:357, 359). Although motifs have been given names, we do not know whether these names were originally invariable, if they varied from barkcloth maker to barkcloth maker, or if they derived from the beholder. Indeed, when speaking of ornamentation, Augustin Krämer noted (1995 [2]:356): “Their scope can be revealed only by an intensive study of the material abroad and at home. That is why I withdraw from any further involvement in this question concerning ornamentation.”

Krämer does, however, make a few interesting remarks on siapo ornamentation (1995 [2]:355):
As I stated in connection with tattooing, my investigations [of siapo ornamentation] have also here not come upon any deeper meaning. In the minds of present day Samoans [that is, at the turn of the 20th century] they are purely ornaments (teu) for which they can not even in a few cases state definite names on which all agree. Constantly asking them was so tiring for both parties that I later gave up searching for an answer....

And further (1995 [2]:361):

If I further discover in the centremost field of the bark cloth a in illustration 124, where Falefā is spelled out, a row of common crabs in the foliage and in the upper right fish vertebrae, I am about to remove myself from terra firma into the realm of a blooming phantasy... [but] I am satisfied to have demonstrated that also on Samoa “the ornaments are not freely invented but have a long historical development” as v. Luschan says.²

Krämer used a different classification from Neich and Prendergrast. He classified siapo by colour, separating siapo tāsina or red siapo from siapo uli or black siapo (1995 [2]:355). He then adds,

a third variety, the multi-coloured fa'apulepule as compared to the single coloured ones (talao) are the so-called siapo mamanu, which are mostly designed and painted freehand (tusi) more or less. The designation mamanu (manu—animal) points to the fact that in the designs on those pieces primarily animal ornaments occur just as in illustration 123a, bats (pea‘pea [sic]) and urchins (tuisea), and in c starfish (aveau) and jellyfish (‘alu’alu) are scattered among the foliage.

One should note here, however, that in the examples he cites the designs are isolated motifs on a natural background (on what appears to be long narrow sashes), there is very little foliage, and he does not tell us if these animals—which take some imagination to discern—are his designations or if they were given by Samoans. It should also be pointed out that Krämer’s etymology explanation that mamanu derives from manu ‘animal’ must be incorrect, since most siapo now categorised as mamanu do not have “animal ornaments”.

Further, it appears that none of these authors have contemplated the connection of Samoan siapo tāsina with Tongan ngatu tāhina in light of their cognate modifiers. Pratt (1911) defines tāsina as “a striped siapo (introduced from Fiji)”, suggesting that this kind of siapo came from elsewhere. In both Samoan and Tongan tā means ‘to strike’ or ‘to draw’ and sina and hina mean ‘white’. Both terms indicate that a white background has been struck (rubbed?) or drawn upon with paint; and not surprisingly both use ‘upeti/kupesi ‘rubbing boards’ as a base for the design that is overpainted. Did one
influence the other? Pratt suggested that täsina was introduced from Fiji to Samoa; the term täsina is used in Fiji to refer to “native cloth marked on the kuveti” (Capell 1991:220). Although the origin of this type of design and method of applying it is difficult to pinpoint, I suggest that the täsina style originated in Tonga, based on 18th century museum specimens and 19th century photographs. The designs of Samoan siapo täsina are similar to the designs of Tongan ngatu tähina and the design layout is also similar. While in Samoa in 1839, Commander Wilkes attributed what appears to be täsina to Tonga (1845 [2]:141): “The Wesleyan missionaries from the Friendly Islands have introduced the siapo, of Tonga, which has now come into common use. It is soft, pliable, and not glazed, and is principally used as a wrapper, after the manner of the pareu of the Tahiti Islanders.” And again, when in Tonga, Wilkes noted, (1845 [3]: 25): “Indeed, in writing of Samoa, I mentioned that many things have been derived from Tonga, particularly their tapa covering from the waist downwards, called siapo.”

Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) focused on the manufacture of the cloth and said little about design motifs. He noted that “Samoaans divide their present methods into two: tutusi or mamanu (painting) and elei rubbing” (1930:306). His use of elei rather than täsina suggests that the latter is an introduced word. Buck also noted (1930:312),

cloth prepared by the rubbing process receives names according to the size and the uses to which it is put: siapo, though a general name, also denotes the shorter-sized pieces suitable for use as a kilt—the reward given to a talking chief for calling the kava, is referred to as one or more siapo potu, a sheet larger than a siapo, often used as a small screen.... pupuni, a large sheet used as a screen to shut off an end of a house.

Pratt (1911) gives terms for large pieces of barkcloth: potu refers to the siapo screen from behind which an aitu ‘spirit’ spoke, tai namu to a ‘mosquito curtain’, ululima to a large sheet measuring 50 widths of a ‘design board’ (‘upeti) and uluselau to a very large sheet measuring 100 widths of a ‘design board’.

