

Patterns of Paradise

By JOHN TERRELL and ANNE LEONARD

EXHIBIT OPENS MARCH 6

Members' Preview March 5

Lieutenant (later, Captain) James Cook, 39 years old, sailed on His Majesty's Bark *Endeavour* from Plymouth, England, on August 26, 1768, headed toward the South Seas. This was the first of his three great voyages of discovery to the Pacific. In the *Secret Instructions* issued him prior to his departure, Cook was ordered by the British Admiralty and the Royal Society to search for "a Continent or Land of great extent" then believed to lie somewhere in the southern waters. If he found this continent, he was to observe "the Genius, Temper, Disposition and Number of the Natives, if there be any, and endeavour by all proper means to cultivate a Friendship and Alliance with them...."

James Cook did not find *Terra australis incognita*, the great Southern Continent which had for so long haunted the European imagination. On the contrary, he proved that it did not exist. But his three voyages to the Pacific between 1768 and 1780 nonetheless captured European thought. They helped create the romantic vision of the Pacific Islands as Paradise-on-earth that survives even today in popular thought and literature.

For three months this year at Field Museum of Natural History—starting March 6—you may yourself observe the genius of the Pacific Islanders: including museum treasures actually brought back to Europe by Cook him-



Two ranking leaders of Bellona Island, Solomon Islands, dressed in garments and turbans of dyed tapa. Photograph by W. Templeton Crocker (1933). Similar turbans collected by Crocker are still fragrant with powdery turmeric dye.

self. Most of the rare artistic and practical treasures in the new special exhibition "Patterns of Paradise" are from the world-famous collection at Field Museum. Most have never before been seen on public display.

Although to Europeans in the latter half of the 18th century the islanders of the South Pacific appeared to live in Paradise, we today know that this tropical world has been the scene of many different, often challenging, and at times cruel patterns of human experience. Moreover, since their discovery, the islanders have also suffered different, at times tragic, fates as a result of expanding European trade and industrial civilization.

"Patterns of Paradise" tells the story of the peoples of the Pacific using the medium of their surviving handicrafts. Most notable of these is a little known and largely unappreciated craft—which is also an outstanding art form: the ancient tradition of making masks, costumes, garments, and effigies out of *tapa*, or bark cloth.

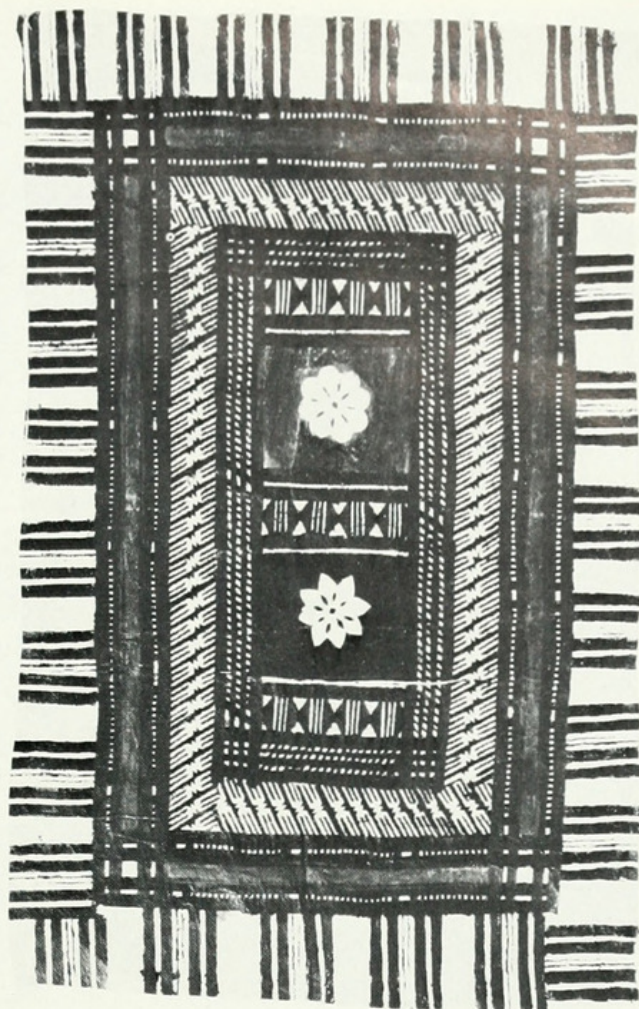
This traveling exhibition—created by the staff at Field Museum and sponsored in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington D.C., a federal agency—displays roughly 125 dramatic tapa specimens and some 75 artifacts of stone, wood, pottery, and other materials from the Pacific and from other tropical regions. "Patterns of Paradise" is really three museum shows in one:

