This article explores one of the commonest classes of historical Tongan artefact, the war-club. Although generally known in recent times by the term *pōvai*, during their period of active, practical use (until the 1870s or thereabouts) these weapons were known by the terms ‘*akau* ‘stave’, ‘*akau tā* ‘striking stave’ or ‘*akau tau* ‘war stave’. The shortest of these terms is used here throughout. The study of ‘*akau* has a number of research merits. They are numerous, well-preserved and have a long history of collection. ‘*Akau* comprise roughly 20 percent of the Polynesian artefacts collected on the Cook voyages of the 1770s; consequently, they are the single most numerous class of documented 18th century Polynesian artwork, heavily outnumbering all other Tongan artefacts—as well as the entire collections from any other Polynesian island group (Kaeppler 1978: 238, 1999: 24). This reflects their ubiquity and alienability in historical Tonga, as well as the militaristic collecting interests of many 18th century British sailors and the vigorous consumer demand for non-Western weapons in the contemporary European curiosities market (Mills 2008a). Cook’s second voyage visit to Tonga in 1773-74 also marks the beginning of *papālangi* ‘European’ weapons importation in Tonga, beginning with bayonet blades (Labillardiere 1800). Firearms and artillery rapidly followed over a few decades, although ‘*akau* and spears (*tao*) were still the principal weapons of war throughout the first half of the 19th century (Dillon 1972 [I]: 274-75, Fanning 1970: 52-53, Lockerby 1922: 9-11, Orlebar 1976: 57ff., Patterson 1817: 94-95). In the mid-1860s, however, the Rev. Thomas West (1865: 266) wrote of ‘*akau* in the past tense and described how older warriors bemoaned the lack of respect for nobility and the protocols of war that the use of musketry had brought about.

‘*Akau* were historically to be found in a broad range of cultural contexts: from (obviously) warfare to sport, dance, religion and the complex of everyday material accoutrements of the chiefly class. These were emically significant artefacts in historical Tonga and therefore a contextual understanding of them also reflects significant aspects of Tongan social history. Their high level of formal variation and decorative complexity reflect this indigenous historical significance, as well as their labour-intensive manufacture in the workshop of the *tufunga fo’u vaka* ‘shipwright, master carpenter’. The variability of ‘*akau* forms, the complexity of their decorative incision and the overlap of various types with forms carved in Fiji and Samoa have all acted in conjunction with
poor provenance information, and surprisingly little past scholarly interest, to create significant confusions of cultural attribution, which plagued early museum curators, collectors and cultural historians of Polynesia (Churchill 1917, Edge-Partington 1969, Montague 1921: 77, Sargeaunt 1908: 13). My aims in this article are substantially twofold: first, to provide a contextual synopsis of the cultural status of ‘akau in historical Tonga, drawing on pre-existing historical sources and recent ethnographic fieldwork; and second, to somewhat clarify their formal variability and historical changes in style, drawing on the study of museum collections undertaken during my recent doctoral research project (Mills, 2008b). The art of shallowly engraving the surface of clubs, known as tongi ‘akau, vies for the title of Oceania’s most complex historical art system. Because of this complexity and the existence of an apparently distinct sub-class of tufunga (the tufunga tongi ‘akau) responsible for its execution, the surface design demands separate treatment to the form of ‘akau. I will not discuss it here.¹

CONTEXTUALISING ‘AKAU

I firstly provide a rudimentary ethnohistoric reconstruction of ‘akau in Tonga during the later 18th and early 19th centuries. This will briefly begin with their practical violent use before turning to explore their non-combative social contexts of use, symbolic capital and finally their illuminating metaphysical status. In this way, I shall generally be moving from the material to the abstract and viewing the implementation of ‘akau in various sociocultural contexts as constituting a range of indexical performative signs. From these a cluster of informing iconic cultural meanings can be abstracted, enabling a rudimentary ethnohistorical representation of the ‘akau’s nature.

Fetā‘aki: The Physical Use of ‘Akau

The use of ‘akau in combat is the most obvious place to start. It is sensible to immediately distinguish between fetā‘aki as fatal ‘akau-fencing with hardwood clubs and fetā‘aki as a spectator sport of recreational fencing with softer weapons. Whether bouts on the competition ground (mala‘e), one-on-one duels or single combat within larger battles, fights were generally initiated by the offering of a challenge (pole). In war, this was verbal, accompanied by threatening postures and manipulation of the ‘akau in mock strikes termed ofa‘aki. The voiced challenge developed into fetalatangata‘aki between the two men—elaborate boasting of one’s own masculine virtues and similarly-themed denigration of one’s opponent (Churchward 1959: 175, Gifford 1929: 218). In ofa‘aki and fetalatangata‘aki, a link can be seen between warriorship as the threat of imminent violence and more general performative traits of masculinity. Insofar as both aspects of male competition were viewed as
manifestations of personal *mana*, this is congruent (see Reilly 2001, Sahlins 1985, Shore 1989). The metaphysical principle of *mana* ‘efficacy, vitality’ was as complex and diversely understood in pre-Christian Tonga as it was throughout all other Austronesian-speaking parts of the Pacific; consequently, although I will discuss it here to some extent, I reserve its fuller exploration for another time and place.

Performative display and psychological intimidation were central to formal fights, although all such gaming and formalities were entirely done away with in charging and general mêlée. Right-handed combatants stood *en garde* (*ino/taino*) with left hand near the ‘*akau*’s butt and right hand near the centre of gravity, slightly over halfway way up its length (this varied with ‘*akau* type). The ‘*akau* was held high to guard the head, and at an angle between 30-45 degrees from the vertical, as is finely illustrated in John Webber’s 1777 watercolour *The Reception of Captain Cook at Ha’apai* (see Joppien and Smith 1988 [III]: 31). A number of fighting moves are well documented (Churchill 1917: 10, Churchward 1959: 207).

Table 1. Documented Fighting Moves of *Fetā’aki*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Hahapo</em></th>
<th>One or several lateral blows to the side of the head, arm or torso. This was considered general ‘<em>akau</em>-play.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Hahau</em></td>
<td>A reckless over-arm strike downwards on the top of the head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fehoka’aki</em></td>
<td>A thrusting jab with the head end of the ‘<em>akau</em>, usually to the face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tā-Tu’a</em></td>
<td>A backwards thrust with the butt, under the left elbow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pale</em></td>
<td>A parrying move; to ward off a blow.²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kalofi</em></td>
<td>The bodily dodging of an attack. This term was also applied to the avoidance of spears, arrows and throwing clubs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fakapoi</em></td>
<td>Feinting to draw the opponent’s guard to one side, exposing his head or other side to a <em>Hahapo</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Inoino</em></td>
<td>To move about and jab the ‘<em>akau</em> unpredictably, in order to unsettle the opponent and create an opening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A head strike was the principal aim of the warrior, in order to stun or incapacitate the opponent as quickly as possible. Obviously, killing with an ‘*akau* was not a simple or clean business and it often required several blows (Martin 1818: 74-75, 87-88, 102-3, 120-29; Vason 1840: 169-70). In this regard, it is not an uncommon understanding among modern Tongans that larger ‘*akau* were used to fell the opponent, while a *kolo* ‘throwing club’ was used in the hand to deliver the *coup de grâce*. 
Fetä‘aki as Sport
The sport of fetä‘aki was conducted with the dressed flexible midrib of the coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*)—a weapon known as palalafa, also carried in everyday life by members of the chiefly class. As is generally the case with martial arts, sporting fetä‘aki undoubtedly emerged as a formalised spectatorial event from the practice of fighting skills in peacetime, an activity termed fehaunamuaki (Churchill 1917: 10). Sporting fetä‘aki was a central attraction at katoanga ‘festivals’, usually occurring in association with wrestling and boxing. Fetä‘aki stands somewhat distinct from the other two sports; boxing and wrestling were sports engaged in by women and men alike, while fetä‘aki was an exclusively male activity. Thus it is readily apparent that sporting fetä‘aki possessed the same male genderisation as warfare itself. An analogous dimension of competitive masculine performance might also be inferred. Although the challenge in sporting ‘akau-play was silent and respectful and fetalatangata‘aki notably absent, it seems that the contingency of masculinity on success was more limited, or at least, somewhat differently framed. James Cook provides the best description of the sport:

> Presently after a number of men entered the Circle or Area before us, armed with Clubs made of the green branches of the Coconut tree, these paraded about for a few minutes and then retired the one half to one side and the other half to the other, and seated themselves before the spectators. But soon after went to single Combat, one or two stepping forward from one side and challenging those on the other which was done more by actions than words; if the challenge was accepted, which was generally the case, each put himself in a proper attitude and began to engage and continued till one or the other gave out or their weapons were broke. When the contest was over, the Victor squatted himself down facing the chief then rose up and retired, at the same time some old men, who seemed to sit as judges, gave their plaudits in a few words and the multitude, especially those on the side to which the victor belonged, celebrated it in two or three huzzahs. (Beaglehole 1988 [III]: 107)

Sporting fetä‘aki was highly developed by the 1770s, with clear sparring rules, protocols of participant and audience behaviour, panels of judges and performance evaluation criteria. It endured throughout Western Polynesia into the 1880s (Churchill 1917), a little after the abandonment of ‘akau in warfare.