Krämer did his research in Samoa during the 1890s and Buck was in Samoa in the 1920s, while Neich did his research in the last quarter of the 20th century. The famous 20th century siapo maker Mary Pritchard, who learned her craft in the 1920s, agrees with Neich and Pendergrast in describing the siapo depicted in her book (1984) as siapo täsina and siapo mamanu. Neich (1985) provides an extended discussion of terms, and he notes that “in Buck’s time siapo with freehand painted designs was more common than siapo dyed by rubbing on a design tablet. By contrast, in 1980, freehand painted siapo had almost disappeared and none was actually seen in circulation” (1985:50).
Pritchard describes her own work process, which she learned in Leone village in the 1920s and continued through the 1980s, as *siapo mamanu*; but many of Pritchard’s *siapo* are considered works of art and were not used for traditional functions, such as ceremonial circulation.

Simon Kooijman, after a long discussion on the manufacture of *siapo* based on the earlier published sources, analyses a number of motifs to show how they are built along the four arms of a square’s diagonals and explicates his theory of how they are related to designs of the Toradja or Toraga of Sulawesi (Kooijman 1972:237). He also describes how the motifs are mainly linear and right-angled in their basic construction (1972:243).


> a range of recognised motifs has developed as a basic design vocabulary. Some are very ancient motifs that can be traced back into Indonesia, but others are recent innovations. Many of these motifs are given descriptive names drawn from the natural world, such as breadfruit leaves, pandanus leaves, pandanus bloom, fishnet, trochus shell, starfish, worm, centipede, and footprints of various birds.

Finally, on the internet site &lt;www.siapo.com&gt; design elements include non-naturalistic motifs called trochus shell, pandanus leaf and pandanus leaves, sandpiper, terns, footprints of sandpiper, starfish, worm, male pandanus bloom, breadfruit leaf, banana pod and centipede.

THE SMITHSONIAN FISH *SIAPO*

The Smithsonian’s fish barkcloth accessioned as item (13,699) is part of the Steinberger Collection (accession 3313). This important collection came to the Smithsonian Institution in 1874-1875 and includes eight pieces of barkcloth and a beautiful pandanus-leaf ‘design-board’ (Fig. 2).

The collection was made in 1873 by the controversial “special agent” Colonel Albert B. Steinberger (1840-1894), who President Grant appointed and instructed to acquire full and accurate information about Samoan inhabitants, harbours and commercial possibilities (Stathis 1982). During the two months that Steinberger spent in Samoa, he interacted with a wide range of people and assembled a varied collection that came to the Smithsonian —presumably because Steinberger was a United States government agent. In 1875 Steinberger returned to Samoa, engaged in commercial ventures, and became Premier under King Malietoa Laupepa.

Following the classification used by Neich and Pendergrast, the Smithsonian fish *siapo* is a *siapo mamanu*, with a freehand painted design. It is also a *siapo mamanu* in the dictionary sense of the word, where Pratt (1911:204) defines
the noun *mamanu* as “…(i) a kind of fish and (ii) figured work in cloth, clubs, sinnit, &c.”, and defines the verb *mamanu* as “to be worked in figures, to be carved”. This, of course, does not separate freehand painting from ‘*upeti* rubbing. The more general word for freehand painting would be *tusi*, which Buck uses and Pratt (1911:354) defines as “to mark *siapo*”—conveying the idea that it is done with a brush and not by rubbing.

Figure 2: Samoan pandanus-leaf ‘*upeti*. Collected by Col. Albert B. Steinberger in 1873. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. (13,737). Photograph by D.E. Hurlbert, courtesy Smithsonian Institution.
The complete dimensions of the Smithsonian fish *siapo* are 333cm in its longest dimension and 262cm in the other dimension, which is cut, and therefore we do not know its original size. The side opposite the cut side does not have fringe, while the other two sides have fringes about 9cm long. The freehand internal design (of about 145cm) is a series of squares (each about 43cm in both dimensions). This very-difficult-to-see design is a complex of straight rectangular forms, leaf-like forms and elongated triangular forms. However, it is over-painted with a dark brown glaze (probably ‘o’a, *Bischofia javanica*) that has almost obliterated the design. Surrounding this design area is a band of plain brown, varying from 19cm to 23cm wide. This plain band, in turn, is surrounded on three sides by a white border, about 25cm wide, on which is painted a double horizontal row of fish, each from about 11cm to 18cm long and 7cm to 9cm wide. They are interspersed with an occasional vertical fish or lobster, about 18cm long. The *siapo* itself is made up of two to four layers of white single sheets.