- The exhibition introduces you to the discovery of the Pacific Islands by European explorers, and it introduces you as well to the islanders: their inventiveness, their artistic creativity, their traditions, and their disparate history.
- "Patterns of Paradise" is the first major museum exhibition to feature a neglected medium of "primitive" art: tapa making around the world. Most of the artifacts and other items have never before been exhibited together for public showing.
- "Patterns of Paradise" also reveals how an ingenious folk craft is done; this craft offers a number of exciting technical and design ideas that can be adapted by modern artists and craftspeople.

When you enter Hall 26 on the second floor at Field Museum, where "Patterns of Paradise" is being shown, you will find that the items on display have been arranged according to four major themes: "Discovery," "Diversity," "Shared Traditions," and "Changing Artistry." Here is a brief introduction to what you will encounter as you tour the exhibition:

DISCOVERY

In 1513 the Spanish adventurer Balboa stood on a mountain-top in Central America and gazed down on a sight never before seen by European



Masi (*tapa* cloth). Precisely stenciled in traditional motifs and colors, this small piece of tapa was made for commercial sale through a marketing cooperative. Namuka Island, Fiji Islands, 1976; 48 x 31 cm (19 x 12 in.). Collection of Anne Leonard.

eyes: a vast ocean he named "the Great South Sea." Seven years later the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan sailed across this sea that covers one-third of the earth's surface. Finding its waters calm and peaceful, Magellan called it *Mare Pacifico*, the Pacific Ocean.

Long before Balboa and Magellan, however, the Pacific had been discovered by those

John Terrell is associate curator of Oceanic archeology and ethnology; Anne Leonard is a researcher, Department of Anthropology.

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by
Anne Leonard
and
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76 pages
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Associate curator John Terrell and anthropology researcher Anne Leonard with contemporary tapa piece from Moce Island, Fiji Islands, where tapa-making is today a major industry. Terrell gave this loan specimen as a wedding gift to his sister and her husband.

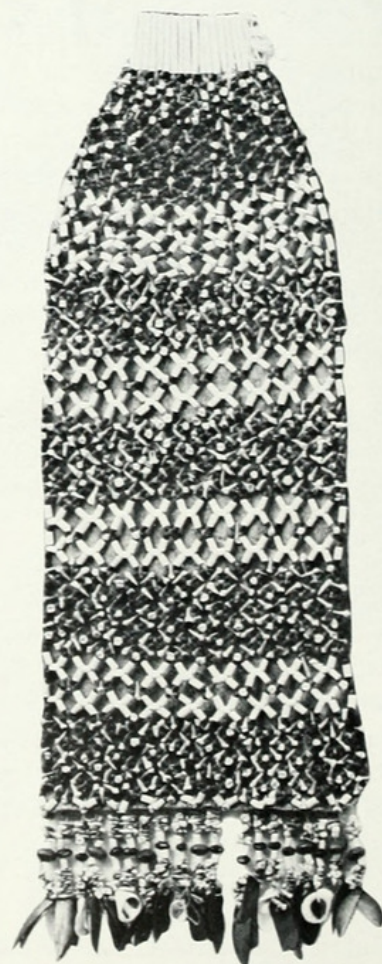


daring navigators we call the Pacific Islanders. *Tapa* making is one of the ingenious crafts developed by the islanders and by people in other tropical regions of the world. Masks, figures, costumes, blankets, clothing, hats, and other articles made of tapa reflect the many customs and patterns of daily life of the peoples of "paradise."

