

BOWLS FROM THE ADMIRALTY ISLANDS

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AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY wooden bowls from the Admiralty Islands became a much sought after collectable item.

The taste for bowls had developed earlier in the nineteenth century in a general way when first bowls for the preparation of kava on the islands of western Polynesia and of the Polynesian Outliers even further west became known to foreign visitors. These bowls had at least four if not more legs supporting a wide open basin.¹ In due time, wooden bowls and wooden plates from the New Hebrides and the Banks Islands (now Vanuatu), the Santa Cruz Islands and the Solomon Islands² became well known, as did those, legless, from the Tami and Siassi Islands, off the Huon Peninsula of the north-eastern New Guinea mainland (Papua New Guinea). Specific forms of bowls were found to exist around the mouth of the Sepik and Ramu Rivers (Papua New Guinea) as well as further west in the area of the Lake Sentani (West Papua, Indonesia).

Title pages. *Large hemispherical bowl. Lateral ornaments carved separately and attached (tips restored). Lou Island, region of Matankor. Hardwood. L. 101 cm; H. 41.5 cm. Former collection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Mission (Herz Jesu Mission) in Hiltrop. Inv. 4402-A. Barbier-Mueller Museum.*

From northern Vanuatu to northern New Guinea and also to the Admiralty Islands and the nearby Wuvulu and Aua group (also part of Papua New Guinea) wooden bowls are not used for the preparation of kava,³ but play specific roles either as simple containers in varying contexts, or as more prestigious recipients for the ceremonial presentation of food and, most specifically among the Titan speakers (or Manus tru people, formerly known as Moanus) of Manus Province in the Admiralty Islands, as containers for preserving items of special importance, like ancestral skulls and bones.

Fig. 1a.





Figs 1a, b, c. Bowl with handles depicting stylized human figures (one is female, the other male). Hardwood.
L. 46.5 cm; H. 18.3 cm; H. of the feet: 2.5 and 3.7 cm. Former George Ortiz collection. Inv. 4402-D. Barbier-Mueller Museum.



Fig. 1b.



Fig. 1c.



Fig. 2. Rodolphe Festetics de Tolna, objects from the Admiralty Islands. Dagers, Ki-Ki-Bol, betel nuts, basin for drawing water, cup, breast ornaments, nose ornaments, sticks for eating betel nuts, etc. (vol. 2, p. 149). Inv. F.5913. Ethnographic Museum, Budapest. Drawn from Boulay 2007, p. 121.