Except for its border of fish, the Smithsonian *siapo* is similar to the layout and colouring of an example in the Auckland Museum (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:18), which has had its white border cut away. This Auckland piece, presented by Mitchelson in 1920, is 208cm by 167cm. The central design is a more careful rendering of a floral pattern.

Figure 3: Samoan barkcloth with turtle and lobster motifs in black, brown and yellow. British Museum, London. Photograph copyright: The British Museum, London (1976.6.5)
In the British Museum there is a Samoan barkcloth (1976.6.5) that includes turtles, a lobster and what appears to be a starfish, with black, brown and yellow colouring (Fig. 3). This piece was acquired in 1976 from the Methodist Missionary Society in London and the pieces were said to have been collected by missionaries John Hunt and James Calvert between 1838 and 1840, but this cannot be verified. In the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, there is a Samoan barkcloth (23290) with a border of fish (although if one is not looking for fish, one might consider the designs to be leaves). There is some yellow colouring, which may be turmeric (Fig. 4). This piece was given to the Linden Museum by Dr Wilhelm Solf, Governor of German Samoa, in 1902. Also in the British Museum is a barkcloth piece (1928.87) with black fish painted on a dark brown ground (the fish are 15 to 25cm long). It is catalogued as possibly Fijian, but is probably Samoan. This piece came from Joseph Jackson Lister, a British
zoologist who was in the Pacific in 1889-1890 on HMS *Egeria*. A similar piece is in the Smithsonian. This is a small dark-brown piece of *siapo* (396,031), which has been cut in such a way that only parts of three black fish remain. It was collected by the Rev. Joseph Deihl and came to the Smithsonian Institution in 1924 from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Other animals on barkcloth said to be Samoan have also been found. These include birds, outlined on four squares of a *siapo* in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne, Germany (Thode-Arora 2001:214). This piece was purchased by the museum from Edward Gerrard & Sons in 1905. Other Samoan pieces depict centipede-like animals. One is in the Auckland Museum (see the back cover of Neich and Prendergrast 1997, and a detail on page 27), received in 1928 from a Mrs Barclay. The overall design includes other unusual elements: unusual leaves, some with insect-like feet, stars, wheel-like forms, triangles joined at their apexes, and a series of worm-like animals with heads and zigzag bodies.

Another centipede-like animal (Fig. 5), on a long narrow strip of white barkcloth (476cm long x 51-63cm wide), is in the Peabody Museum, Harvard (19-39-70/ D1272). It came into the Museum in 1919 from Mrs G. Peabody Gardner.7

Mary Pritchard’s book depicts (1984:46) a barkcloth piece showing several centipedes that is in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna. Pritchard notes that the “fa’a atualoa/centipede... is found often in older siapo, [but] I do not like or use [it] in my work”. Pritchard (1984:41-45) also cites other motifs in which animals are “depicted” non-naturalistically, including trochus shell, sandpiper, tern, sandpiper footprints and starfish.

Perhaps the most interesting siapo of this group with animal-derived designs, featuring a series of spider-webs, is in the Peabody Museum, Harvard (11-2-70/83930). This beautiful siapo was collected between 1896 and 1900 by William Woodworth, who was part of the United States Fish Commission research voyage in the South Pacific. It is a typical siapo mamanu ‘freehand painted siapo’ organised in horizontal and vertical squares, surrounded by a brownish border (Fig. 6). However, the design is extraordinary in its asymmetrical symmetry. Its creator has taken the elements of a more usual motif—a series of crescents drawn in the points of triangles (formed from

a square that is divided-into-eight-triangles)—and has rearranged these crescents to meet the crescents of three other squares in such a way that the four intersecting squares form spider-webs.

Another piece in the British Museum (1895-485), said to be Samoan, has a motif of two concentric circles with six bent legs encircling it. This piece was acquired from Mr Meinertzhagen, who lived in New Zealand from 1866 to 1881. The designs on this piece are similar to pieces in other 19th century collections, such as those depicted by Krämer; however, “Mairatatera” is painted on it and this is not a Samoan word.

To summarise, the animal forms so far located on Samoan siapo are very few and most can be dated to the late 19th/early 20th centuries. They are found on long, narrow sashes or on rectangular siapo mamanu. The small number of animal motifs raises the question of whether animal designs in Samoa were originated by one or a few especially creative Samoan women as “decoration” and then simply abandoned, or whether these designs had meaning for specific chiefly lines and their gods? Although all of the known pieces could be the work of a single individual, it is more likely that this creative streak was shared among a few women, possibly in a few communities or descent lines for which the designs had meaning. For example, some chiefly lines had specific associations with certain fish and turtles (see Buck 1930:522). Unfortunately, the documentation is not precise enough to venture such a guess.