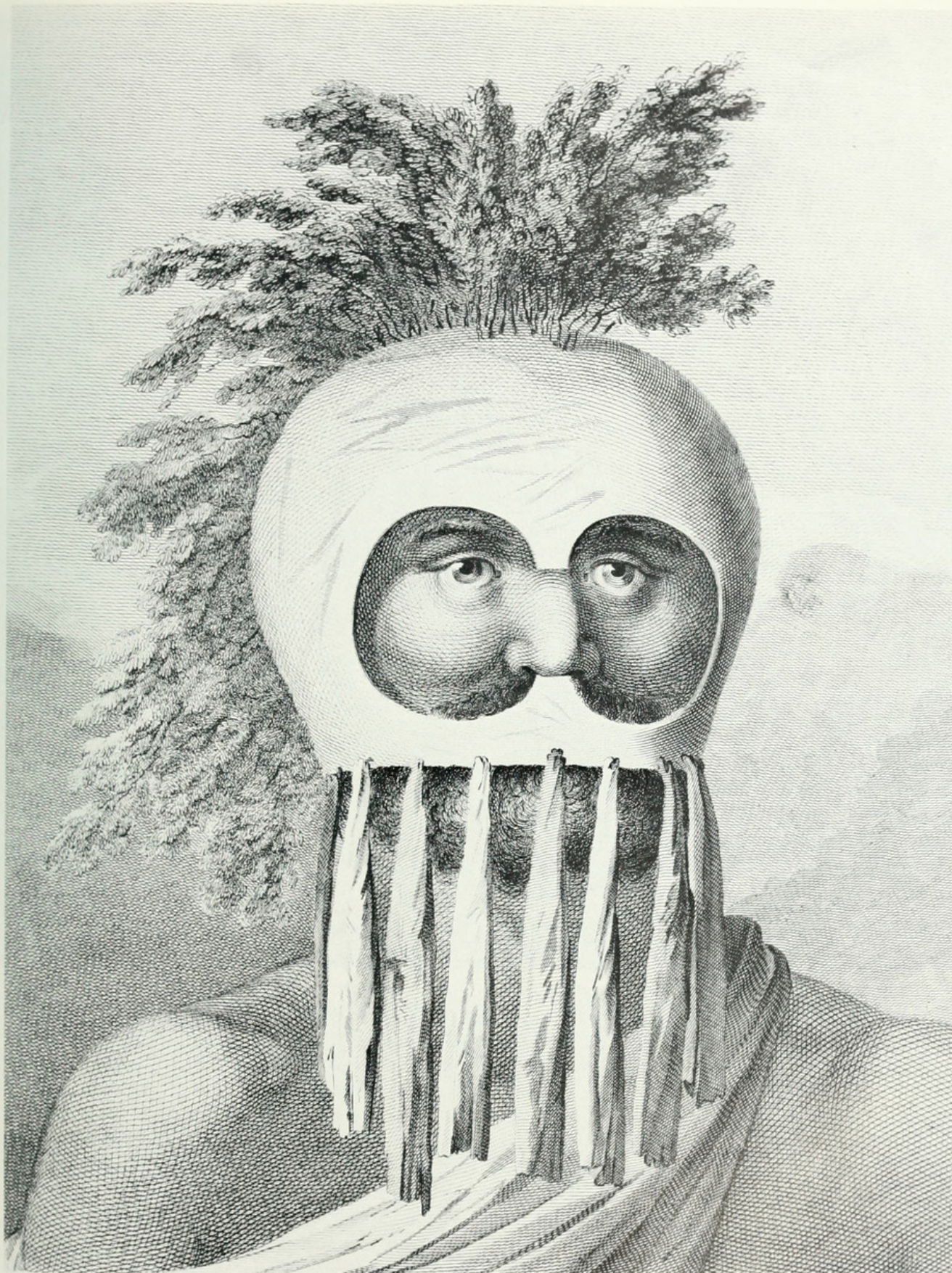
What is Tapa? *Tapa* is beaten cloth made from the inner bark of a number of species of trees. The origins of tapa making are lost in the prehistoric past. Suitable trees are found throughout tropical areas. The natural materials used dictate that tools and basic manufacturing techniques will be much the same regardless where the craft is practiced. At the time peoples outside the tropics were discovering and perfecting techniques of weaving cloth, tapa makers were also developing their skills into a human achievement of artistic and practical value.