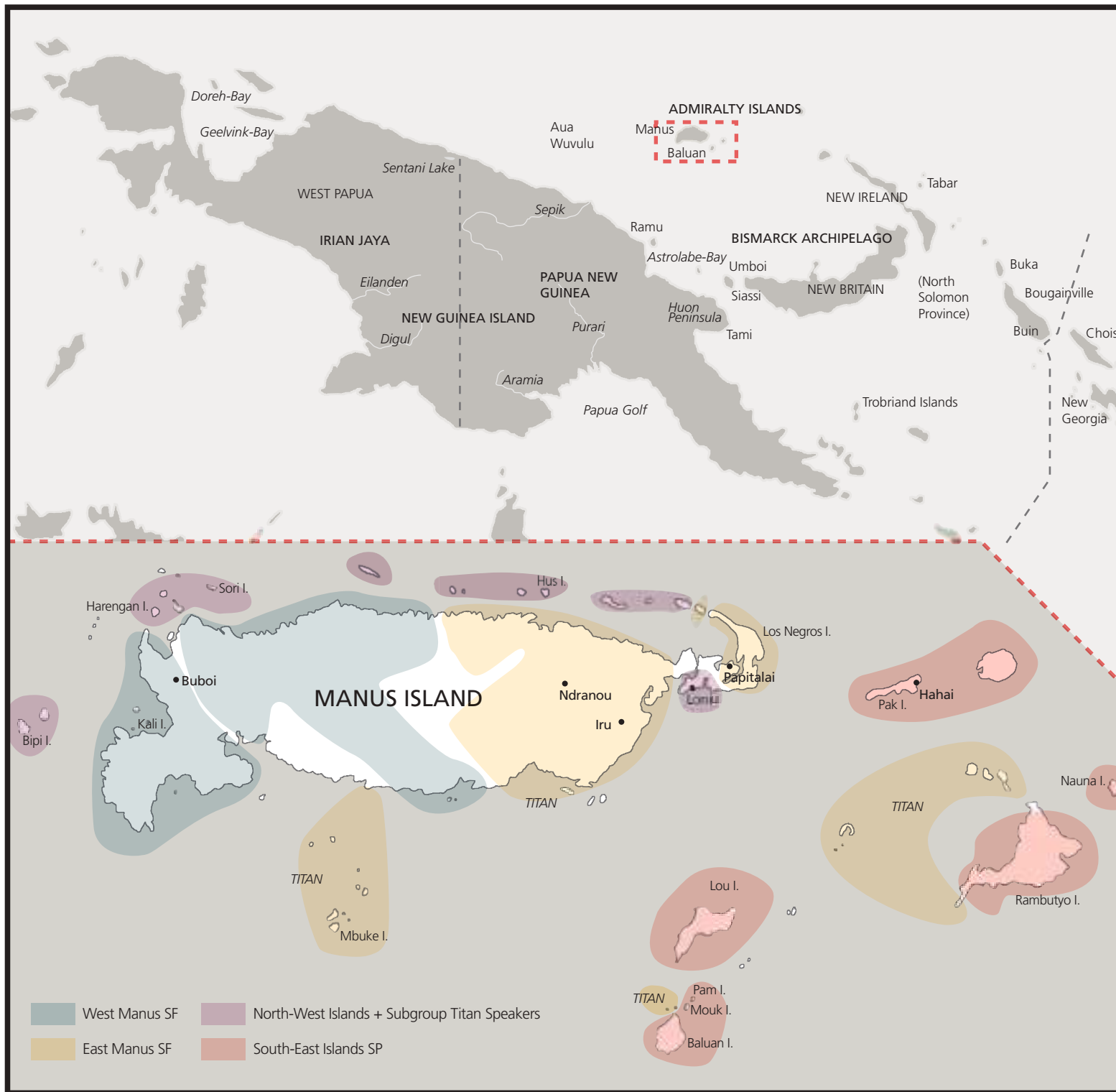




Fig. 3. Large bowl acquired by Bühler. Iru, eastern Manus. Wood. L. 148 cm; H. 76 cm, D. 114 cm. Vb 10520. Museum der Kulturen Basel.

All over the Melanesian area bowls with a deeply hollowed out body are often used besides forms with a widely flared, transitional to decidedly flat-bottomed wooden plates, the latter serving for the preparation of food paste with a wooden pounder smashing roasted breadfruit or taro tubers. Wherever bowls end in handles which mark a longitudinal axis they often become associated with canoes with which they may share principal elements of decoration, resembling for example bow and stern.

In north-western Melanesia forms of bowls and plates vary even more widely than their functions. For the Solomon Islands, and especially their eastern groups, Sandra Revolon has presented a comprehensive survey of specific functions, of which some are mirrored by specific forms while others are not.⁴ Of particular interest here is what Solomon Islanders have explained to her in regard to more recent developments. In their local context the bowls on Aorigi are still being made for use in a specific ceremonial context, that is the ceremonies ending an extended period of mourning. For people who died a normal death these bowls were – and still are – made to commemorate the deceased at the final ceremonies – Revolon speaks even, in a hypothetical way, of the bowls as made to embody, together with the food placed into them, the deceased. The bowl made for an individual who has died a ‘normal’ death – and these are by far the majority according to Revolon’s finding – may eventually be reused or even sold to foreigners, after the person’s spirit has left this world for good.⁵



Fig. 4. Woman cooking with an undecorated round wooden bowl. Kali Island. Photo Christine Kocher Schmid, 1994. Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, p. 238, fig. 305.



Fig. 5. Undecorated round wooden bowls were also used as receptacles containing raw materials used for making nets. Loni Island. Photo Bühler; (F)Vb 1343 (detail). Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, p. 201, fig. 257.

On the other hand, a powerful spirit will be born directly from the blood of those people who have died a death inflicted by force. A bowl is dedicated to such an individual and his spirit will help the living descendants and followers to integrate part of the spirit and its ambiguous spiritual power *mena* into their own body. Bowls serving this second function have to be kept in the family or clan to keep the ancestor's spirit alive and happy in order to encourage the spirit to help the living and to protect them. According to Revolón, it is the beauty of both types of bowls that captivates the gaze of the deceased's spirit, a beauty enhanced by figurative elements of decoration and linear patterns of shell, and the overall contrast between the white inlay made from lime or shells and the blackened surfaces. The eye of the Western observer is equally attracted. In this regard, the production for the tourist market in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, is not governed by a different canon.

The bowls originating in the Admiralty Islands do not fascinate less, although they do appear in a rather different form and style of finishing. Furthermore, no such detailed study as that previously referred to exists. However, Sylvia Ohnemus in publishing the collection of artefacts assembled by Alfred Bühler in 1932 on behalf of the Museum der Kulturen, Basel devoted ten pages to the presentation of a selection of fourteen from the museum's fifty-eight bowls.⁶ Ohnemus also added remarkable details of information from her own field observation. Going beyond Alfred Bühler's unpublished field notes of 1932 (which Hans Nevermann had been allowed to use for his monograph on the Hamburg collection⁷) she also reviewed information published by other authors. Only more recent publications made it more widely known that an earlier interest in the bowls from the Admiralty Islands was stirred by collectors like Richard Parkinson⁸ or the Hungarian Count Festetics de

Fig. 6c. The scarifications on the chest of this young Makantol woman are reminiscent of the ornamental designs drawn on the outside of the bowl reproduced figs 6a and b.
Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, fig. 136.



Fig. 6b. Detail of the external bottom of the bowl in fig. 6a. The decoration shows a succession of fine incisions.
Barbier-Mueller Museum.