James Burney, First Lieutenant of HMS *Discovery*, remarked on the admirable grace with which competitors offered, accepted, won and lost bouts; he also remarked that, should a man offer an open challenge, and have it taken up by someone he knew to be a better fencer, there was no shame accorded to a prudent withdrawal (Beaglehole 1988 [III]: 108n.2, Martin
However, Collocott and Havea (1922: 147-49) record a number of proverbs that take sporting fetā‘aki as their subject or metaphor, and these indicate high levels of concern among fighters about the impact of loss in terms of public humiliation. Indeed, Burney’s description of men withdrawing a challenge when confronted by a more skilled opponent might indicate that there was a greater cost to personal reputation in fighting and losing than in simply backing down.

‘Akau, Masculinity and Performance
From the above it is evident that the ‘akau-armed warrior (toa) operated as an important performative sign of successfully competitive masculine behaviour in pre-Christian Tonga. The activity of historical Tongan warfare was genderised and sexually charged, as has also been thoroughly discussed for Fiji, the Southern Cooks, the Marquesas Islands and Aotearoa (Clunie 2003: 50-53, Kjellgren and Ivory 2005: 9ff., Reilly 2001, Vayda 1960). Beyond fetā‘aki, this can be identified in a number of other historical manifestations: for example, men took great pains immediately before battle to ensure that their dress, face paint and hairstyles were striking and immaculate. Within the ritual drama of the fakate ‘military review’, which usually took place after the various kongatau ‘regiments’ had assembled and before the first battle of a campaign, similar elaborate self-adornment took place. Particularly ambitious warriors drew attention to themselves by making bold public promises and predictions of their achievements on the battlefield, accompanied by the same ofa‘aki ‘akau-play discussed above, and announcements of the weapon’s thirst for enemy blood, its loyalty to the paramount, and so on (Martin 1818: 77-78, 113-14, West 1865: 266).

Moreover, just as waging war indexed masculinity, the significative link was equally true in reverse; cultural processes of male genderisation were substantially militarised. For example, in the pre-Christian Tongan birth rites, the neonate’s umbilical cord was severed with a ritual adze by the ulumotu’a ‘ranking senior male’ of the kainga ‘extended kin group’. This severance was accompanied by a prayer that the child, if female, grow up to be a fertile mother or, if male, a warrior; warriorhood was narrated as a quintessential performance of successful adult masculinity (Collocott 1921: 419-20). This strong symbolic link between warriorhood and masculinity, in which the ‘akau was intimately implicated, can also be seen to be manifested in Tongan performance art outside of wartime. Thus, it can be argued that there is a strong militaristic character to male dance forms such as the kailao and me‘etu‘upaki. The kailao is explicitly narrated as a club dance historically imported from ‘Uvea, in which groups of men perform a range of synchronised and contrasting moves with the pate kailao, an ornamental
dance club (Collocott 1928, Kaeppler 1993). Kaeppler has attributed a Futunan origin to the me’etu’upaki ‘standing dance with paki’, a dance form recorded in Tonga as early as 1777. In this dance long files of men split apart, move through each other and mesh back together while performing a range of synchronised moves with the paki ‘dance paddle’. Paki have been consistently termed dance paddles in the literature on Tongan arts, despite the fact that their blades do not actually resemble traditional Tongan paddles. Paki means (among other things) ‘to strike’ in Tongan, as explained in the discussion of ‘Akau Family A in the second section of this article. The me’etu’upaki is now performed only at events of elite ritual, such as chiefly investitures and marriages, and it is salient that the only Tongan artefact class that paki do closely resemble are that class of ‘akau termed kinikini (‘Akau Family I below), which were the exclusive insignia of high-ranking chiefs and possession priests. Many paki even bear a curved detail across the base of their blades that vestigially parallels the distinctive down-curved reinforcement ridge to be seen on kinikini. If the foregoing is not enough to convince the reader that paki are in fact dance clubs and the me’etu’upaki originally a club dance, I may also add that, in the first historical description of its performance (by William Anderson, surgeon of the HMS Resolution, in Beaglehole 1988: 895-96), the mid-point of the choreography involved a centrepiece in which

...two men enter’d very hastily and exercis’d the clubs which they use in battle. They did this by first twirling the club in their hands and making circular strokes before them with great force and quickness, but so exactly together that though standing quite close they never interfer’d. They shifted them to the opposite hands with equal dexterity, and after continuing a little time kneel’d and made different motions, tossing the club up in the air which they caught as it fell, and went off as hastily as they entered.

Weighing the foregoing, I take the balance of probabilities to imply that paki were not dance paddles, but dance clubs. Consequently, the ‘akau can be identified in the two dominant forms of communal, single-sex male dance. As a result, it becomes more problematic to doubt the ‘akau’s performative symbolism as instantiating masculinity than to assert it.

‘Akau and ‘Eiki
In peacetime, and outside of the sporting arena, only male ‘eiki ‘chiefly person’ were entitled to carry clubs. These might be either soft palalafa or hardwood ‘akau, as the man saw fit. The ‘akau was an important handheld component of the material culture complex of chiefly male identity in Tonga,
alongside ī ‘fans’, fue ‘fly-whisks’ and tokotoko ‘oratory staffs’. Other distinguishing features of the material self-presentation of the ‘eiki’ were garments such as ta’ovala ‘waist-mats’ and high-status kie hingoa ‘named mats’, sifafatafata ‘breastplates’ constructed from pearlshell and whale ivory, and a hierarchy of increasingly exclusive feather headdress forms. The authority of the chiefly class was instantiated by their entitlement to sport this material culture complex, which visually distinguished them from those of lower, mua ‘intermediate’ and tu’a ‘commoner’, status (Kaeppler 1978: 206-41, 1999; St Cartmail 1997). Like all exclusively elite or regalia weapons, ‘akau in this context allude to the underlying military legitimation of civilian political authority (Fraser and Cole 1972: 299, Roach and Eicher 1979: 15-17).

Lawry (1850: 19-20, 74, 247) remarked that it was commonplace for male ‘eiki to carry palalafa clubs at all times, for the purpose of punishing and coercing their tu’a. Dumont d’Urville (1835: 76) suggested that the central concept of crime in early 19th century Tonga equated to the infraction of tapu restrictions and the lack of demonstrable subservience and humility by tu’a; both, he observed, were primarily punishable by a summary hardwood clubbing at the hands of one or more chiefs, albeit only fatal in the most serious of cases. Cook and several of his crew earlier remarked on observing similar violent incidents of chiefly punishment. This was the “club arbitration” which the Christian missions fought hard to abolish (Beaglehole 1988 [II]: 174 n3, 1988 [III]: 100-101, 951, 962, 1049-50, 1309-10; D’Entrecasteaux 2001: 186; Forster 2000: 253-54; Labillardiere 1800 [II]: 183; Martin 1818: 178; Thomas, Methodist Missionary Society Notices, July 1830: 298). The ‘akau and palalafa were the principal tools through which disciplinary structures of authority, and indeed the status asymmetry of the ‘eiki and their structural inferiors, were practically enforced and discursively asserted. As the ‘eiki were categorically armed in this way, ‘akau were also understood to have certain qualities of ‘eiki, as their metaphysical status reveals.

‘Akau and the Biographical Accumulation of Mana
A close biographical relationship existed between historical Tongan warriors and their weapons, which not only can obviously be conceived as ownership but also possessed a number of metaphysical qualities that go far beyond that. I have explored above the way in which ‘akau were centrally involved in the performative instantiation of a mana warrior-masculinity on and off the battlefield, as well as the authority of the ‘eiki—who were almost integrally conceived as mana (Marcus 1980: 17ff., Sahlins 1985: 85-87, Shore 1989). Obviously, the next question to address is whether ‘akau themselves also possessed and participated in that mana or whether they were metaphysically
inert tools incidental to it. It is well documented that ‘akau known to have taken many lives were considered to be mana, directly paralleling a warrior’s biographical accumulation of toa ‘warriorhood’ (a specific military sub-form of mana, discussed by Gifford [1929: 327]). As a material indicator of their accumulating toa, warriors were in the habit of decapitating their victims and retaining the heads as trophies—a collection of ten heads being the number aspired to. In this there are discernible echoes of the Fijian practice whereby warriors were ranked and titled by their number of kills in increments of ten lives (Clunie 2003: 50, Gifford 1929: 339). This incremental acquisition of demonstrated mana applied to the killing man and the killing tool alike, which can be inferred from a number of salient historical facts. The mana of persons was contagiously shared with certain significant possessions, particularly garments such as vala ‘kilts’ and ta’ovala ‘waist-mats’, kali ‘headrests’ and so on. For these artefact types, prolonged close physical contact (particularly with the head and loins) was the key determinant of this contagious mana. This in turn applied a tapu ‘sacred, closed, prohibited’ condition to the object for individuals of inferior social status. This status is indicated for ‘akau in the prohibition against a pregnant woman touching or stepping over her husband’s significant possessions, including his ‘akau (Collocott 1921: 418).