Captain James Cook. Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch voyagers pioneered the exploration of the Pacific Ocean in the 16th and 17th centuries. The great age of Pacific exploration, however, belonged to the English and the French in the 18th century. The most famous, most successful

Jivaro Indian (Peru) back ornament of bark cloth decorated with bird bones, monkey teeth, beetle wings, seeds, and shells (#6159). Such bird bones were said to come from birds that roost in caves inhabited by fearful spirits. Only a warrior who was himself powerful in spirit dared wear them. Collected by William E. Safford in Peru, 1891; 60 x 20.5 cm (24 x 8 in.).



A Man of the Sandwich Islands, in a Mask (Hawaiian Islands, 1779). Engraving after a sketch by John Webber, official artist on Captain James Cook's third voyage. The gourd helmet is decorated with streamers of colored tapa and a crest of foliage. Rare Book Room, Field Museum Library.



navigator of them all was Captain James Cook. He began his third and last voyage to the South Sea Islands a week after the Declaration of Independence was signed at Philadelphia in July 1776. It was on the third voyage that he discovered the Hawaiian Islands. And it was at Kealahou Bay on the island of Hawaii itself that he met his death at the hands of the native inhabitants on February 14, 1779.

DIVERSITY

First settlement by people on the small islands of the central and eastern Pacific dates back only to around A.D. 300. Settlement on the islands of Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa, farther west in the Pacific, began sometime between 2,000 and 1,000 B.C. Scholars think, however, that people were already living on New Guinea and neighboring

An Offering before
Captain Cook in the
Sandwich Islands
(Hawaiian Islands,
1779). Engraving after
a sketch by John
Webber. Cook is man-
tled with a tapa befitt-
ing a king or god. Rare
Book Room, Field
Museum Library.



islands near Asia 30 to 40 thousands years ago, if not earlier. Consequently, the farther back in time and the closer to Asia you look, the more diverse and confusing is the story of human settlement and later prehistory. The diversity of customs and ways of life among the islanders of the southwest Pacific can be seen in their remarkable creations made of bark cloth. Extraordinary diversity can also be found elsewhere in the tropics: in Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

SHARED TRADITIONS

People who live on islands are never entirely cut off from the outside world. There are many legends and reports in the Pacific about voyages between islands that are hundreds—even thousands—of miles apart. Sometimes these trips have been made on purpose. At other times, people have been driven from their intended course to some nearby island because of storms or shifting currents.

The neighboring islanders of Fiji, Samoa,

Tonga, and Futuna, all located in the area of the Pacific called western Polynesia, share customs and handicrafts that reveal their common history some 3,500 years ago and their continued voyaging between their island homes for trade, settlement, marriage, ceremony, and occasionally warfare. Tapa and other artifacts from western Polynesia reflect the differences that have grown up over time among these islanders, as well as the similarities that exist among them because of tradition and travel among the islands.

Fiji Islands. Discovered by the Dutch navigator Tasman in 1643, the more than 300 islands that form the famous “Cannibal Isles” of the Fijian archipelago are richly diverse in their natural resources and in the customs and ways of life of their inhabitants. Hillsmen, coast-dwellers, outer-islanders, and Tongan migrants are all linked together by social and economic ties, in spite of their cultural differences and the ocean waters that divide them from each other. Fijian *masi*, tapa cloth, is not as varied today as it once was. Yet there are still three different styles.



Masi kesa, decorated with traditional stenciled designs, is made for personal use and commercial sale. *Gatu vaka toga*, long sheets of bark cloth in "Tongan style," is made largely for ceremonial exchange. *Gatu vaka viti*, "Fijian tapa," combines stenciled designs with "Tongan" decoration and is now made primarily for wedding ceremonies.