Tolna (**fig. 2**)⁹ even before the Hamburg Südsee-Expedition in its first year under Professor Friedrich Fülleborn became active, while Captain Carl Nauer of Norddeutscher Lloyd,¹⁰ zoologist Ludwig Cohn from Bremen,¹¹ and the van den Broeks on the expedition of La Korrigane added further additions to the substantial corpus of objects.¹² In 2002 a selection of bowls collected over a period of one hundred years was shown for the first time at an exhibition held at the Rietberg Museum in Zurich devoted to the Arts of the Admiralty Islands.¹³ It is in the light of these accumulated efforts both descriptive as well as analytical, and especially of the presentations by Sylvia Ohnemus¹⁴ and also by Ton Otto,¹⁵ that the seven bowls of the Barbier-Mueller collection (**title pages and figs 1, 6, 7, 13, 14 and 17**) shall be placed into context.

We do not know who collected these items, nor when and exactly where they were collected. From Bühler's observations

we gather that by the time of his visit in 1932 carving the very large bowls used for communal feasts, once a speciality of Lou Island, had already ceased for good, though he was still able to obtain a beautiful example (**fig. 3**). Bühler says that he succeeded in locating two still active centres of production, one on Bipi Island and one in the area of Baluan Island and Rambutyo Island.¹⁶ However, in 1991 Ohnemus still identified and met two carvers, one on Bipi Island and one on Hus Island producing bowls for use or for sale.¹⁷



Fig. 6a. Bowl. Wood. D. 42 cm; H. 14.5 cm;
H. of the feet: 0.7 cm. Inv. 4402-F Barbier-Mueller Museum.



Fig. 7a. Bowl. D. 40 cm;
H. 15.3 cm; H. of the feet: 1 cm.
Former MacAlpine collection. Inv. 4410.
Barbier-Mueller Museum.

As bowls were widely used, and moreover travelled as exchange goods a fair distance away from their site of production, it is not an easy task to establish a pattern of regional styles. In fact, this effort may seem idle, except for the production from the islands of Baluan, Rambutyo and Bipi, where according to Bühler the carving of bowls in animal shape had its centre.

As a first observation regarding the use of bowls we should quote Bühler's general remark that for the use in daily life the bowls made in a basketry technique and covered with layers of a putty made from the *Atuna* nut,¹⁸ which rendered them watertight, were preferred. These bowls were made by men of the Ussiai and traded all over the province. Next come the circular undecorated bowls made from wood, a type of container which served several functions in a traditional household, such as a recipient for sago starch during the process of food preparation (**fig. 4**), or for the serving of food, and may be also for keeping refined raw material ready, for example when making a net (**fig. 5**). From Ndranou in the inland we learn that women during seclusion were meant to eat from wooden bowls, not the basketry ones.¹⁹



Fig. 7b. Bowl in fig. 7a photographed from above. Barbier-Mueller Museum.

People at the western end of Manus Island and on the north-western off-shore groups of small islands, such as Harengan Island or Hus Island, carefully distinguished between circular-shaped and clearly oval-shaped bowls (as seen from above), according to Bühler's field documentation. We do not know whether this differentiation was linked to a definite distinction between functions, too. Especially the decorated bowls which were not necessarily oval-shaped were made and kept for more specific types of use. Carved oval bowls with handles form the main group: they were used for serving food at special functions, like closing ceremonies of initiations, or to people of special status, for example clan and village leaders, *lapan*. For the Manus tru (or Moanus) people,²⁰

Parkinson refers also to the use of wooden bowls by magicians, for serving food to an ancestral spirit, as well as for the use of a bowl filled with water in a healing ceremony; in fact the water served according to Fortune to receive and transport 'the soul stuff' of the sick person.²¹

Just as a reminder regarding the degree of basic cultural diversity: twenty-seven different languages, grouped into four subfamilies and all belonging to one branch of the Austronesian Languages were, and still are, spoken in the province. Despite the linguistic diversity, which also tells about the constant competition between relatively small units – in former times also provoking periods of intense warring –



Fig. 8a.

there are many features that are shared by the majority of all village societies. One is that there are leading patrilineal lineages with hereditary leaders, *lapan*, who have to give proof of their capacity as leaders by organizing big feasts and – in former times – warring activities. A *lapan* would also have followers of a lower status, called *lau* on whose support he depended in many respects.²² Trading relations based on an exchange of locally produced special artefacts, or of raw materials, or of food not available elsewhere established strong links across language borders, as did the mutual recognition of clan totems.

Let us now have a look at the seven individual objects before us.

Fig. 8b.



Fig. 9.

The simplest variation of the rounded form is represented here by the bowl in **figure 6a**, slightly oval seen from the top. It shows a decorative band marking the upper edge of the outward surface. Regarding the decoration along the rim, Ben Mana, a carver on Hus Island whom Sylvia Ohnemus contacted in 1991, explicitly linked his pattern on a newly carved bowl to the term *kamuet* which he also applied to a tattoo pattern, without further elaborating on this. His statement points perhaps at a more general link between patterns of body decoration and patterns used on containers. We may detect more evidence for this. Only by going closer to our first bowl and by looking across the outside surface can we find a further element of distinction. What do we see? Fine lines is the first answer, normally three lines in parallel, each line made of a sequence of fine incisions about 2 to 4 mm in length, interrupted by sequences where no incisions are visible (**fig. 6b**); incised and not incised parts of the lines are spaced at about identical intervals. The better informed answer is that these bundles of parallel lines form a sort of net. Two basic line-bundles seem to reach from rim to rim, one set crossing the other at a right angle between the four legs. Further line-sets seem to have been drawn, at least ideally, from each of the legs in approximately a 45° elevation to-

Fig. 8a. Detail of a belt of woven and stitched plant fibres. *Buboi*, Vb 9805. L. 64 cm. Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, p. 122, fig. 143.