Furthermore, the rite of fanofano (meaning ‘to wash the hands’ and ‘to extend/prolong/expand’) was performed when one warrior wished to pass his ‘akau on to another—the ritual enabling the socially inferior of the two to avoid contracting a tapu from contact with his superior’s mana. Fanofano involved the superior cutting down and splitting an immature banana tree, and then drizzling and smearing the sap over his own hand, the recipient’s hand and the ‘akau (Gifford 1929: 327, see also Collocott 1921: 436-37, 1928: 92); thus, it is readily apparent how the rite constituted the washing of the hands. Insofar as the other situations in which fanofano was performed were those in which the two participants sought to transmit mana from the more powerful to the less (as in the case of a master physician imparting a treatment technique to their apprentice), it should be clear that ‘akau were conceived as accumulating mana through close biographical association with militarily successful and/or high-ranking owners. The rite of fanofano demonstrates that the owner’s mana was both alienable and inalienable concurrently—capable of transmission to another without its original possessor experiencing any diminishment—and that fanofano was also the extension and expansion of that mana. Importantly, however, when this mana was transmitted to an artefact, such as an ‘akau which remained in the owner’s possession, the use of the artefact effectively redoubled the owner’s complement of mana. As the Hon. Albert Tu’ivanuavou Vaea explained to me in 2005, this historical process
is well understood among modern cultural historians in Tonga; he chose to term it as a relationship of the warrior’s reliance on the mana ‘akau to bring him military success, which I discuss further below. In relating directly to a warrior’s agency, this phenomenon of the warrior and weapon’s reciprocal mana empowerment bears more than a passing structural resemblance to Gell’s (1998: 96ff., 122ff.) concept of “distributed personhood” in artefacts, and this is now an opportune moment to address the personhood of ‘akau directly.

‘Akau as Persons
William Mariner recorded that it was the early 19th century Tongan practice to name ‘akau after they had “done much execution” (Martin 1818: 359). In other words, the demonstration of an ‘akau’s mana (that it had shown itself to be effective at the killing task for which it was created) led on to the attribution of a kind of personhood. In historical sources references can be found to ‘akau known as Ualulu /‘Two Owls’, Pasivulangi /‘Strangers Applaud’, Pasitaukei /‘The Experienced Applaud’, Tu‘i Papanu /‘The Lord Who Strikes with a Good Outcome’, Tu‘i Tapavalu /‘The Eight-Sided Lord’, Mo‘ungalaulau /‘The Mountain of Lamentations’ and Mohekonokono /‘The Bitter Sleep’ (Churchward 1959: 417, Collocott 1928: 99, Gifford 1929: 207, 327). Exactly the same appending of names to successful weapons was done elsewhere in Western Polynesia (for Samoa, see Mallon 2002: 94; for Fiji, see Clunie 2003: 53). This handful of documented ‘akau names reflects a number of ethnohistorically pertinent facts. First, ‘akau themselves were viewed as chiefly—and by virtue of their own mana, and by direct association with ‘eiki humans. Second, Pasivulangi and Pasitaukei allude to the prominent role of socially self-conscious performance and critical evaluation in warfare. Third, their past success was viewed as a reliable predictor of future success, rather than the user’s skills in fetä‘aki (more will be said about this below). Fourth, the names of Mohekonokono, Mo‘ungalaulau and Ualulu indicate a fittingly morbid poetics for such killing tools, as well as associations with spiritual forces and entities, commensurate with their mana status.

Particularly exalted ‘akau were not only metaphysical persons but also sentient and, in some cases, prescient and capable of limited movement. This twisting movement, termed futefupe by the cultural historian Sione Havea (Gifford’s informant above), is itself interesting. Churchward recorded it as meaning “to be subject to sudden fits of anger”, and as the form of involuntary erratic movement one exhibits when enraged (1959: 204). Gell (1998: 130ff.) suggested that the attribution of sentient personhood to artefacts constitutes a psychodynamic externalisation of aspects of the self, which he termed homunculi after Dennett (1979). Grossman (1995) argues that the primary
emotional repercussion of killing our enemies, and allowing our comrades to be killed, is guilt; therefore, any cultural phenomenon that permits the projection of motivation and responsibility for homicidal acts onto a third party (human, divine or otherwise) will be both empowering and therapeutic for the killer.

It is here timely to introduce the only significantly complete documented example of an extant biographically exalted ‘akau, that of Vaha‘i and his ‘akau Mohekonokono ‘The Bitter Sleep’. The incumbent of the Vaha‘i title, with whom Mohekonokono was originally associated, was a powerful late 18th century war-chief (‘eikitau) of Hihifo, the western district of Tongatapu. Vaha‘i was a deadly warrior and skilful general, who successfully repelled the invading combined army of Vava‘u and Ha‘apai around the turn of the 19th century, despite his army being heavily outnumbered. Mohekonokono was a notoriously bloodthirsty weapon and conceived as integral to Vaha‘i’s success (Collocott 1928: 92, Gifford 1929: 223ff., 327). The account of Mohekonokono demonstrates that the mana personhood of ‘akau was actual and not simply a fictive personhood (as Westerners name their ships, for example); it was known to twist, vibrate and moan in order to warn Vaha‘i that his enemies were approaching. Vaha‘i kept the club in the fata ‘loft rack’ of his house, wrapped in a mat.

Vaha‘i’s club was so full of mana that it could not lie still and was always moving (futefute) as it reposited in the house. On one occasion a man was sent to fetch from the house Vaha‘i’s club, which was wrapped in a mat. Entering, he could see no club, but only the bundle of mat, which kept moving, and he thought it to be a child. Vaha‘i told him to go and bring it, which he did, it being the mana club. Vaha‘i’s club gave warning of war planned against Vaha‘i, by moving. The movement was caused by the “mana of the god”. (Gifford 1929: 327)

Decades later, the heirloom Mohekonokono’s material form was destroyed in a house fire. In response, the descendents of Vaha‘i simply had a replacement carved, which is presently on display in the Tongan National Museum in Nuku‘alofa, and acknowledged by almost all to be Mohekonokono (Gerstle and Raitt n.d.: 11). The social, biographical personhood of this ‘akau entirely superseded any particular physical index more than a century ago. I say “almost” because I have twice heard a rumour on Tongatapu that the ‘akau on display at the TNM is a proxy, while the “authentic” Mohekonokono is concealed at a secret location on the south coast of the island. Clearly, even in the 21st century, ‘akau retain a certain cultural capital which makes their display in glass cases somewhat distasteful to a number of Tongans.
‘Akau in Religious Context

This very real metaphysical personhood neatly leads on to the use of ‘akau in traditional Tongan religion. For convenience, the religious use of ‘akau is treated here as three distinct phenomena, although I hope it will be apparent to the reader that the boundaries are fuzzy. In the first instance are encountered the deposition of ‘akau in temples. A wide range of artefacts were placed in faletoputapu or fale’otua: mats, barkcloth, kava roots, ‘akau, spears, conch and cowrie shells, etc. These objects were termed fakafa’anga and considered to be the personal possessions of the deity (Gifford 1929:317-18). Captain Wilson of the London Missionary Society ship Duff (1799: 101) directly observed such a collection of artefacts in a pre-Christian temple: “On the floor were four large conch-shells, with which they alarm the country in times of danger & on the rafters were placed spears, clubs, bows & arrows, to receive from their…deity, supernatural virtue, to render them successful against their enemies.”

Gifford clarifies the purpose of this deposition: “Weapons were placed in the temple in order to acquire the mana of the god. John Havea said that when a weapon has mana, it is the abode of a spirit (faikehe) and it confers prowess and might on the user” (1929: 327). Faikehe was a generic pre-Christian term (loosely translating as ‘other side’) that encompassed all supernatural entities (Gifford 1929: 289). First, it is apparent that the mana of the deity had a positive contagious effect on the mana of the objects. Second, the weapon’s mana had a direct impact on the mana of the warrior who used it (this was the “reliance” referred to above). Third, Havea explicitly stated that the person of an ‘akau was a spirit. These descriptions of fakafa’anga shed considerable retrospective light on the account of Mohekonokono reproduced above: One can recognise that Vaha’i was storing his ‘akau in his own home as if he were the deity, his home a faletoputapu ‘temple’ and the ‘akau his fakafa’anga; he and Mohekonokono existed in a reciprocal relationship of mutual spiritual exaltation, in war and peace alike.

There were two processes, therefore, by which ‘akau acquired supernatural mana personhood: the first performative, through combative use, and the second contagious, by association with human or divine persons of great mana. There was evidently a close structural analogy between the process of mana-acquisition demonstrated by fakafa’anga, and the transmission of mana between individuals through the rite of fanofano. The implication of ‘akau in both contexts reflects their fundamental preponderance towards the accumulation of a dangerous metaphysical efficacy, hand-in-hand with the development of their own personhood. In a fascinating 1835 event at Lifuka in Ha’apai, described by the Rev. Charles Tucker (Methodist Missionary Society
Notice, August 1836: 319), syncretistic Christian echoes of the *fakafa ʻanga* phenomenon are apparent in the reuse of *mana ʻakau* and spears to fabricate communion rails and pulpit newels for a chapel. Moreover, there is material evidence for the reuse of *mana ʻakau*-butts and spear-tips as the handles of *fue* fly-whisks, held and used by ʻeiki to emphasise their oratory (Kaeppler 1978). The structural translation between ʻakau reuse to empower chiefly oratory, or sermons from the pulpit, is notable.