Samoa Islands. The Samoan Islanders, famous for their love of politics and social form, remain today irrepressibly Samoan in custom and tradition, in spite of decades of European influence and modern economic change. The legacy of tradition continues to shape the strong web of social ties that unites the Samoan people. *Siapo*, Samoan tapa cloth, reflects their creativity and their sense of tradition.

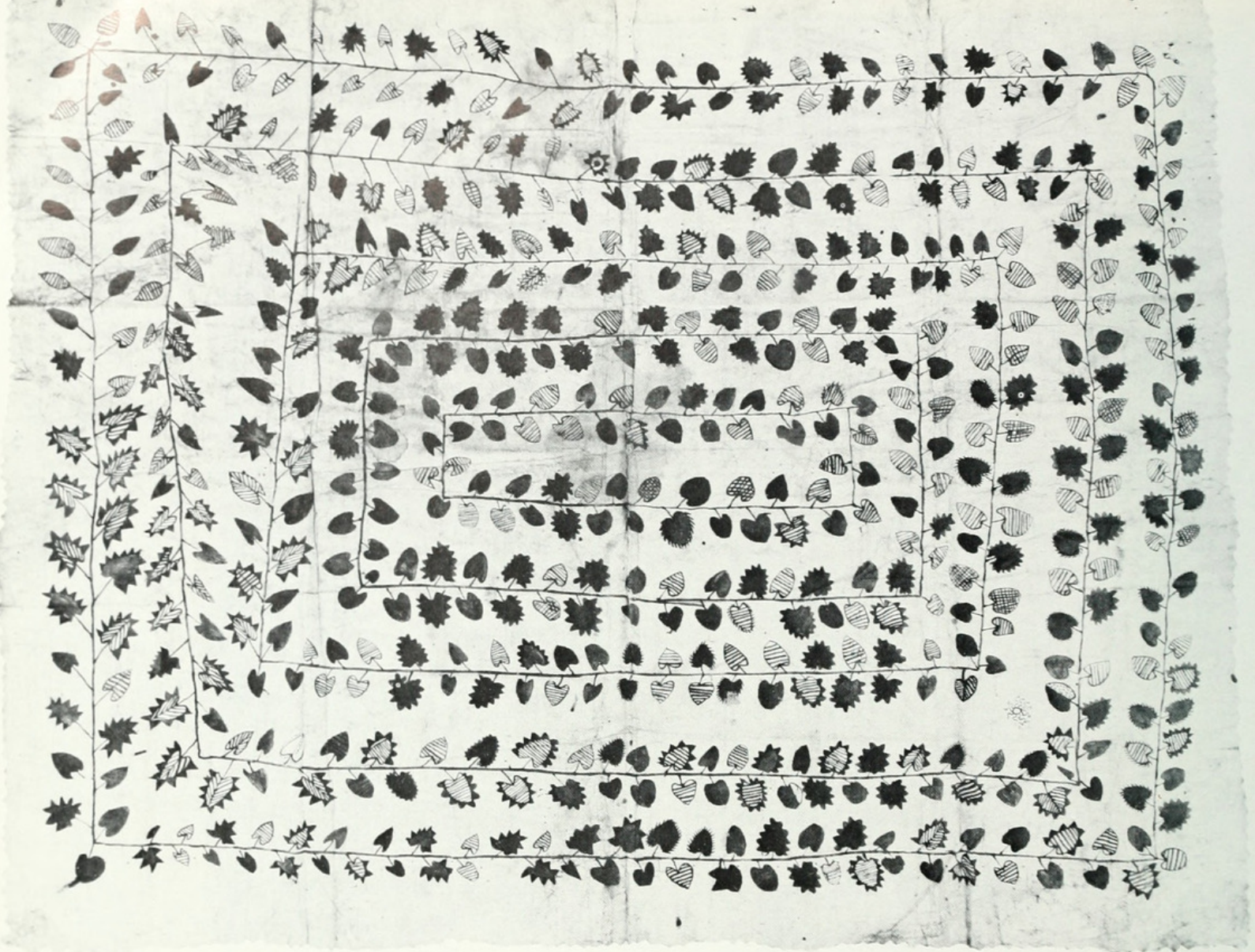
Tonga and Futuna. Captain James Cook named the Tongan archipelago the "Friendly Islands." He found Tongan society to be politically complex and strictly ordered by rank and nobility. Today these islands remain one of the few constitutional monarchies in the world. While social rank is still an influential force, daily life in the Friendly Islands has a warm, exuberant style that can be readily seen in modern Tongan *ngatu*, or tapa cloth. The small and proud island of Futuna also keeps its old traditions strikingly alive. Sheltered from the outside world, the Futunans have preserved their intricate and distinctive style of tapa painting in the face of modern social and economic change.