Fig. 8b. Bracelet woven from yellow orchid fibres. *Ndranou*, 1991. Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, p. 122, fig. 144.

Fig. 9. Photo of the interior of a residential house in Loni. The edge of the trap door and the top part of the post that allow access to the upper floor are decorated. Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, p. 277, fig. 346.

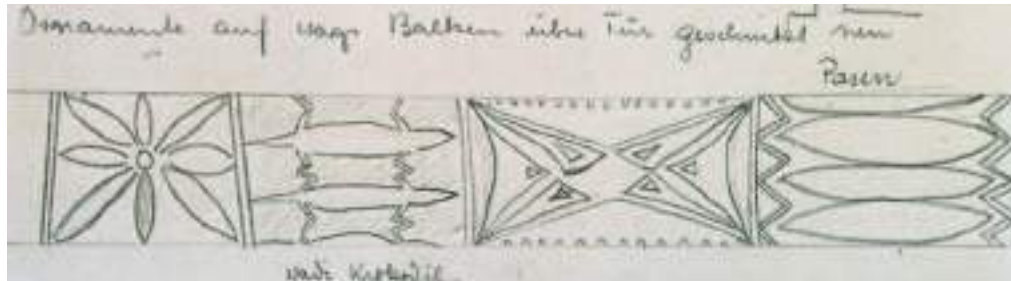


Fig. 10. Lower part of the drawing of the men's house in Buboï, by Bühler. Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, p. 268, fig. 335.

wards the rim. Though some line-bundles deviate from the ideal, the different sets cut across each other's path in a very much regular way, creating an angular pattern by which crossing points are linked to each other. Indeed, such fine lines of incisions are known from skin incisions as they were applied among Matankol people on the north-western islands both on men and women, as has already been observed by Bühler and confirmed by Ohnemus (fig. 6c). It is worth noting that Bühler found in the north-western part with a centre around Sori Island and Harengan Island not only skin incision (producing fine small scars), but also scarification (provoking the formation of protruding scars by keeping the wounds from healing quickly and smoothly) as well as true tattooing (with a hammering method, including the application of pigments into the wound). On the main island the less sophisticated method of producing scars by burning was also widespread. In the source texts it looks as if the delicate incisions arranged to form lines and the tattooing were sometimes treated as one and the same craft tradition. A very similar motif can also be found on the surface of clay pots, until the recent past still being made on Mbuke Island.²³ Moreover, a similar net-like arrangement of linear patterns, but cut in relief is shown on a much larger wooden bowl collected by Alfred Bühler at Iru in the east of Manus, the big island (fig. 3).

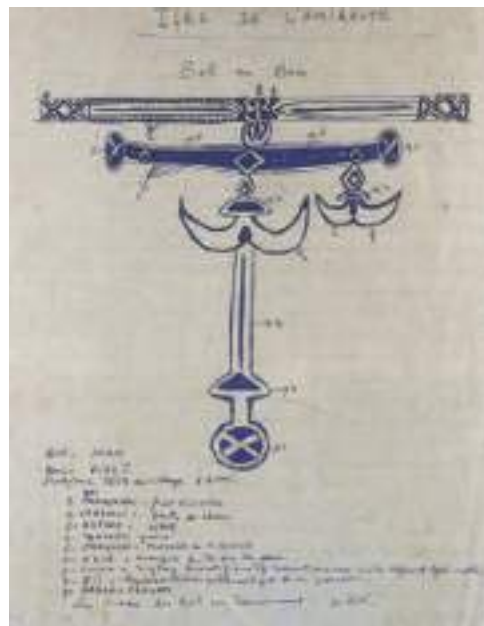


Fig. 11. Sketch by Régine van der Broek depicting the decorative motifs on a wooden bowl, especially the stylized dog's teeth coins. The names of the represented motifs are indicated at the bottom of the drawing. Drawn from Coiffier 2001, p. 170.



Fig. 12. *Mother-of-pearl breast ornament with pendant composed of dog's teeth and Pallaquium shell. H. 14.5 cm. Baluan Island, Vb 9669. Drawn from Ohnemus 1998, p. 59, fig. 56.*

The following example (**figs 7a–b**), formerly in the MacAlpine collection shows us a round bowl, standing on four short cylindrical stumps or feet (without legs), richly decorated along the rim on the outside, and covered with a nicely aged layer of soot and dirt on the external surface. At one spot two small adjacent areas are visible where the patina had been removed. Laurence Mattet offered the opinion that this might have been the effect of a previous owner removing an inventory number and an older label stuck to the object. Reading of the labels with a perforated edge which Rodolphe Festetics de Tolna glued onto the objects he collected one would like to check out this hypothetical link.²⁴ This bowl (**fig. 7b**) is most peculiar in having a handle across the interior of the bowl; this device was carved out of the same wood block when shaping the bowl's interior. Strange as this element might look, it is nothing to be afraid of: in 1932 Bühler collected a much less developed example of the same structure on Mouk Island.²⁵ While on the Basel example a small bird is very basically represented, here two beautiful lizards seem ready to sprint away in opposite directions, their tails barely touching each other in the centre of the bowl. The rim of the bowl had been broken off and glued back, just across one end of the handle.