ANIMALS IN WEST POLYNESIAN BARKCLOTH DESIGNS

Following from the above, my original attribution of the Smithsonian fish barkcloth as Tongan has been discarded for two reasons. Firstly, the piece is considerably earlier than Tongan naturalistic designs, which cannot be well documented until the 1890s. Secondly, the type and design of the Smithsonian fish siapo are definitely Samoan and quite different from the fish designs on Tongan barkcloth (ngatu).

Tongan barkcloths with fish include one said to have been brought to Sydney in 1886—although it cannot be securely dated until 1926 when it entered the Australian Museum (Kaeppler 2002:300, 301). This piece (Fig. 7) includes foliage, fans, necklaces, crescent moons, shooting stars, birds, fish, sailing ships and the pinwheel/vane design (manulua in Tongan). The manulua motif usually refers to a chief. Perhaps this is a visual story about a chief who went on a sailing ship, making this design the visual counterpart of a laulau ‘lament’ or lakalaka composed to commemorate a departure overseas.

Figure 7: Tongan *ngatu* with fish motifs. Australian Museum, Sydney (E30421, 30422). Photograph courtesy Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia.

This piece has Tongan words printed in the plain white border that say ”KOETOFAA” (*koe* = the, *tofua’a* = whale). There are three rows of whales and then a row of another fish that look more like sharks and were interpreted as sharks by Tongans (Fig. 8). Tongan fish could also refer to specific chiefs or chiefly lines. Although the overall designs are not clear, it is likely that the Tongan barkcloths with fish designs are allusions to specific individuals and events.
A set of *kupesi* ‘design boards’ was collected in Tonga during the voyage of the American scientific vessel *Albatross* under the aegis of the United States Fish Commission that visited Tonga in 1899. These *kupesi*, now in Peabody Museum, Harvard, and the Smithsonian Institution, include four fish, four creatures that look like flying fish, two eels, two birds and a dog. The *kupesi* show no signs of use and it is possible that they were made in response to urging by the scientists on the voyage (Kaeppler 2002:296-98). The fish *kupesi* are 22cm in length and 11 to 12cm in width (Fig. 9).
My search for fish designs on West Polynesian barkcloth has turned up a few others. A piece of barkcloth with fish and birds (Fig. 10), along with their pandanus-leaf rubbing tablets for both the fish and the birds are in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne, Germany (Thode-Arora 2001:268-69). The fish rubbing tablet is 32.4cm long (Fig. 11) and the piece of barkcloth is 325.5cm by 146.5cm. They were collected in 1892 by John William Lindt and are catalogued in Cologne as Fijian. Thode-Arora notes, however, that they could be Samoan, but I suggest that they are Tongan. The design layout...
does not seem to me to be either Fijian or Samoan, but is similar to early Tongan naturalistic design structures. It is similar to the design layout on the Tongan ngatu that includes fish in the Australian Museum, Sydney, mentioned above (Fig. 7).

A delightful small fish is depicted on a Niue barkcloth in the British Museum (Fig. 12). It is dated 1887 by a printed date on the cloth and came to the British Museum in 1953 from G.A. Fickman, County Offices, Haverfordwest, Pembroke, from St David’s Museum.

To summarise fish motifs on West Polynesian barkcloth so far located:

- The earliest piece appears to be the Smithsonian Samoan siapo collected in 1873 (Fig. 1).
- The Niue piece in the British Museum is dated 1887 (Fig. 12).
- The Sydney Tongan piece may be 1886-1892 (Fig. 7).
- The 1892 piece in Cologne (Fig. 10) is probably from Tonga.
- The Tongan kupesi in Peabody Museum, Harvard (Fig. 9), was collected in 1899.
- The Samoan piece in Stuttgart (Fig. 4) was given to the museum in 1902.
- The earliest information on the whale-design Tongan piece in Auckland (Fig. 8) is 1927-1932 (although from the design layout it appears to be earlier).
- The piece in the British Museum (1928.87), which is probably 1889-1890, appears to be Samoan.
Thus, the Samoan fish *siapo* in the Smithsonian is not only the earliest fish design, but is also the earliest documented naturalistic design on West Polynesian barkcloth so far identified.

**DISENTANGLING POLYNESIAN DESIGNS**

Nineteenth and early twentieth century studies of Polynesian design often focused on design as decoration (Greiner 1923) or as ornament (Stolpe 1892). More modern approaches have used linguistic analogies in the derivation of visual grammars of design. Green (1979), for example, demonstrated the possibility of examining continuity and change in Polynesian art from the prehistoric past into historic times. Within Green’s corpus of design motifs there are no fish or other animals.

My interest in design lies in a different direction. Did the designs have meaning to Polynesians? Were certain design structures and motifs used only for certain purposes? If so, how might we be enlightened about these meanings? Can designs and their layout be used to identify the origin of the barkcloth?