In the second instance of religious ʻakau use, they are encountered as the *vaka* ‘god vessels’ of deities themselves. On 3 June 1849, Tūngi, chief of Tatakomotonga, converted to Christianity and passed several ‘god vessels’ to Walter Lawry. Most of these seem to have been either whole whale teeth or necklaces of dressed ivory pieces wrapped in feather-trimmed barkcloth bundles or undescribed textiles covered in red feathers (possibly archaic *sisi fale* ‘waist-mats’ [see Kaeppler 1978, 1999]). Many of these were the manifestation ‘god vessels’ of powerful ancestral ʻeiki, and it seems probable that Tongan vaka were generally material culture relics of deceased humans (Lawry 1851: 38). Turning to Gifford’s discussion of temples in Haʻapai, there are several examples of gods taking ʻakau as their vaka. At his temple in Holopeka on Lifuka, the deity Ngaohaa had a vaka in the form of a *kolo* ‘throwing club’ and a whale tooth that were wrapped together in a sheet of plain barkcloth, which was then smeared with turmeric and kept inside a basket of unspecified form (Gifford 1929: 305). In the same town, the god ʻUluenga had an almost identical vaka, with the addition of a *paango lafo* ‘gaming piece’—a coconut shell disk used in a game similar to bowls. A priest by the name of Havea resided in ʻUluenga’s temple and was also occupied by the god for consultation or to decree in the more conventional way (Gifford 1929: 306-7). On the island of Uiha, the god Taufamangumoetoto followed a similar pattern, incarnated in a club of unspecified form and a ‘shield’, as well as the usual set of a specific bird species (such as a banded rail, tropic bird, frigate bird or pigeon) and a taula ‘possession priest’ (Gifford 1929: 310). Owing to the way in which Tongan deities manifested through a multitude of different vessels, it would seem uncertain whether the ʻakau served to manifest the deity in situations of active interaction, passive rest or both. However, Collocott (1921: 436-38) noted that clubs kept in temples were consulted on the expediency of going to war. In such divinations, shaking signified that the *faikehe* desired war, and stillness peace. In this shaking can be recognised the same *futefute* identified as a characteristic of Mohekonokono. Similarly, Lawry (1851: 38) described a third religious function for ʻakau:

There is also in my possession, among the Heathen relics from Muʻa, a club belonging to a long line of priests; and its name is Hallah [hala], or ‘path’. 
When the chiefs came to enquire of the priest, this sacred club was taken down; the priest was inspired and delivered his message, which might be in anger, or otherwise, as the case might be; then the club smote the beam, and away went the fahe gehe, mounting aloft, or plunging into the deep, as they saw fit. This club, then, is a sacred fahe gehe or ‘god’ of Tonga.

Lawry’s use of the phrase “this sacred club was taken down” also implies that the *hala* was placed or suspended at a height in the *faletoputapu* as *fakafa ‘anga* were; indeed, it seems most likely that the *hala* were essentially an exalted sub-category of *fakafa ‘anga*.

The Rev. John Thomas, stationed on Lifuka, wrote in his diary for Sunday 26 December 1830:

I was glad to see so many grey-headed men who are becoming wise at last; one of these is a respectable Matapule; the Chief and I visited him yesterday at his village called Ahau, we talked to him of the necessity of turning to Jehovah. The old man believed what we said; he sent for his club called Hala, that is ‘way’ or ‘road’, and gave it to me, thus testifying his assent to the truth of God, and that he cast away his spirit or devil who had hitherto guided him; for the club he gave me was that by which he used to divine, it was the road or way for the spirit. (*Methodist Missionary Society Notices*, August 1832: 125)

William Mariner also described an almost identical rite on Tongatapu in 1804 (Martin 1818: 84-85), indicating that the *hala* were to be found throughout Tonga and through the first half of the 19th century at least. These accounts directly link the divine inhabitation of clubs, divination and human spirit-possession in a single ritual form. What may be discerned here is the weapon’s role as a tool for removing the soul from the body, symbolically redeployed into the sphere of spirit possession rites. The accounts indicate both that the *hala* served to provide the faikehe an exit from the body of the *taula* ‘possession-priest’, and possibly an entrance as well. Contemporary Fijian religious analogies can be drawn upon here. Williams (1858: 224-25) described the manifestation of deities through possession priests (*bete*), remarking on the movement of the deity from the ridge-pole of the temple (*bure*) into the priest, via a long streamer of unprinted barkcloth suspended from it, inside the building. After delivering its divine message, Williams wrote, “The priest looks round… and, as the god says ‘I depart’, announces his actual departure by violently flinging himself down on the mat, or by suddenly striking the ground with a club.” The parallels with the Tongan accounts are too close to imply anything other than a contiguous and contemporary form of religious practice spanning both archipelagos.
CLASSIFYING 'AKAU

In this second part of the article, my aim is to provide a practical overview of formal typological variation in 'akau. This has been done before (Bailey 1947, Churchill 1917, Kaeppler 1999, St Cartmail 1997), but rarely have Tongan clubs been considered separately from those of wider Polynesia, and never as a result of the systematic formal analysis of quite so large and chronologically diverse a research sample of 'akau. The 253 'akau sampled here have collection or first documentation dates spanning the period from 1773 through to 2004, and amount to something in the order of 15-25 percent of all remaining examples. I do not intend to outline my methodology of typology construction here, which is explained at length elsewhere (Mills 2008b: 117-83). Suffice it to say that the primary determinants on the typology are historically recorded Tongan categories, enhanced by typological classification methods used in the study of archaeological ceramics, where the historical sources let us down (see Hardin 1990, Plog 1990, 1995 and Whallon 1972). The typology presented below ought not to be viewed as exhaustive; extreme rarities are not included here and the prodigious creativity of historical tufunga means that even a global documentation of all extant 'akau would inevitably be a partial representation of what was. I present various 'Akau Families, lettered in order of decreasing frequency in the research sample. Each 'Akau Family comprises a number of common variations, termed Core Types, which are similarly numbered in order of decreasing frequency. Thus, A1 is the commonest Core Type of the commonest 'Akau Family and so on. Their raw numerical incidence and (more usefully) relative frequencies are presented in Table 2. Table 2 also presents median average values in millimetres for each 'Akau Family and Core Type on five Principal Dimensions: Length, Head Width, Head Depth, Butt Width and Butt Depth. These measurements may be useful in their own right to contemporary Tongan artists, as well as providing a useful means of understanding the coarse differences between the types. This section of the paper is intended to be read in conjunction with examination of Figures 1 through 4.

Pakipaki: 'Akau Family A
Tapering paddle clubs are the most numerous form of 'akau in the research sample (23%), and were also described as the commonest type by Anderson in 1777 (Beaglehole 1988 [III]: 941). Their primary formal characteristics are a rhomboidal head section, with the arch-pointed blade tapering from its widest point smoothly into the cylindrical handle. Their upper (distal) halves may bear one, two, or as many as seven, raised “collar” features, each taking the form of one or more circumferential ridges of triangular, trapezoidal, semicircular...
Figure 1. ‘Akau Families A-D.

Figure 2. ‘Akau Families E-M.
Figure 3. A selection of representative Core Types. Clockwise from top: Pakipaki A3, Square Apa‘apai A4, Pövai D1, Stellate ‘Akau J4, Kinikini I2.

Figure 4. ‘Akau Families absent from earlier typologies. Clockwise from top left: Lenticular ‘Akau (E), Arch-Necked ‘Akau (G), Fan-Shaped ‘Akau (L).
or square section. Clubs of this basic form also occurred in Samoa, although their shapes tend to be somewhat more angular, collar features more profuse and decorative engraving less extensive and intricate (see Mallon 2002: 95). Such forms were only known in Fiji as Tongan imports (Clunie 2003: 117, 127-28). Clubs of this type were termed Mo‘ungalaulau by St Cartmail (1997: 128-31), following references to this name by Collocott (1928: 99) and Gifford (1929: 207). Such a term has high poetic content and the most plausibly translation would seem to be ‘The Mountain of Lamentations’. During ethnographic interviews in 2005, a number of informants observed that such an elaborate term is closer to the longer poetic names attached to distinguished individual ‘akau, discussed above, than those ‘Akau Family names already known. I suspect that St Cartmail misinterpreted Collocott’s and Gifford’s ambiguous texts, and took the specific to signify the generic; Mo‘ungalaulau is absent, for example, from Churchill’s (1917: 10) small vocabulary of West Polynesian club type-terms.

Lapsed English missionary George Vason participated in Tongan warfare around the turn of the 19th century and discussed the commonest type of ‘akau in his written account. Long-bladed clubs which he recorded and described as “wooden swords” were termed bogge bogge (Vason 1840: 169). Taking account of orthographical differences between Vason and later texts, this term does correspond to one recorded in Churchill’s lexicon: bakibaki (1917: 10) or pakipaki in the modern Tongan orthography. Pakipaki is the recombinant form of the verb paki ‘to break, strike or pluck something’, meaning “to break into many pieces, or to pick many of” (Churchward 1959: 398). On this documentary evidence, I consider pakipaki to be a more reliable type-term than Mo‘ungalaulau and strongly advocate its general use henceforth to refer to this commonest class of ‘akau. The pakipaki were the longest ‘Akau Family, with shallow head sections. These two dimensions were also found to constitute the major differentiation between the five Core Types of pakipaki presented here.

A1. A thin-bladed, single-collared pakipaki type, with an arched tip.

A2. A short and narrow pakipaki type, with a relatively light, square-ish head section, collarless with a round-ended blade tip.

A3. A pakipaki of average proportions, with several collars on its upper half and the number of ridges within each collar increasing incrementally towards the head. This is the type most similar to Samoan cognates, and also that which most usually displays the relievo carved “eye” features to be seen on examples of pakipaki illustrated in recent overviews of Tongan arts (see St Cartmail 1997: 130-31). That these features
signify eyes rather than crescents (as are to be commonly seen in the surface decoration, for example) is supported by the following: their demarcating lines are asymmetrically curved above and straight below, their *relievo* carving gives each “eye” an upper lid and brow, and they occur in pairs as a reflection of each other. These eyes are a striking characteristic and occur on 80 percent of *pakipaki* A3. Clearly, they reflect the attribution of personhood discussed extensively above.