The different pattern along the outer edge shows a structural similarity to the pattern of the bowl (**fig. 6a**), but the bowl (**figs 7a–b**) takes the analogy with a decorated body one step further by adding motifs that could well represent pendants with a fruit or disc motif. In describing similar patterns as the one along the edge, Ohnemus draws attention to the likeness with beautifully plaited girdles, arm bands and leg bands.²⁶ For these highly decorative bands either plaited brown fibres were combined with stitched on yellow fibres from an orchid (**figs 8a–b**), or patterns made of shell and glass pearls were created by a looping technique.²⁷ Ohnemus was able to

collect an inventory of names for patterns and their elements used on the plaited bands; some are patterns 'used to divide the belt into sections', but the names of the majority 'refer to animals (fish, bird, turtle, crab, snake and shell), plant parts (seeds, thorns), stones, parts of objects (e.g. the side of a canoe) and parts of the human body (e.g. elbow)'. By her informants, she was also told that patterns were owned by the maker, always a woman, and in fact inherited from her maternal family.²⁸ The copyright according to Ohnemus applies as much to the specific form as to the naming of the form, which may or may not imply an interpretation of its meaning. A number of these patterns had also been applied to posts and beams of houses (**fig. 9**) as well as to the platforms often used as beds in the twentieth century. There again carvers had to respect the copyrights of predecessors (**fig. 10**).²⁹

On the bowl's outer surface (**figs 7a–b**) an ornament combining the motif of dog's teeth from strings and chains of valuables with grains, beads and circular shapes can be seen below this band. Régine van den Broek drew a sketch of a very similar decoration on a bowl (now privately owned, but from the Korrigane collection) (**fig. 11**). She was also careful in recording also the information provided to her by a local informant at Hahai village on Pak Island who referred to the carver.³⁰ According to these notes we can isolate visually the following named elements of the simplest order; we may consider them to be modules from which different motifs can be constructed:



1 the fruit of a tree, *bhorenhau*, the disc-like element with two lines across the surface which cross each other in the centre at approximately 110° and 70° respectively,

2 the dog's teeth, *lehemui*, shown in pairs combined with

4 a lenticular seed, *parmoës*, of the *Pallaquium* nut, usually split in half, with

3 the rope, *buthen*, made from a liana, going through a hole in the seed, thus creating a pendant ending in either the dog's teeth or the tree fruit (fig. 12);

On Régine van den Broek's drawing we can further identify

5 a canoe board, *parankai*, with

6 fine incisions made on the skin, *roue*;

7 a motif surrounded by a zigzag band, *holdlo* which is constantly repeated around the bowl, interrupted by

8 representations of a fish, *nii*, as well as by

9 representations of the Frigate bird, *karah*.

Fig. 13. Bowl. Lightwood.

L. 50.5 cm; H. 18 cm;

H. of the feet: 2.2 cm. Inv. 4411.

Barbier-Mueller Museum.



Fig. 14. Zoomorphic bowl. Hardwood.
L. 47.5 cm; H. 23 cm; H. of the feet:
2 cm. Former Josef Mueller collection,
acquired in Paris before 1942.
Inv. 4402-C. Barbier-Mueller Museum.

The feet of the bowl, following Régine van den Broek, would be named *ken*, the bowl *man*; it would have been made from the wood *pireū* by the carver Tete from the village (H)Ahai. Of these names the wood *pirou* is also known by Ohnemus, partly used for naming the bowl among the eastern Ussiai, while *man* for bowl had previously been reported for Pak Island.³¹

By looking at a decorated bowl as an image we may see the bowl as referring in some way to a body with human-like characteristics, like two pairs of legs carved out of the same block of wood (thus extending the image of one body only), two breast decorations (or a breast and a head decoration), one girdle or arm band, as well as skin marks and other body decorations such

as multiple shell strings.³² All these elements of body decoration seem not to be of a specific gender.

As for the use of the bowls which are of a form a bit more than usual, several sources say that after a period of seclusion (especially for women) and initiation, the first food to be brought to the young individual was served in a wooden bowl. Three of the five remaining bowls each have a pair of symmetrically protruding parts, usually referred to as handles. Let us start with the bowl in **figure 1a**, formerly in the George Ortiz collection. It shows a shinier surface than those of other old bowls, maybe because of the particular attention given to it by one of his former European collectors. This bowl is made from a heav-

ier wood. It is standing on four legs which go straight down. The bowl carved in all its elements from one block of wood is fundamentally circular if viewed from the top but ends, as the profile view of the longitudinal axis shows, in two elegant handles. On the handle we find a highly stylized reclining figure, clearly human when seen from above, though with a drastically reduced main body as opposed to the stretched out limbs. The figures are in a reclining position, one is clearly male, the other female (figs 1b–c); its feet form a block protruding from the inner edge of the bowl. From the rim of the bowl a relief motif is carved out of the outward surface, and repeated in a simpler form on the side opposite. We can already read it: the motif refers to a pendant made of a pair of dog's teeth and segments of the shell of the *Pallaquium* nut (figs 11–12). On the bowl this motif appears to sit just below an edge separating the large lower surface from a part tilted inward to form the lip of the bowl's mouth.