Several years ago, I attempted to ascertain the meaning of designs as metaphors by examining two of many possible Polynesian designs—the
crescent motif and the motif combining three or four triangles that meet at their apexes—both of which are widespread in Polynesia (Kaeppler 1997:91-93) and are both found on Samoan *siapo*. I have also examined Tongan designs as metaphor and allusion (Kaeppler 2002) and traced the origin of naturalistic designs on Tongan barkcloth to the 1890s. It is tempting to speculate that Samoan designs also had meanings in the past, in spite of present-day views that “they have no meaning or significance other than as motifs or patterns” (Pritchard 1984:41). Where might we find such significance?

Named design motifs, some similar to named *siapo* design motifs that include animal motifs, can also be found in Samoan tattooing. Krämer mentions worm-like, millipede-like, sea swallows, starfish and jellyfish designs (1995 [2]:92), but considers them “nothing more than decoration in a variety of expressions as appropriate for all designs” (1995 [2]:89). And Willowdean Handy notes,

> the Samoan whose patterns are reproduced here described his motives in the terms given in the legend for Plate VI. It will be noticed that most of the motives are named for animate or inanimate objects, to which some resemblance may be traced in the general shape of the design, but the drawings can hardly be called naturalistic (Handy 1924:24).

I want to suggest that there is also a similarity of some *siapo* motifs to the form of the so-called “star mounds”. These mounds, called *tia ʻave* by Herdrich, are believed to have been used for the ritual sport of pigeon-catching and perhaps other rituals (Herdrich 1991:381). Seen from above, the mounds have a number of “rays” or arms, which Herdrich associates with actual and metaphorical shapes of animals such as octopus, starfish, turtle and eel/snake. Further, Herdrich (1991:415) associates the animals with the Samoan pantheon of gods, and notes,

> [I]n addition, these entities are either directly associated with pigeon-catching or are indirectly associated with it, in that they are depicted in oral narratives where the acquisition of a wife is a major theme and the acquisition of wives is related to pigeon-catching via Samoan proverbs. I consider this to be supporting evidence for the idea that variations in the *tia ʻave* are based on the mounds being representations of these various mythological entities.

Krämer (1995 [2]: 357, Fig.13, q and r) depicts a *siapo* motif, which he calls *manoa* (*mānoa*), that consists of a line that forms an open triangle. Pratt (1911) defines *mānoa* as a thread or string, and notes that *mānoatūina* refers to a tame pigeon held by its leg. In Tongan *mānoa* refers to a string with which a decoy bird is tethered (Churchward 1959:332). In Tonga, pigeon-snaring
is also associated with the snaring of high-ranking women as wives for the chiefs, and the sung poetry of lakalaka ‘sung speeches with choreographed movements’ associates snaring women with snaring pigeons (Kaeppler 1996), but, as far as I am aware, there is no mānoa motif on Tongan barkcloth.

One of the mounds looks centipede-like from above (see drawing in Herdrich 1991:404). Pigeon snaring has not taken place on these mounds for some time, but perhaps fishing had, or could have acquired, a similar metaphorical association with the catching of wives—both are carried out with a net and both pigeon snaring and fishing are men’s work—making fish and fishing appropriate designs for men. In addition, Samoan gods are often associated with fish. Mary Pritchard illustrates a net motif that she associates with nets “used in older times to hunt pigeons (lupe) and to catch turtles (laumei)” (Pritchard 1984:41). One might even venture the idea that the spider-web design of Figure 6 may be a metaphor for snaring women, who are represented by flowers. Further, the rays or arms of the star mounds have a similarity to the siapo motifs that are based on lines and crescents that dominate the siapo squares—including fetū ‘stars’.

Figure 13: “Patterns of bark cloth: a. manutasi; b. logologo; c. eye ornament; d, e, f. eye star and small eye wheel; g, h. wind turbine; i, k. pe’a, flying fox; l. pe‘ape’a, bat; m. ‘alu’alu, jellyfish; n. tuisea; o. fetū, star; p. fatatuanui, plaiting of coconut leaf ribs; q, r. manoa.” After Krämer (1995, [2]:357).
I am suggesting that motifs and designs did have meaning and significance for Samoans in the past. With the coming of Christianity, fish and other animal designs may have served as remembrance of things past, echoing distant rituals associated with the gods, such as the old gods’ association with ritual mounds and specific chiefs who were not hierarchically ranked. The designs may also have been gender specific—snaring pigeons alludes to snaring women in both Samoa and Tonga; ritually caught sharks are considered female in Tonga; perhaps ritually caught fish are considered female in Samoa as well? At the end of the 19th century, wearing siapo with such designs may have been an effort to imbue the present with a sense of significant meanings of the past—of carrying the past into the present. By the first quarter of the 20th century, however, these visual reminders of the past became less and less immediate, their associations forgotten, and they were finally abandoned.