CHANGING ARTISTRY

Given time, we expect things to change to keep pace with historical events and changing conditions of daily life. Today most scholars believe



Cubeo Indian men of the Brazil-Colombia border dressed in bark cloth masks for an *óyne* (weeping), a dramatic mourning ceremony for the recent dead. Masked dancers impersonating familiar creatures as well as mischievous spirits come, as the anthropologist Irving Goldman has described them, "to mourn, but mainly to turn the people from grief." Photo courtesy of Irving Goldman.



Tapa cloth (#272722). A departure from traditional Polynesian geometric patterns, this piece was probably intended for commercial sale. Fiji or Samoan Islands; 210 x 166 cm (83 x 65 in.).

that all of the Pacific islanders are historically related to the islanders of southeast Asia. Over the thousands of years since the first Pacific islanders left Asia, however, many changes occurred throughout Asia and the Pacific. As a consequence, tapa from Indonesia and the Philippines is now often strikingly different from that made on the islands farther out in the Pacific Ocean.

Hawaiian Islands. After the death of Cook at Hawaii in 1779, the surviving officers and crew soon left the archipelago. They carried home to England the news of Cook's death and also many examples of the "curiosities" made by the Hawaiian islanders. *Kapa*, or Hawaiian tapa cloth, brought back to England in the 18th century, still can be found in museum collections. In appearance, it is thick and heavy, and painted in a variety of somber but elegant designs. By the 19th century, however, the art of *kapa* making had changed, partly because iron obtained from European sailors and traders made it possible for the Hawaiians to carve intricately designed finishing beaters (*i'e kuku*) and printing stamps of bamboo. *Kapa* from the 19th century is sheer and delicately patterned. However, by the end of the

last century, *kapa* making had died out. Instead, Hawaiian women spent part of the time once given to *kapa* production in sewing wonderful quilts made out of imported woven textiles.

Island Southeast Asia. The islanders of southeast Asia live in worlds that vary from "Stone Age" simplicity to modern urban complexity. Bark cloth is made (or was made until recently) in many areas throughout this part of the Pacific. The diversity of local custom and life is clearly reflected in the widely varying technical and artistic sophistication shown by garments and other articles made of bark cloth.

The survival of tapa making in the future will depend on whether the people who still know this ancient craft are successful in keeping alive their own ethnic identity and how they themselves will continue to value an expression of their heritage that demands time, learned skills, and raw materials that must be carefully cultivated or somehow preserved in their wild state.

In the few hundred years during which European civilization has exported its technology and its system of values to peoples in other lands, tapa making has died out among many

A group of Batak people of the Philippines wearing festive tapa clothing. The flowers, leaves, and colored grasses that complete their headdresses were chosen for fragrance as well as for color. Palawan Island, Philippine Islands, 1907-08. Photo by anthropologist Fay Cooper-Cole.



people for whom it was formerly not only a valuable but a valued craft. The fragile treasures of bark cloth held in museum collections bear mute testimony to the lost glories of an art that once flourished throughout the tropics. Such beautiful things, nonetheless, should be a source of

pride and inspiration to the descendants of those, now dead, who made them. All of us can take delight in the artistry and skill of the tapa makers of the past and in the colorful ways in which tapa, one of the oldest creations of mankind, is still enjoyed today.



2962, 217394. 1980. "Patterns of Paradise." *Field Museum of Natural History bulletin* 51(3), 4–11.

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