This type of bowl appears in collections as the most common form; traditionally one would have used it for serving food or for eating, especially by persons of rank. Such bowls present a patina produced by traces of use including fine layers of soot from storing the bowl over a fireplace. Such bowls often show a patina produced by traces of use, including fine layers of soot from storing the bowl over a fire place. On the present example the appearance of the bowl, especially pleasant to our eyes, invites further tactile experience of delicately touching and handling the bowl, as others may have done before.

With the example of the bowl in **figure 13**, of an oval or oblong general shape, and made of a light wood we approach the theme central to many observers, foreigners as well as locals: Does the shape of certain bowls specifically refer to a canoe? While observers from the West seem to agree spontaneously on this, the link might be a bit more complex to explain than by a simple homology of form. But let us look at the bowl first. In planar view the bowl is no longer circular, but oblong or oval. In the side view the bowls



stands on four legs which at their feet slightly converge towards the centre. Two handles underline the horizontal stretching. Along the edge of the main body we find again the narrow band with relief carving, displaying curved motifs intersected by triangles, placed back to back and pointing in opposite directions, both parallel to the edge. Each of the two handles shows again a symmetrical arrangement, that is a pair of spirals, carved in openwork technique, each spiral evolving quite naturally in the direction opposite to its partner. As a result the two spirals oriented towards the centre of the bowl evolve into the bowl, while the two outward oriented spirals evolve away from the bowl. The dynamic created for the viewer by the spirals seems irresistible, though in carving the handles the carver introduced an element which helps to keep the visual dynamic under control: he inserted between the two pairs of spirals a small open space, limited by a fine bar, something like an open hut with its roof or a rectangle with a fifth corner on the top.

Fig. 15. *Feast with large bowls for the food. Admiralty Islands.*
Photo Heinrich von Sigriz, before 1914.
Drawn from Appel 2005, p. 19, fig. 12.

According to information obtained by Alfred Bühler and by Sylvia Ohnemus the spirals may evoke several levels of reference. The most obvious one is the curled tail by which the cuscus, a marsupial similar to the possum, grips itself to a tree branch.³³ Spiral-shaped teeth of pigs raised for that purpose might be another point of reference, as could be evolving ferns, or a special kind of shell. Both for canoe prow ornaments as well as for the handles of ceremonially important bowls the reference could be in fact pointing to an animal in a totemic relationship to the clan either of the person who commissions a bowl or the person to whom the bowl is ceremonially dedicated, an interpretation also suggested by Joe Nalo, an artist from Manus Province when he visited the Basel collection.³⁴ In fact, it may well be that for identification it was not the central form of the evolving spiral that was decisive, but rather one of the formally marginal elements.

We might add here a detailed observation by Reo Fortune who participated in Margaret Mead's research on the Titan-speaking Moanus people of Pere village concerning some more richly decorated bowls, adorned with *Ovula* shells. Most spectacular to a Western observer was the placing of an ancestral skull, and of the forearm bones into such bowl, after a ceremony already described by Parkinson.³⁵ From Fortune's description we may gather that 'a finely carved wooden bowl' hung up in 'an honoured place in the house front' of the family home (of a leading man) played an important role in mediating between the world of the living, the realm of the ancestors and the world of the spirits. The bowl would contain the father's skull and some of his bones. Offerings of food for the personal spirit of the deceased were placed into the bowl when addressing this protecting spirit (*moen palit*) or Sir Ghost, and asking him for help and protection.³⁶ Father's spirit, honoured by the living, and empowered by his link with father's skull in the bowl, would help to keep the family prosperous and especially the grandchildren safe. Though, ultimately, Sir Ghost will fail as he shall be unable to prevent the death of his first descendant – both skull and Sir Ghost shall then be replaced by those from the newly deceased.

It is time to discuss the largest bowl (**title pages**), a four legged example again, from the Matankor area. It must have been collected by a member of the Mission Order of the Sacred Heart (Herz Jesu Mission) of Hilstrup, near Münster/Westfalia, this mission society having been allotted by the German colonial administration a mission field in the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago. Manus and the small islands of the Admiralty Islands (named thus by Captain Philip Carteret in 1767) proved to be an especially difficult place for missionaries, colonial administrators and traders alike for putting their feet down. In fact, the difficulties leading to many bloody clashes and deaths have clearly arisen for two reasons: (a) the European arriving as traders were considered a threat by the coastal people who were traders in their own right, mounting trading expeditions to other island groups, such as the Little Schouten Islands (near the New Guinea coast, where they obtained coconut oil³⁷), and (b) that a number of the early visitors treated local people very badly. Anyhow, colonial administration became more or less firmly established by only the first decade of the twentieth century, but missionary work even then was very difficult, and collecting for their home museum was not a priority. The MSC missionaries were based at Paptalai on the main Los Negros Islands in the far north-east of Manus, often considered a peninsula of the mainland.