The Smithsonian fish siapo, and other examples, have the remains of a yellow dye that appears to be turmeric, which, at least in some parts of West Polynesia, has a religious ritual significance. In Samoan oral traditions, lega ‘turmeric’ retains an aura of sacredness and is found in place names such as Sālega (Sacred turmeric) in southwest Savai’i. Pratt’s definition (1911:255) of potu as “the siapo screen from behind which an aitu [spirit] spoke” also opens the possibility that some siapo pieces had a similar ritual function to their counterparts in Fiji, where a piece of barkcloth hung from the rafters of the bure kalou ‘god-house’ served as a pathway for the god to descend to the priest (Kooijman 1972:414).

Looking at the other three barkcloth-making West Polynesian societies—‘Uvea, Futuna and Niue—animal and other recognisable naturalistic designs do not occur on barkcloth of ‘Uvea or Futuna, but in Niue we encounter human figures on barkcloth and occasionally an animal. Neich and Pendergrast (1997:69) attribute the introduction of barkcloth, which was known in Niue only in historic time, to the Samoan missionaries. They taught Niueans the Samoan method of making barkcloth and introduced the tiputa ‘poncho’, which had previously been introduced to Samoa from Tahiti (see also Buck 1930:313 and Kooijman 1972:289 on this point). The Niueans, however, quickly evolved their own design system, which included the introduction of human figures (see Fig. 12 and Kaeppler 1997:428, 529). Also characteristic of Niuean motifs is a spiral motif that radiates in four or eight crescentic lines from the center of a square—essentially curving the four or eight straight lines of the Samoan and Tongan motif formed from crossing a square diagonally, vertically and horizontally. Although Neich and Pendergrast attribute some barkcloths with these motifs to Samoa (1997:28), I suggest that this spiraling motif is even more characteristic of Niue. Other characteristic Niuean motifs are concentric...
circles, concentric squares and squares divided into eight triangles, some or all of which are filled with crescents that diminish in size. Thomas (2002:192) has attributed a poncho in Te Papa Tongarewa Museum in Wellington with some of these motifs to Samoa, but this poncho is surely from Niue.¹²

Fijian barkcloth uses some of the same motifs as the West Polynesian barkcloth on which I focus in this article. The arrangement of the motifs, the overall designs and the emphasis on black and white are all distinctly Fijian. However, one piece of Fijian barkcloth that has been located does have a fish motif (Fig. 14).¹³ This piece, in the British Museum (1848.7-12.31), has a

Figure 14: Fijian barkcloth with fish design. British Museum, London (1848.7-12.31). Photograph copyright: The British Museum, London.
series of fish depicted quite realistically. The only other Fijian representational motif, of which I am aware, is the depiction of muskets on a few pieces. Rod Ewins, who has studied the designs on Fijian mats and barkcloth in collections around the world, describes the Fijian use of design motifs in a way that is similar to writers on Samoan design.

Notwithstanding the highly abstract nature of the motifs [on mats] that appear to be traditional, they are all assigned names, and in almost all cases these names derive from natural objects... or at least from the appearance of the motif itself rather than any imagined resemblance to natural objects. Most names can broadly be said to relate to this type of imagined resemblances, but I am unable to detect any significance in the objects concerned, other than that they are objects with which Fijians are apt to be familiar. Seemingly, they need not have any particular importance or significance. Therefore the names seem to me to bear all the hallmarks of “craftsmen’s nicknames”, appended to aid memory and recognition, and signifying nothing else. This view is perhaps supported by the fact that a great number of the designs are found in bark-cloth stencils, where they bear quite different and unrelated names, in most cases (Ewins 1982:16).

DISCUSSION

Two questions are still to be explored: (i) can animal designs be used as a clue to the provenance of pieces of barkcloth, and (ii) why was such a promising introduction of new designs with animal motifs abandoned?

My answer to the question of whether animal designs, and especially fish, can be used to provenance pieces of barkcloth is: “not by themselves”. Although the Smithsonian fish *siapo* is Samoan and an early example of naturalistic designs, it is more likely that barkcloths with fish motifs would be Tongan. Giving a provenance to a piece of barkcloth from West Polynesia depends on design structure, the layout and combination of design motifs, the original size of the piece, the texture of the barkcloth and how the layers are pasted together. Design motifs are like linguistic phonemes. Although many phonemes are shared throughout West Polynesian languages, it is the grammar that distinguishes one language from another. Just so are many visual motifs shared among West Polynesia design systems, but it is the “visual grammar” that distinguishes one area from another. Further, it is the “cultural grammar” that influences how imported objects and designs will be incorporated. It should also be remembered that although men may fabricate the wooden design boards, and even some of the pandanus-leaf rubbing tablets, barkcloth designs are usually conceived by women and often travel with women when they move to a new village or island or archipelago with
their husbands. If, or how, new designs might (or might not) be accepted would depend on the design system in place and the judgement of people with status in the cultural tradition.