**A4.** This is the most dimensionally distinct *Core Type* of *pakipaki*, being up to 300mm longer than the others, with a wide, shallow-sectioned blade and two collars between the head and shaft.

**A5.** This last *Core Type* of *pakipaki* exhibits the same rounded blade tip and collarless shaft as A2, but its proportions are more average than A2’s short, narrow, deep-bladed form.

**Apa‘apai: ‘Akau Families B and C**

Tapering rhomboidal-sectioned *‘akau* with a flat or slightly concave head terminal (rather than the arched or rounded point of the *pakipaki*) are widely documented to have been termed *apa‘apai*. The name seems to connote the Tongan concept of deference—*fakaapa‘apa‘i* (Churchward 1959: 128). However, the form’s distribution in the region, and comparative etymology, seem to indicate the reconciliation of an imported originally Samoan term—*lapalapa*—to familiar Tongan phonemes. In Samoan, both the cognate *lapalapa* and *uatogi* designate this form. The collar form of these types is the same as that described for the *pakipaki* above. The Samoan *lapalapa* refers to the serrated profile of these weapons when heavily collared and *uatogi* to the two cuts required to form each ridge (Mallon 2002: 95). It is not always easy to differentiate between Samoan and Tongan clubs of this type, but (as with A3 above) collar distribution and the style of surface incision are the best guides. Again, they were not indigenously made in Fiji. Their shape is understood to represent the form of the soft *palalafa* (see Kaeppler 1999: 28-30, St Cartmail 1997: 128-29).

The *apa‘apai* collectively represent 32 percent of the sampled *‘akau*—more than the *pakipaki*. However, they are typologically subdivided here into two *‘Akau Families*: (i) *Family B: Square apa‘apai*, with flat head terminals perpendicular to the club’s primary axis, representing 18 percent of the sampled *‘akau*, and (ii) *Family C: Concave apa‘apai*, with slightly concave head terminals, representing 14 percent of the research sample. There is no historical evidence for an emic Tongan distinction along these lines. However, a range of formal, dimensional, decorative and chronological differences
legitimate such a division here (see Mills, 2008b). The two apa‘apai families represent the middle ground of ‘akau dimensions, although the square-ish depth of their heads differentiated them from many other rhomboidal or ovate-sectioned types. This also reflected the significant dimensional difference between the Square and Concave apa‘apai: The latter tend to have deeper head sections, closer to an equal rhombus. Four Core Types of Square apa‘apai are recognised here.

B1. Single-collared and centrally proportioned within the apa‘apai as a whole.

B2. Collarless, but possessing the same dimensional characteristics as B1, B2 reflects a homogenous proportional core to the Square apa‘apai that is absent in the pakipaki.

B3. This type exhibits a number of collars spaced throughout the upper half, with the number of ridges in each successive collar increasing towards the head (much like the scheme exhibited by pakipaki A3). B3 is longer and has a shallower, more blade-like head section than B1 and B2. Again, this is the type most similar to cognate Samoan forms.

B4. This is the most distinctive Square apa‘apai type, with three or more flat pseudo-collars created by a pair of parallel incised lines, between which a triangular tooth protrudes from the straight blade edge on each side. Beneath these serrated pseudo-collars, B4 ‘akau also exhibit another collar form, the same raised circumferential ridge as that of most apa‘apai and pakipaki. In possessing the flat pseudo-collars and exhibiting two distinct collar forms, Core Type B4 is unique (see Kaeppler 1999: 9). Dimensionally, B4 exhibits the same differences to B1, B2 and B3 as A4 did to the other pakipaki. They are significantly longer and both wider and shallower in the head, making them a more substantial chopping weapon, albeit more prone to longitudinal splitting when struck across the shallow edge.

Two Core Types of Concave apa‘apai are presented here:

C1. This type bears a single collar of the usual apa‘apai raised circumferential ridge.

C2. As B2 was to B1, C2 is collarless. However, C2 also exhibits a significant proportional difference to C1; its butt dimensions are generally much greater, reflecting a stouter, flared handle.
Pōvai: ‘Akau Family D
Accounting for 11 percent of the research sample, cylindrical and collarless pole clubs are the commonest ‘Akau Family found throughout Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. They were termed pōvai in Tongan and Samoan; the Fijian cognate was bowai (Clunie 2003: 126, 128-29; Mallon 2002: 95; St Cartmail 1997: 127-8). Pōvai has become the modern generic term for ‘akau in Tonga, owing to its application to police truncheons throughout the 20th century, which do resemble heavily scaled-down pōvai (Churchward 1959: 417, Atolo Tu‘inukuafe, pers.comm. 2005). Etymologically, the term pōvai appears to be a Tonganisation of the Fijian original bowai (Helu, pers. comm. 2005, Geraghty, pers. comm. 2006). Two Core Types of pōvai are recognised here, with no significant dimensional differences found between them:

D1. Those terminating with a flat or slightly convex head.
D2. Those terminating with a fully hemispherical head.

Lenticular ‘Akau: ‘Akau Family E
Representing eight percent of the sample, ‘Akau Family E is the commonest of those that possess no previous historical documentation and that have not appeared as distinct in any of the earlier typologies. Its members possess a two-faced head of oval or (more properly) lenticular sectional shape and are uniformly collarless. The form of their head terminals follows either the pointed, square or concave forms of ‘Akau Families A-C. There is a readily apparent close stylistic unity between A, B, C and E, in which the pōvai did not participate. This said, Family E were also collarless, unlike A-C. The decision not to reconcile these forms as variations of the first three Families may seem counterintuitive to the reader, but it was borne out during the classificatory analysis by the partitive precedence of head sectional shape, and the presence or absence of collar features, over the more variable characteristics of head closure. Dimensionally, Family E occupies a middle ground, although their thickened head depth places them in a distinct zone between the bladed types and the types with round or square head sections. Core Types E1 and E2 qualify here for presentation.

E1. As mentioned, this type possesses an arch-pointed head, resembling the pakipaki.
E2. This type possesses a flat head, resembling the Square apa‘apai.
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Kolo: ‘Akau Family F

Like pōvai, short throwing clubs were distributed across Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, possessing the Tongan name kolo, Samoan ‘olo, and Fijian i ula. In Fijian, the term kolo signifies a short stick for targeted throwing (as a bird-hunting weapon, for example) and was also used to speak of throwing clubs in place of the conventional i ula in the dialects of eastern Fiji. Like pōvai, the term seems to possess no relevant Tongan meaning, although it does have a number of very common homonyms (Capell 1941: 101; Churchward 1959: 270; Clunie 2003: Ch.15; Geraghty, pers. comm. 2006; Mallon 2002: 96; St Cartmail 1997: 126-27). This constitutes strong circumstantial evidence that throwing clubs spread to Tonga and Samoa from Fiji, where they originated. Comprising eight percent of the sample, the kolo are a particularly diverse set of clubs, as they also were in Fiji (Clunie 2003: Ch.15). Their throwing function means that kolo are dimensionally entirely distinct from the other ‘akau types, while having an internal dimensional homogeneity that contrasts starkly with their typological variety. Because of this typological variety, only Core Type F1 qualifies to appear here on numerical grounds; once again, I refer the reader to Mills (2008b) for the fuller picture.

F1. A ball-headed kolo with a raised circumferential band around the sphere’s “equator”, and a raised finial-boss at the top of the head.

Arch-Necked ‘Akau: ‘Akau Family G

A secondary class of paddle club seems to have had its distinctiveness to the pakipaki overlooked in the previous literature. Comprising seven percent of the research sample, however, it is significant in numbers. In contrast to the pakipaki, these ‘akau actually do exhibit paddle-shaped blades, which open from the tip to the widest point and close to the shaft diameter in a uniform arc. Below the head, the shaft’s edges are parallel and straight, quite unlike the long, smoothly tapering closure of Families A-E. ‘Akau Family G also possess an entirely distinct form of collar feature, carved as three-dimensional bars of various forms, oriented perpendicular to the ‘akau’s long axis and parallel with the blade at the “neck” point where head and shaft meet. When shown images of these ‘akau types, a number of Tongan carvers, dancers and laypeople have identified a strong resemblance to pate kailao—ornamental clubs used as props in the kailao club dance discussed above. Modern pate kailao are smaller and lighter than these artefacts, however. The distinctive transverse bar collars of this ‘Akau Family can be clearly seen in mid-20th century pate kailao illustrated in Bain (1954: 43-48). Mallon (2002: 95) has discussed Samoan anave dance clubs, which bear analogous transverse
bar collars. The curvature of the blade edges of *Family G* seems to jar with the more geometric aesthetic of Samoan clubs in general, but it may be that these forms were Tonganised *anave* or *vice versa*. This strong resemblance to two forms of West Polynesian dance club seems to suggest *Family G* was a non-combative style and quite possibly an early form of *pate kailao*. Without making any concrete claims to this end, I term these *Arch-Necked ‘Akau*. It is not possible for me to connect any Tongan name to them. One *Core Type* qualifies for inclusion here:

**G1.** Possessing a rhomboidal-sectioned blade of lenticular profile and a single transverse bar collar.

*Bossed ‘Akau: ‘Akau Family H*

Comprising five percent of the sample, a small number of types exist which I term *Bossed ‘Akau*. Their principal formal characteristics are a straight shaft, cylindrical below, that becomes hexagonally, octagonally or nonagonally carinated as it widens slightly towards the head. At the head, each of these carinations everts to join the pointed base of an equal number of radiating raised bosses. Predominantly, the bosses exhibit the same shield-like shape and a central raised triangular structure as the stylised faces of anthropomorphic sculptures of the period, such as the well-known “goddess figures”, admirably discussed by Neich (2007) in a recent issue of this *Journal* (see Hooper 2006: 242-44). Above the row of bosses, the head closes to a point as a cone or beehive shape.