This big bowl, even if it does not belong to those measuring between 120 cm and 140 cm in diameter, is of quite exceptional quality. It had to be carved from a respectable tree. The decorations consist of two differently carved motifs on each lateral side under the rim as well as the two main elements showing a spiral each in a field of angular openwork bands. These two so called handles are not fit to serve such a purpose as they are made separately and attached with the help of small pegs and *Atuna* putty. Looking at these decorations, the first link that comes to mind is the structure of the canoe with symmetrically carved and attached bow and stern boards. The motif of the openwork spiral appears there as well. A different view would be to look at the bowl as a body, with the attachments as its pair



Fig. 16. Drawing of zoomorphic bowls. The bowl reproduced in fig. 17 is identifiable above right. From Nevermann 1934, p. 208, fig. 123.

Fig. 17. Zoomorphic bowl. Wood. L. 45.8 cm; H. 23 cm. Inv. 4402-B. Barbier-Mueller Museum.





Fig. 18. The sculptor John Horris produces bowls for sale. As well as traditional motifs, he seeks for new forms and ideas. Bipi Island. 1994. Drawn from Ohnemus 1996, p. 229, fig. 292.

the bowl with the areca nuts in focus. From a different area – Sori Island – Romanucci-Ross reported that in a ceremony closing the initiation of a woman, during which she also had her skin marked with incisions (or tattoos), ‘a huge bowl containing a coconut with a shoot on it is placed before her’.³⁹

Other reports mention the display of large amounts of food, or even – for a marriage – of coconut oil in a large wooden bowl. Food or the oil were to be subsequently distributed among the participants. Bühler saw a different type of large bowl being used for assembling and distributing food: a horizontal bowl, apparently more than 4 m long and carved out of a log, roughly resembling, with its head, a canoe.⁴⁰ According to Ton Otto the big feasts arranged by a leader, *lapan*, where large amounts of food and goods were collected and redistributed played an important role in stabilizing the village societies: these were the occasions where the clan leaders could compete against each other, and where each family could renew and deepen the links, especially to the maternal relatives of their marriage partners.⁴¹

of ears, delimiting the empty space to receive the materially and spiritually important load.

In fact, the large bowls were indispensable for the big feasts that ended different types of ceremonies. They were often connected to a display of status by one or more leading men, *lapan* (fig. 15).³⁸ According to diverging local customs large bowls may have served for presentations in various ways. Ton Otto described a final stage of a long period of mourning for a *lapan* on Baluan Island where a large wooden bowl was placed under a bunch of areca nuts (betel nuts). During the ceremony, the leaders would dance up to the bowl, one by one, each breaking off the number of nuts that corresponded to the number of pigs he had contributed earlier for distribution, and place these nuts into the bowl. In a final act the individual efforts were publicly acknowledged,

Our last but one example, **figure 14**, formerly in Josef Mueller’s collection in Solothurn, and acquired before 1942 brings us to the animal-shaped bowls. It is made from a heavier wood. Most known examples are representing a bird; a few can be seen to show a dog, one even a dog with a crocodile’s tail. In our specimen unfortunately the bird’s beak has lost its point. The bird shows two wings – or at least the idea of two intricately decorated wings and a bundle of tail feathers, again with fine chip-carved rows of small triangles. The bowl is again a four-legged one, which does not help to identify the bird. Comparing bird-shaped bowls it is the shape of the bird’s neck, head and beak that differ characteristically. According to Bühler, carvers on Rambutyo Island, Baluan Island and Bipi Island were especially active in producing animal-shaped bowls around 1930; for Baluan Island he

mentions especially the 'big eagle' as motif. The bird type was evidently well available already when Rodolphe Festetics de Tolna collected his share in 1896.⁴²

With the bowl in **figure 17** we reach the end of our tour. This bowl is clearly illustrated in Nevermann 1934⁴³ at the top right (**fig. 16**); in the caption it is identified as 'Stuttgart IC. 57280'. A bird again, but one with a different head. It is not standing on feet but rather sitting on an almost rectangular support, which could well have had its origin in representing the bird's folded legs. Is it a duck or a dove? Perhaps, however when comparing it to a stirrer for taro paste which was carved in a way to represent the Chauka bird, a species or subspecies (perhaps of the Tropicbird, *Phaethon sp.*), said to be endemic on Manus,⁴⁴ and a clan totem,⁴⁵ one is tempted to broaden the field.