During the late 19th century and much of the 20th century, Tonga’s King Tupou II and Queen Sālōte Tupou III combined their Tongan background and culture with distinct European flair. It is probable that their acceptance of new motifs into the Tongan design system encouraged more and more creativity in this sphere. Queen Sālōte’s high-ranking counterparts in Samoa, such as Salamāsina, were probably much more focused on culturally important fine mats, ‘ie tōga, and would encourage creative individuals, such as Mary Pritchard in her siapo-making endeavours, to follow tradition. Mary Pritchard followed the siapo style that she learned in Leone village in the 1920s—a traditional style that has now become synonymous with Samoan barkcloth and is followed closely by the new generation of siapo artists.

I suggest that animal designs, introduced during the last quarter of the 19th century in Samoa, Tonga and Niue, and perhaps even Fiji, were abandoned because they did not fit well with the aesthetic of indirectness, so important in this part of Polynesia. The introduction of naturalistic designs into Tongan barkcloth stimulated an artistic efflorescence that might not have occurred without them, but the animal designs did not persist. Naturalistic designs (and their geometric counterparts) in Tonga were associated with hierarchical rank, but not the gods. Rank remained important in Tonga and new naturalistic designs added a kind of modernity to traditional ways of depicting it. But animal designs are visually ambiguous and for the most part do not relate to specific people or places—except for flying foxes. These have been retained as symbols for the area around Kolovai on the island of Tongatapu and Kolovai’s chief, Ata (Fig. 15). In Samoa, where the incarnation of gods in animals was common, it is possible that animal designs on siapo made visual reference to the gods and that “star mound” designs were also associated with the gods. With the advent of Christianity such visual references became superfluous and associated with pagan belief, and were no longer used. Mary Pritchard’s dislike of the atualoa/centipede design, mentioned above, may echo this Christian avoidance of things considered pagan.

The flying-fox motif illustrates how design concepts differ between Tonga and Samoa. In Tonga, a flying fox (peka) is depicted naturalistically on barkcloth as shown in Figure 14. In Samoa, a flying fox, pe’a, is depicted as an obtuse triangle with one side elongated (Krämer 1995 [2]:357; Fig. 13 above, examples i and k), that is, essentially abstracting the essence of the stretched wings as a horizontally-elongated triangle. The pe’a motif is also part of Samoan tattoo design as an abstracted, elongated, open triangle (as seen in Handy 1924, Plate VI B,d), and pe’a sometimes refers to the whole tattoo.
The names of Samoan motifs are still in use while the visual motifs remain (or have become) conventionalised. The names of Tongan motifs and the motifs themselves, though naturalistic, are essentially metaphors and allusions. In both Samoa and Tonga, the possibility of developing naturalistic designs was present and, indeed, such designs were used at the end of the 19th century, but each took a different route to modernity. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Tongans were focused on the visual trappings of monarchy and British influence. Samoa was focused on internal warfare among equal chiefs and experienced a variety of colonial influences, which resulted in a perpetuation of traditional visual images.

The aesthetic preference of Tongans is towards naturalistic barkcloth designs, which gained in popularity throughout the 20th century, retaining older geometric designs primarily as decorations of the naturalistic ones or as special chiefly-related designs. In Samoa the aesthetic preference is...
much more abstract and traditional motifs have been retained as the main design elements. It appears that an important Samoan aesthetic principle is one of ordering vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines within a square. This would corroborate Shore’s idea of extending Krämer’s definition of teu as “decoration” to include the meaning of “to put in order”, and Krämer’s speculation on the origin of the term tatau (tattoo) as “correct” (Shore 1986:514). Peter Buck (1930:6) noted that the persistence of custom is very important in Samoa and has led to a greater retention of old forms than in other parts of Polynesia.

Although the incorporation of naturalistic designs (or their abstracted essence) into barkcloth (or tattoo designs) may involve borrowing from the outside or within the region of West Polynesia, it is the incorporating design system that shapes the product into its evolved form. The designs suggest that intercultural dialogues were taking place in the arts of West Polynesia. Equally important were design analogies with other artistic forms within each cultural tradition and the aesthetic principles and preferences in each society.

In Tonga there was a tradition of incising animal (and human) motifs into clubs and other wooden objects. The design layout and motifs used on clubs is analogous to the design layout and motifs used on barkcloth (Fig. 16). Tongan barkcloth designs, and the kupesi ‘design board’ sets that transfer them, echoed these carving motifs and led to the representational embedding of the conjunctions of place, genealogy and event—important elements in this hierarchical society. During much of the 20th century, metaphors and allusions to the uncontested hierarchical order were creatively elaborated visually in barkcloth design and verbally in lakalaka performances, and have not been successfully challenged since the time of Tupou I.