Clunie (2003: 124, 131) figured these weapons as present in his Fijian corpus, but remarked on no known Fijian name. As I have suggested (Mills 2008b), the *Bossed ‘Akau* bear no close formal relationship to the other forms of *‘akau* and, when one discounts the distinctively *fakatonga* facial bosses, they most closely resemble Fijian “rootstock” clubs of the *waka* and *saulaki* forms. However, they present a highly regular stellate rotational symmetry to their heads, while the *waka* retain the natural dendrite asymmetry of the sapling’s root structure. In this way, I have argued that the *Bossed ‘Akau* were stylistically extracted from the *waka*, undergoing a transformation of regularising abstraction in order to conform to pre-existing aesthetic norms in Tonga, where dendrite asymmetry was unpopular. Indeed, it may be appreciated that much the same process also occurred with the Tongan uptake of *kolo*; dendrite asymmetrical *i ula* were relatively common, while “rootstock” *kolo* of convincing Tongan manufacture seem to have been extremely rare. I would argue, therefore, that the *Bossed ‘Akau* present in Fiji were re-importations of a modified form. No *Core Types* of *Family H* qualify for presentation here.
Neich (2007) has recently suggested that the ritual *hala* clubs may have been of the *Bossed ‘Akau* type. In the light of the Fijian stylistic derivation suggested here and Fijian ritual analogues to the *hala* discussed above, this seems quite plausible to me. However, I would suggest that the *Bossed ‘Akau* were one of a number of forms suitable for distinction as *hala*. Neich makes the connection on the basis of the *Bossed ‘Akau* possessing anthropomorphic features similar to the “goddess figures”, but as seen above other ‘*akau* types (notably, the *pakipaki* A3) might also possess anthropomorphic modellings and that any ‘*akau* of sufficient *mana* came to be understood as a *faikehe*. Indeed, a remark made by John Thomas after acquiring the *hala* from the village of Ahau discussed above, may offer further insights into their form: “The *hala* or gods shrine was laid at the feet of the king who passed them to me, thanking the old chief who had thus renounced his idol god and as proof had thus given up the insignia of his office” (Thomas MSS n.d., as cited in Neich 2007). This bears direct relevance to the next ‘*Akau Family*:

Culacula-Kinikini: ‘*Akau Family I*

A third class of paddle club to *Families A* and *G* is less common again and represents only three percent of the research sample. These clubs are extremely broad and thin-bladed, with a plank-shaped head section, and often have a blade profile reminiscent of a bell curve. There is also usually a prominent transverse ridge across each face, either straight or down-curved, that constitutes a form of reinforcing collar feature. *Family I* demonstrated significant dimensional differences to other ‘*akau* in terms of their very broad, shallow heads and oval-sectioned butts. It is widely acknowledged in the literature that these clubs occurred in both Tonga and Fiji and they possessed the names *culacula* and *kinikini* in Fiji (Clunie 2003: 115-16, 127; Kaeppler 1999: 26, 28; St Cartmail 1997: 132-33; Von Bellingshausen 1945: 307-10). The straight-ridged *culacula* is the commonest kind found here (Type I1), followed by the curve-ridged or ridge-less *kinikini*. *Culacula* is a Fijian name, meaningless in Tongan. *Kinikini* occurs in both languages. Importantly, in Fijian, it signifies a species of jellyfish (Capell 1941: 98); Fijian club types were often named on the basis of phytomorphic or zoomorphic formal resemblances—seeming to imply that the term was originally Fijian and acquired by the Tongans with convenient homonymy. In Tongan, it is a recombinant term, either a verb signifying the beating down of something (vegetation, for example) with a stick or a noun signifying the cry made by a kingfisher immediately before it dives (Capell 1941: 39, 98; Churchward 1959: 265). This latter sense is intriguing, as Churchill (1917: 10) recorded *sikota* ‘kingfisher’ as one of the club type terms that I have been unable to match to a form. It may be that *sikota* and *kinikini* were one and the same, or
the former a distorted remembrance of the latter. Gifford (1929: 337) fittingly documented the kingfisher as an animal of deathly omen. I term this Family *culacula-kinikini*. No Core Types qualify for individual presentation here.

*Kinikini* were ‘akau of high status and were considered to be the exclusive insignia of high chiefs (*hou’eiki*) and possession priests (*taula*). In two indirect ways their form reflects this status. First, it is well-documented that chiefs and priests were present on the battlefield, but considered exempt from actual combat—a rule of war almost invariably observed until the mid-19th century. Indeed, its infraction was a greater matter of note than its observance. However, Tongan battles on an open field generally followed the format of the two opposing forces closing, each firing a volley of arrows at approximately 30 metres distant and hurling a volley of throwing clubs and javelins at five to ten metres distant (Martin 1818, Vason 1840). Consequently, immediately before engagement, chiefs and priests were as vulnerable to stray attacks as the subordinates they were sending to their deaths. The broad *kinikini*, therefore, was an effective protection against such missiles in a cultural context where shields were absent. Second, the *culacula-kinikini* were particularly labour-intensive ‘akau to produce, their planks necessarily riven from a trunk of diameter greater than their extreme head width (see Table 2). Even a mature *toa* (*Casuarina equisetifolia* or Ironwood, strongly favoured in club carving) was a rather small tree and might only produce two such blanks. As the insignia of priestly office, these are perhaps the likeliest candidate for *hala* form, if any type was favoured over another. It would be common sense for the priest’s insignia ‘akau to be among the *fakafa‘anga* deposited in a deity’s temple, as the transmission of both heirloom ‘akau and priestly status were generally patrilineal. Such clubs often bear paired “crescent” or “eye” motifs incised or ivory-inlaid on each face, likely reflecting (yet again) a strong testimony of the attribution of personhood. They are also certainly the least practical of the ‘akau forms.


Accounting for only three percent of the sampled ‘akau, these rare clubs possess a tapering closure from head to shaft and stellate rotational symmetry to their head sections—including pieces with polygon, cog and star shaped head sections (see Kaepller 1999: 25, 30 and St Cartmail 1997: 131). I recognise two distinct Families within them: ‘Akau Family J: Stellate ‘Akau (two percent of sample) and ‘Akau Family K: Polygonal ‘Akau (one percent of sample). I am unable to reconcile any known type names with these formally remarkable artefacts. That said, Gifford (1929: 207) recorded the name of an individual ‘akau as *Tu‘i Tapavalu* /‘Eight-Sided Lord’, as well as another club similarly titled *Tu‘i*. Samwell recorded *Tu‘i*, glossed ‘Lord/King’, in
his short Tongan vocabulary of 1777, as a term meaning ‘club’ (Beaglehole 1988 [III]: 1045), which may simply reflect the artefact’s exalted status or may have been a formal artefact class. If the latter, a tu’i must have been a type current in the 1770s and there are very few other types of that period for which the Tongan name is not already known. The formal complexity of the Stellate ‘akau indicates a labour-intensity of sharply faceted, fine modelling chisel-work far beyond that of the other types, a trait widely taken to index high status. Peculiarly, their closest formal resemblance is not to any other West Polynesian weapons but rather the “mace gods” of Central Polynesia (see Barrow 1979; Hooper 2006: 226, 232-33). Neither of these ‘Akau Families contains Core Types of great enough frequency to merit further discussion here.

Fan-Shaped ‘Akau: ‘Akau Family L
Comprising only half a percent of the research sample, this ‘Akau Family is extremely rare, although its constituent members bear a close formal similarity. They are interesting ‘akau, bearing a strongest stylistic similarity to the fa’a lau taliga of Samoa (see Mallon 2002: 95). The Samoan forms, however, are generally much smaller, since ‘akau of Family L seem to have been two-handed weapons. In the thickened convex head terminal with a concave plane, everted blade edges and symmetrical arched “eyebrow” ridges joining a straight central ridge over the upper long axis, there is also a notable formal resemblance to the Marquesan ‘u’u clubs, albeit without their transverse bar at the cheekbones or anthropomorphic tiki decoration (see Kjellgren and Ivory 2005: 9-10, 31ff.).

Pupepuke: ‘Akau Family M
Another rare, single-type class of weapon found in collections of Fijian and Tongan material alike has a straight shaft, everted neck and domed head studded with several rows of raised discs. A number of their basic formal characteristics indicate a similarity to ‘Akau Family H (strengthening my attribution of the latter’s origin to Fiji), although they are evidently quite distinct. Although enumerated by both Kaeppler (1978: Fig. 515, 1999: 25) and St Cartmail (1997: 131, 133), no historical Tongan name seems to have been recorded for them. Clunie (2003: 125, 132) records their Fijian name as bulibuli, which alludes to the head’s resemblance to a raised mound used for the cultivation of certain yam varieties (Capell 1991: 18-19), with the discoidal bosses to be understood as the tubers protruding from the well-built mound. A synonym for such a yam-mound is bukebuke (Capell 1941: 17), which (in light of the well-known sound correspondences between Fijian and
Tongan) corresponds to one of Churchill’s list of unmatched Tongan club-type terms (1917: 10): *pukepuke*. I consequently deduce that this loan-word was the matching historical type-term.