Conclusion

It is much to be regretted that no detailed field study was ever devoted to this fascinating and quite exceptional chapter of Melanesian art. The quality of craftsmanship is as exceptional as was the artistic vision of some of these carvers. More than once, they mastered technically what their imagination had led them to conceive. We should honour them by honouring their works. ■

BIOGRAPHY

Christian Kaufmann, born in 1941, is an anthropologist. He conducted his field researches in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. From 1970 to 2005 he was curator of the Oceanian art collections at the Museum der Kulturen in Basel; he was also in charge of the publications and exhibitions programmes dedicated to Oceanic Art, specifically Melanesian art. He also served as Professor at the Basel University from 2000 to 2005. Since 2006 he has been chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Museo delle culture in Lugano. In 2007 he was A. B. Mellon Fellow in Art History at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and since 2009 he has been Honorary Research Associate at the Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia, Norwich.

Fig. 19. Men's house in Loniu.

Photo Bühler (F) Vb1393. Drawn from Ohnemus 1996, p. 270, fig. 338.



NOTES

1. Adrienne Kaeppler on ceremonial wooden containers in Kaeppler 2008, pp. 33–45.
2. Both groups form nowadays the independent country of the Solomon Islands, with the exception of the north-western islands of Bougainville and Buka which belong to Papua New Guinea.
3. Parkinson nevertheless observed the use of the roots of *Piper methysticum* for the preparation of kava on Lou Island in the Admiralty Islands (Parkinson 1907, pp. 373–74, in the following quoted from the English translation Parkinson 1999, here p. 165).
4. Revolón 2007 and Revolón 2003.
5. Revolón 2007, pp. 62–65.
6. Ohnemus 1996, in the following quoted from the English version Ohnemus 1998, numbering of pages and figures is basically the same, here pp. 201–11 and pp. 406–08.
7. Nevermann 1934.
8. For his biography see Jim Specht “‘The German Professor’: Richard Parkinson” in Parkinson 1999, pp. xv–xxxii.
9. Boulay and Antoni 2007.
10. Nevermann 1934; Buschmann 2000, Müller 2004, Mader 2008.
11. Rentrop 2004.
12. Parkinson, Richard [1907] 1999, pp. 155–81; Boulay (ed.) 2007, pp. 129–35; Coiffier, Christian (ed.) 2001.
13. Kaufmann, et al. 2002, pp. 44–58.
14. Ohnemus 1998, 2002, 2003.
15. Otto 2002.
16. Ohnemus 1998, p. 201.
17. Ohnemus 1998, pp. 209 and 229, fig. 292.
18. Formerly referred to as *Parinarium* putty (Parkinson [1907] 1999, p. 160, Ohnemus 1996), but see Christine Kocher Schmid 2002, and for the identification of the *Atuna* nut (*Atuna racemosa* Raf.) as the source material with more specific natural properties also Luer en 1999.
19. Ohnemus 1998, p. 191.
20. The reader is referred to the overview given in Ohnemus 1998, pp. 8–9 of Bühler’s use of terms designating population groups, introduced in much detail by Parkinson [1907] 1999, pp. 157–66. Imprecise as they may be, they allow us some generalization in the interest of the general reader. As Parkinson already recorded by checking his own observations with descriptions given by Po Minis, a mission-educated Moanus man, ethnic boundaries were traditionally blurred as named totemic clans did cut across village and group boundaries Parkinson [1907] 1999, pp. 168–74, see Heintze, Dieter, 2002 and Mohr de Collado 2003.
21. Ohnemus 1998, p. 205.
22. Otto 2002, pp. 32–34.
23. Ohnemus 1998, pp. 197–98, 202.
24. In Boulay 2007, p. 97 fig. of container, see pp. 131–33.
25. Inv. no. Vb 10038, Ohnemus 1998, p. 207, fig. 265.
26. Ohnemus 1998, p. 202.
27. See Ohnemus 1998, pp. 71–95, 122 with figs 143–44.
28. Ohnemus 2002a, p. 58.
29. Kaufmann, et al. 2002, p. 107, fig. 5, Ohnemus 1998, pp. 282–83, figs 351–52, Ohnemus 2002b, 2003, p. 199 and 2004.
30. Coiffier 2001, p. 170, see also fig. 31 in Kaufmann, et al. 2002, p. 49.
31. According to Nevermann 1934, pp. 206–07.
32. Ohnemus 1998, p. 87, fig. 96 ex coll. Nauer.
33. Appel 2005, p. 17 quotes an observation by Emil Nolde of a ceremony on his 1914 tour with Professor Leber; they observed large bowls being filled ‘with sago, roasted corn, yam and tree fruits, on top of each bowl a roasted cuscus was lying with its thin tail, curled up into a spiral’ (my translation), after Nolde’s *Mein Leben* (autobiography).
34. Ohnemus 1996, p. 209.
35. Parkinson [1907] 1999, p. 179.
36. Fortune in Ohnemus 1998, p. 205.
37. Parkinson [1907] 1999, p. 156.
38. Appel 2005, p. 19, fig. 12.
39. Ohnemus 1998, p. 205.
40. Ibid., p. 210, fig. 271.
41. Otto 2002, pp. 33–35.
42. Boulay 2007, p. 121 and pp. 131–33, Chauvet 1930, pl. 84, figs 326–28.
43. Nevermann 1934, p. 208, fig. 123.
44. Kaufmann et al. 2002, p. 152, fig. 64.
45. According to Parkinson [1907] 1999, pp. 174 and 309, but they are a honeyeater.

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