In Samoa incised designs on carved clubs include squares, triangles and chevrons that have similarities to siapo motifs, and both retained these traditional designs (Fig. 17). Siapo and tattoo motifs also have similarities and may have influenced each other. In Samoa the importance of orators whose verbal proclamation of the ranking of titles, repeatedly proclaimed on each important occasion, became rhetorical performances each time an oral statement was appropriate. Like their oral counterparts, I consider siapo designs to be visual rhetoric—repeated each time a visual statement is appropriate. Samoa and American Samoa both have a history of emphasising how traditional they are in their use of material and verbal culture, while at the same time they have become part of democratic societies. The importance of oral and visual rhetoric is demonstrated on each important occasion when title ranking and social precedence is orally proclaimed—such as during ceremonial ‘ava drinking, and when figured siapo is worn and/or presented.
Both Samoa and Tonga proclaim their own specific cultural traditions orally and visually. Occasionally groups from Tonga and Samoa interact, such as at the wedding of the King of Tonga’s second son, the Hon. Ma‘atu, to the Samoan chief Malietoa’s granddaughter, Alaileula, in 1989. In the wedding exchange the Samoans presented one small piece of *siapo* and the Tongans presented huge pieces of *ngatu*, while the Samoans presented hundreds of mats and the Tongans presented only a few, illustrating yet again that cultural boundaries are not social boundaries and that gifts and exchanges are perhaps equally (or even more) relevant to the giver than the receiver.
Are there cultural differences between Samoa and Tonga that encouraged Tonga to explore a wide variety of barkcloth design motifs and fully develop naturalistic design concepts, while Samoa essentially retains its more traditional design vocabulary? I suggest that Tongan design concepts are based on metaphor and allusion, which must be constantly replenished, while Samoan design concepts are based on visual rhetoric, which must be constantly repeated. If only we could learn how to read it, visual history may be as significant as oral history as meaning-making elements of memory and politics.

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ENDNOTES

1. See Sean Mallon’s book Samoan Art & Artists, 2002, for information about some of these art forms.
2. F. von Luschan (1854-1924) was a German ethnologist and Director of the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde during the late 19th century.
3. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer, who pointed out the Fijian term. Capell (1991:107) defines kuveti as “a large frame on which masi [barkcloth] is marked”.
4. The collection also included objects from Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert Islands), the Caroline Islands and Kosrae in Micronesia, and Niue, Tonga, Tokelau and Futuna in Polynesia.
5. Although the fish siapo is part of the Steinberger Collection (accession 3313), there is a slight complication. An annotation in the card catalogue done much later notes that the fish siapo (13,699) was given by Gustavus Goward. There is also a Gustavus Goward Samoan collection in the Smithsonian. It consists of 15 pieces, including one piece of barkcloth, and was accessioned into the Smithsonian collection in 1882. We do not know the relationship between Mr Goward and Mr Steinberger or why a piece of siapo from Goward was thought to have been part of the Steinberger Collection. However, as it is catalogued in sequence with the Steinberger collection in the original ledger catalogue, and it has its original label that matches Steinberger’s original list, we are confident that it is part of the collection that came to the Smithsonian in 1874-75.
Animal Designs on Samoan Siapo

6. I am indebted to Hilary Scothorn, who drew this piece to my attention.
7. This piece was conserved by T. Rose Holdcraft and was featured in an article about barkcloth conservation (Holdcraft 2001:105).
9. Greiner (1923), in her extensive study of Polynesian design, does not mention or depict any animals in her section on Samoan barkcloth (except for repeating Krämer); and Leonard and Terrell (1980) do not depict or mention animal designs on Samoan siapo.
10. The Rev. E.E. Crosby served in Tonga from 1884 to 1892 and was said to have brought the piece to Sydney about 1886.
11. The USS Albatross was cruising in the South Seas between 1889-1900.
12. This poncho, which did not have original provenance data, was attributed by the cataloguer to Samoa, but was re-attributed by Janet Davidson to Niue. I agree with her. Note the similarity between this poncho and a poncho in the Bishop Museum (C8236).
13. I am indebted to Jill Hasell for bringing this piece to my attention.
14. Rod Ewins informed me (pers. comm. March 2003) that he was not aware of any representations of fish on Fijian masi.
15. Lakalaka is a sung speech with choreographed movements. This “dance” is essentially an evolved form of the me’elaufoa that developed in the late 19th century. Evolving side by side with the naturalistic kupesi designs during the 20th century, the metaphorical and allusive poetry and movements reached their peak in the compositions of Queen Sälote.

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