Mata: ‘Akau Family N

To all of the foregoing, wooden knives termed *mata* may also be added (Churchill 1917: 10, Churchward 1959: 336), although they are absent from the present research sample. Labillardiere (1800) provides us with a pictorial record of ‘akau observed in Tonga during 1793. In Plate 33 of Volume Two (facing p. 150), he depicts four ‘akau (Figs 37, 38, 40 and 41), among which are two wooden knives: one closely resembling a one-edged machete or blubber knife and the other a two-edged sword with upturned quillons, very like a typical European smallsword of the 18th century. These weapons indicate that, as early as the 1790s, widespread exposure to European blade forms was already having a significant impact on the Tongan production of formal wooden derivatives. For the sake of completeness, I classify them here as ‘Akau Family N: Mata.

Taunga (Lug) Features

The popularity of carved suspension lug (*taunga*) features at the butt is strongly correlated to ‘akau type and highly polarised, from complete absence in some types to complete presence. The popularity of the *taunga* feature within each ‘Akau Family or Core Type’ is presented in Table 3. In general, there is a stark contrast between those types occurring in Tonga only (or Tonga and Samoa) and those which also occurred in Fiji. This seems to indicate that the *taunga* was identified as an inappropriate stylistic characteristic for carving on types of Fijian origin. There are also intriguing differences between the Core Types of Families A and B with reference to this characteristic, as can be seen in Table 3.

CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

The statistical-ethnohistorical method used in the recognition of the following chronological periodisations demands proper demonstration as a paper in its own right. It was developed during my doctoral research and has not seen previous publication (see Mills 2008b: Chs 6-9). This cannot be done within the present article and a brief summary is the best I can offer the reader: The known date of an artefact’s *in situ* collection or museum accession has a relationship to its unknown date of manufacture (and stylistic determination) which is mediated by a factor of generalised chronological distortion that can be called “Biographical Drift”. This factor subsumes (into pure terms of
temporal extent) the artefact’s emic biographical trajectory, etic circulation in the Western curiosities market and so on. The “Biographical Drift” of each artefact within a research sample can be statistically characterised as comprising the “Average Drift” of the sample as a whole, plus or minus its “Individual Variance” from the “Average Drift” (i.e., its statistical residual from the mean). Insofar as the “Average Drift” is a mean and consistent across the sample, it can be bracketed out for calibration to the actual chronology by reference to ethnohistorical sources, once a relative chronology is achieved.

The relative chronology is achieved by effecting a reductive recoding of a sample of artefacts’ collection dates into coarse artificial periods, which largely ameliorates “Individual Variance” by homogenising it. As a consequence, statistical tests of significant difference (Pearson’s Chi²) between these artificial periods in the frequency of stylistic features elicit quantitatively-legitimated non-random stylistic frequency curves. Experimental variation in the length and year-settings of these artificial periods elucidates the most statistically productive periodisation scheme for the sample under analysis, and once selected, that periodisation scheme elucidates the relative frequencies of significantly differentiated stylistic features—and hence a large part of the art-historical narrative. By reference to textual and pictorial historical sources, the relative chronology can then be calibrated to actual historical dates and “Average Drift” calculated merely for the sake of completeness. A small number of subsidiary stylistic methods of chronological attribution follow on from this method, permitting the full identification of stylistic chronology. I term this kind of chronological reconstruction “ethnohistorical collections sequencing” (see Mills forthcoming).

The reconstruction identifies three coarse analytical periods of manufacture: Period One (c. 1725-80), Period Two (c.1780-1820) and Period Three (c.1820-80), but it is important for the reader to bear in mind that these are simply abstractions from the seamless historical run of stylistic flux. The results are presented in Table 3 as something of a fait accompli, with each ‘Akau Family and Core Type presented with its presence, in Periods One through Three respectively, measured as a percentage of the sampled ‘akau reconciled into that period. Considering the ‘Akau Families first, before exploring the more complex representation of the Core Types, provides a fairly clear picture of the most coarse art-historical transformations of ‘akau.

**Period One (c. 1725-1780)**

In the mid-18th century, ‘akau carving was comparatively homogenous; the overwhelming majority were rhomboidal and circumferential ridge-collared, lug-bearing, tapering weapons (‘Akau Families C, B, A, E, in order of decreasing frequency). In addition to this, there was a minority of
### Table 3. Lug and chronological frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Aka' Family/ Core Type</th>
<th>Lug Frequency</th>
<th>Period One</th>
<th>Period Two</th>
<th>Period Three</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Family A</td>
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<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>A5</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family L</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family M</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
extraordinary pieces, exhibiting complex rotational symmetry about the head axis on a stellate compositional scheme (‘Akau Families H, J, K). Minor Fijian influence can already be seen in the bossed ‘akau and pukepuke, but the pōvai, kolo and other pan-regional styles were notably absent from the earliest period. This was the terminal part of what some scholars (e.g., Helu 1999) have referred to as the “Classic Tongan Period”, characterised internally by political and military stability and externally by dominant tributary relationships with neighbouring West Polynesian island groups.

Period Two (c. 1780-1820)

Turning to Period Two, a marked transformation in the popularity of Period One’s dominant styles is apparent. ‘Akau Families A, B and C all lost significant ground—both of the apa’apai Families having their popularities halved, while the pakipaki weathered the changes in taste somewhat better, losing only four percent of their share. Most popular in Period Two were the pōvai, appearing in the sequence for the first time, followed by the Concave apa’apai once more, the Square apa’apai and pakipaki. Thereafter, ‘Akau Family I: culacula-kinikini makes an appearance, with the minor representations of Lenticular ‘akau, the newly-represented kolo, and the new Arch-Necked ‘akau. What may be seen for Period Two is that the central core of Period One ‘akau-carving (Families A-C) was heavily eroded by the incursive international styles, particularly those with a Fijian origin, such as ‘Akau Families D, I and F (in order of decreasing frequency)—as well as other innovative forms such as ‘Akau Family G. The Lenticular ‘akau maintained their low level of popularity through this transformation, but other Period One types, such as ‘Akau Families J, K and M, disappeared altogether.

The reader may be wondering (as I have myself) why these Fijian-style clubs are not simply Fijian clubs traded by the Tongans to papālangi, and some undoubtedly were. The historical evidence is good for clubs constituting a significant export commodity for the Fijians in their trade with the Tongans—and vice versa (Williams 1858 [I]: 45, 94). Moreover, Labillardiere (1800 [II]: Pl. 33) illustrated a Fijian i tuki as one of four “Tongan” clubs collected in 1793; similarly, the Hancock Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England possesses a Fijian gata documented to have been in the United Kingdom by 1800 at the latest—which (at such an early date) can only have passed into papālangi hands through the Tongan market, and is most likely to be a Cook voyage acquisition without adequate documentation to prove it as such (Jessop and Starkey 1998: 67). However, these are rarities, and the Fijian-style clubs of Period Two (and indeed, Period One), represent a very specific selection of the full range of Fijian forms. Many of the commonest Fijian types (the gata, totokia, vunikau, i sali, kiakavo and so on) are entirely absent (or almost
so) from the Tongan sample. There was evidently a strong aesthetic filter at work in the Tongan uptake of Fijian forms, through which the dominant curved and dendrite types were almost totally excluded.

**Period Three (c. 1820-1870)**

As Period Two shaded into Period Three around 1820, there was a collapse in the commoditisation of *pōvai* and *kolo*, which would seem to have followed on from a collapse in their local popularity and manufacture, and the eventual exhaustion of available stocks for trade. There appears to have been a substantial re-traditionalisation in the return of *Core Types* A4, B2, C1 and ‘*Akau Families* H, J and M to prominent commoditisation, which might imply that these earlier types acquired something of an antique status during Period Two’s Fijianisation and were withheld from trade to the *papālangi* while the supply of Fijian styles was available and less emically valuable. The subsequent re-traditionalisation of supply is noted, yet the character of Period Three ‘*akau*-carving was quite different to Period One. The diversity of *pakipaki*, *apa‘apai* and other important Period One ‘*Akau Families* had dwindled away to homogenous, fragmentary remnants, heavily augmented by now-fully integrated innovations, such as the *kolo* and the *Bossed, Arch-Necked* and *Fan-Shaped ‘akau*.

**Formal-Aesthetic Themes**

It is informative to consider the overall sequence of art-historical transformation in ‘*akau* in terms of two articulating aesthetic principles of formal determination: axial head symmetry and eversion. The rubric of axial symmetry—that informing reflectional and rotational symmetry about the weapon’s long axis—was dominated in Period One by an “orthogonal principle” (generating rhomboidal, square and lenticular head sections), augmented by a secondary “stellate principle”. Both suffered in the middle period with the appearance of Fijian designs based on a “radial rubric” of axial symmetry—the *pōvai* and *kolo*. As I have said above, however, the curved Fijian types (those exhibiting what might be termed a “monolinear rubric”, like analogous East Melanesian club types of Vanuatu and New Caledonia) were evidently largely unacceptable to Tongan aesthetic tastes. In Period Three, the “radial rubric” receded once more, and the “orthogonal-stellate complex” returned to its central position.

The character of ‘*akau* had become quite different, however, and the second articulating principle to be highlighted here—eversion—partly illustrates why. In Period One, the blade-shaft-handle profile of ‘*akau* tapered smoothly and evenly towards the handle. In Period Two, however, forms such as ‘*Akau Families* F, H, I and M introduced a rubric into the aesthetics of Tongan ‘*akau*-
carving, where the weapon’s shaft was predominantly cylindrical throughout and widened out immediately below the head with its profile exhibiting an everted curve of a relatively uniform radius of arc. This occurred alongside the parallel eversion or flaring of the butt end, which became radically more popular over time (Mills 2008b [I]: 241-42), occurring on 33 percent of ‘akau in Period One, 67 percent in Period Two, and 71 percent in Period Three. Although many of these everted-necked types subsequently declined in Period Three, the aesthetic convention of eversion was itself retained and informed later carving practices. Thus, Period Three forms returned to “orthogonal-stellate” axial symmetry, but this was cross-cut by the continued incorporation of eversion at the head and butt.

Interpretation: Fakafisi’i

This major art-historical transformation from a corpus dominated by indigenous Tongan forms to one heavily mixed with imported Fijian forms is significant and may be broadly equated to the Tongan term fakafisi’i or ‘Fijianisation’, recognised as a central cultural thread in late 18th and early 19th century Tongan identity politics (Mills 2008b [I]: 394-96). Although there was unquestionably significant contact and cultural influence between Tonga and Fiji before this period, there is good evidence for a Tongan cultural reorientation in military practice and technology from the 1770s onwards towards a Fijian way of doing and making things. Fijian club forms appeared in Tonga and Samoa, their original names passing with them, rapidly becoming a dominant fashion, and then after 1800 a lucrative commodity for trade to papālangi once they had lost some of their initial local appeal. The terminal 1700s were marked by internal political fragmentation in Tonga—the beginning of what has been termed the “Long Civil War” (Campbell 2001: 59-71, Martin 1818: 70-71, Moulton n.d., Ve’ehala and Fanua 1977: 37-38). In this period, the balkanised political landscape of Tonga more closely resembled that of contemporary Fiji than either before or after. It is historically unclear whether Tongan politics underwent this swing towards the emergence of ambitious revolutionaries as a result of Fijian cultural influence, but it is a possibility that ought to be entertained; Tongan warriors were certainly using Fiji as a military “finishing school” at the time and acquiring valuable Fijian resources as a product of mercenary service. Tongans of this period admired the Fijians as stereotypically fearsome, warlike and politically cunning as well as more accomplished in the arts of woodcarving and barkcloth production. This conception in itself, and mercenary exposure to the Fijian theatre of war, may have been enough to promote fakafisi’i in military material culture—as it seems to have done in other aspects of Tongan warfare, such as cannibalism, face-painting, the holding of military reviews and so on. However, when
coupled with the relatively unfamiliar need for Tongan men to harden themselves to the realities and uncertainties of civil war, a motivation to emulate “Fijian” characteristics is readily understandable (Beaglehole 1988 [III]: 163-64, 955-59, 1311-12; Derrick 1968: 122-23; D’Entrecasteaux 2001: 188; Lawry 1850: 253-55; Twyning 1850: 41-104; Von Bellingshausen 1945: 308-9; West 1865: 58-59, 266-71; Wilkes 1970 [III]: 26). 

Furthermore, in the latter part of Period Two, after 1800, northeastern Fiji became an area of intense papālangi economic interest, because of the discovery of sandalwood reserves. This produced a brief economic boom for chiefdoms such as Bua, Macuata and Cakaudrove and, more importantly from a Tongan viewpoint, short-circuited Tongan mediation of exotic papālangi commodities—as well as the vital ivory trade they had previously monopolised. This further inclined the already-steep economic gradient between Tongan and Fijian traders (Derrick 1968: 41-2). Large-scale warfare in Tonga depended heavily on the possession of vessels to transport infantry. But Tonga lacked large timber trees, so the largest Tongan war-ships (kaliala) were generally built by tufunga fo ‘u vaka in eastern Fiji using Fijian vesi timber (Tongan: fehi, Intsia bijuga). This work often demanded several years away from home and was conducted under Fijian chiefly patronage and in close collaboration with local Fijian carvers (matai). In other words, the precise specialists who manufactured ‘akau are historically documented to be among those Tongans of the period with the greatest experience of Fiji and its people, as transnational economic migrants, and are known to have had close and prolonged artistic association with the producers of Fijian clubs (Derrick 1968: 121; D’Entrecasteaux 2001: 189; Lawry 1850: 254; Orlebar,1976: 74-75; Roth and Hooper 1990: 118-20, 400; Routledge 1985: 17-18; Thomas, Methodist Missionary Society Notices, March 1834: 433-34; Tippett 1968: 3-5; Williams 1858: 45, 94). A substantial internal militarisation in Tonga must have increased chiefly demands for kaliala and the economic activity of Tongan woodcarvers in Fiji. It is hardly surprising then that that these same men produced a concomitant Fijian influence in Tongan material culture.

*      *      *

‘Akau were far from socially and spiritually inert tools. Significatively, they were inherently masculine and martial objects, with associations of successful competitive performance and chiefliness. Metaphysically, they incrementally developed an exalted status through performative use in warfare, dance and the hegemonic self-presentation of chiefly males. Through their biographical association with the mana of humans and deities, their deposition in the
pre-Christian temple and their use as the manifest conduits and vessels of supernatural entities they gained exalted status. This status was manifested in an ‘akau’s progressive acquisition of an aggressive supernatural personhood, and a complement of its own mana, which it imparted to its user on (and off) the battlefield. This incremental, biographical process of ‘akau coming to power and sentience may be labelled “crystallising mana personhood”—a process that can also be recognised as the principal ennobling process undergone by fine mats, spears, bows and the variety of ancestral relics that attained the status of manifestation vessels—an illustration of how initially ordinary items of material culture became extraordinary. In this, there are powerful echoes of wider Polynesian cultural phenomena, Maori taonga being perhaps the most obvious. Through their performative and contagious accumulation of mana, ‘akau became an important component of pre-Christian Tongan religion. The sources are frustratingly vague and so it is impossible to discern whether the fakafā'anga, hala and vaka categories discussed above constituted distinct religious phenomena or three stages of “crystallising mana personhood”. To my mind, the three stage scenario is simpler and more plausible. To this general narrative overview, a synthetic review of museum collections also allows us to provide a relatively comprehensive representation of the formal diversity of ‘akau themselves (as one of the finest artworks of the tufunga fo‘u vaka) and to make some brief art-historical comments concerning the influence of Fijian cultural forms on military aspects of Tongan culture around the turn of the 19th century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to the indispensable knowledge, assistance and advice of the Hon. Albert Tu‘ivanauavou Vaea, Futa Helu, Sitiveni Fehoko, Leonati Fakatava, Tu‘ione Pulotu, Sela and Atolo Tu‘inukuafe, Sela Reyawa, Paul Geraghty, Roger Neich, Fulimalo Pereira, Sean Mallon, Fergus Clunie, Jill Hassell, Anita Herle, Tabitha Cadbury, Jeremy Coote, Jennifer Peck, Les Jessop, Steven Hooper, George Lau, Joshua Bell, Michael Rowlands, Wonu Veys, Maia Jessop and Josephine Cushnahan. I have greatly appreciated the financial support of the United Kingdom’s Arts and Humanities Research Council and Cambridge University’s Crowther-Beynon Fund. Finally, I owe a debt of thanks to Adrienne Kaeppler for a number of illuminating, corrective and cautionary comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

NOTES

1. I refer the reader to a recent paper in the JPS by Weener (2007) that explores some fascinating aspects of tongi ‘akau iconography and which I hope to complementarily supplement in a future paper.

2. Insofar as pale is likely to be a loanword from the English “parry”, we are faced with some uncertainty regarding the true antiquity of the term and hence the
practice. However, it seems senselessly rigid to doubt the existence of parrying altogether in pre-Christian Tonga on this basis.

3. In pre-Christian Tonga, the owl was a bird of omen, variously signifying pregnancy or impending death (Gifford 1929: 336).

4. It is not clear what the practical distinction between the meaning of these terms historically was; various sources use one or the other to signify ‘temple’.

5. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the Tongans did not make or use shields. What Gifford’s source meant by this is likely to have been a very large whalebone ‘breastplate’ pectoral (sifafatafata), such as the two examples observed in use during sporting feta’aki and collected on the Cook voyages (see Hooper, 2006:254-55).

6. These dimensions require a little explanation: While what is meant by Length is obvious, Head Width is taken to be the largest head diameter exhibited by the piece and Head Depth the measurement perpendicular to that. Butt Width and Depth are taken as the maximum handle measurements in the same plane as their counterparts at the head. When I speak of dimensional differences between Families and Core Types, these emerge here as the result of statistically significant Pearson’s Chi² tests of all members of any two Families or Core Types within a Family. For the sake of brevity alone, the test results themselves are not included here, but can be found elsewhere (Mills 2008b [II]: App.5-7). There are good reasons why median average values are presented here. The mean average values of ‘akau Principal Dimensions are often skewed by the existence of exceptionally small or large one-offs; the median values are a much better indicator of typical qualities. Dimensional conventions are a particularly interesting and complex aspect of ‘akau carving, which will see due exploration in a future paper.

7. The reader ought not to confuse this term with the common fakafisi, which means simply ‘Fijian’.

8. For a refutation of such interpretations, see Gunson (1977: 91).

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