HAWAIIAN ART

BY

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HUC-MAZELET LUQUIENS IS AN AMERICAN ARTIST, A PAINTER-ETCHER WHOSE ETCHINGS OF HAWAIIAN SUBJECTS CONSTITUTE AN IMPORTANT PART OF HIS WORK. HIS INTEREST IN THE ANCIENT ART OF THE HAWAIIANS IS A BY-PRODUCT OF HIS PROLONGED RESIDENCE IN THE ISLANDS.

HAWAIIAN ART

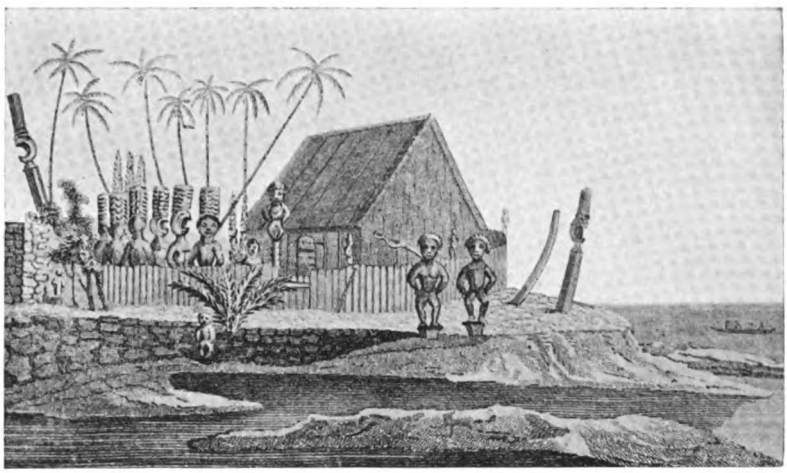
LARGE TEMPLE IMAGE
British Museum

HAWAIIAN ART

I

In the culture of Polynesia, even its earliest discoverers recognized a phenomenon of the greatest importance, and a rich field of ethnological exploration. The art, plastic and decorative, which made part of that culture, is in itself an impressive racial manifestation of extraordinary interest. Not much has been written of it, in any way to put the first emphasis on its character and quality as art, and those who have written of it at all have been chiefly interested in the more exuberant art forms of the Maori of New Zealand. Among the somewhat divergent culture centers of Polynesia, however, there is no good reason for assigning an inferior position to Hawaii. On the contrary, it is at least a tenable thesis that the Polynesian culture achieved one of its finest flowerings in its northernmost outpost. The art of Hawaii, though limited in scope as the island group is limited in size, should, we might expect, reflect in some way the vigor and beauty of its legend and the ingenuous dignity of its communal life. The present writer has been tempted to the following sketch by his interest in Hawaiian art for its own sake, and by the fact that no one before him has undertaken just such an appraisal.

Although the savage arts of the true primitives have been more or less the vogue in artistic circles of Europe in recent years, it is still very difficult to give a clear picture of the art of even so small and compact a racial group as the Hawaiians. There is no sufficient historical frame in which to fit our surmises as to the development



HALE-O-KEAWE, ADJOINING THE PLACE OF REFUGE AT HONAUNAU
(From a drawing by the Rev. William Ellis, 1823.)

and meaning of the art forms that we find. The savage has no history, no written history certainly, of the sort that forms the background of our studies of civilized art. Oral tradition may serve as authentic history through a few generations. Beyond that, it soon turns to legend, part and parcel of the very art in question, and infused with the same difficulties of interpretation. Even in Polynesia, where the elaborate record of the genealogies has a consistency and a weight that make it an essential foundation of racial investigation, the disputes of the ethnologists give warning to the anxious student that any far-reaching conjectures of relationship or derivation must be reserved till the scholars are better agreed.

A further difficulty arises in the lack of any accepted standard for judging the value of a truly primitive art. What is good and what is bad in such an art? To what extent is it art at all? Had the savage who made it a standard to tell him whether it was good or bad? To the last question an affirmative answer may surely be made,

IMAGE FROM HEIAU AT KAILUA
British Museum

even if his measure was merely one of good workmanship. Franz Boas, one of the most competent of modern students of primitive art, emphasizes his belief that the mental processes of all races are fundamentally the same, and that all peoples have produced work which has given them aesthetic pleasure. The savage knows little of art for art's sake, since all his efforts are applied to some ulterior purpose, whether ritualistic or merely decorative. But these purposes are important to him, and, though his scope is more limited, he often seems even more susceptible to the direct emotional appeal of his art than some civilized peoples. The ethnologists and archaeologists, in general, have not gone far in appraising the value or the beauty of the art of Polynesia. Their interests lie very naturally in a different direction. In a sense, the most convincing testimonials of the quality of such primitive art have come from modern European artists, who, with no expertness of an archaeological sort at all, have simply found in the art of savages something which rings true to their intuitive understanding of their own trade.

It is manifestly unsatisfactory to judge of the excellence of primitive art forms by the strictly sophisticated standards of Europe. It would be equally unwise to imagine all savage manufactures admirable so long as they are sufficiently uncouth. Some middle course is needed, by which we shall not have to cast aside all that we have learned in the practice of our European arts, but which may yet leave us open minds when confronted with the products of barbaric fancy. It is safe, perhaps, to insist that all arts must be judged in their own kind, and that we must not look with too patronizing an eye on the races that we call primitive.

LARGE TEMPLE DRUM OF WOOD AND SHARK SKIN
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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II

One notable effort to bring the art forms of Polynesia into a definite relation with the great current of human expression that we call art, is to be found in the second volume of Élie Faure's monumental "History of Art," already classic, where he devotes a section to what he calls the art of the Tropics. Faure is of a school of criticism that is closely interested in all art, so long as it possesses vigor and reality and the sap of life. He draws no invidious distinctions between primitive and modern arts. In fact, he is in accord with some very modern artists in suspecting that we have something to learn, something that we once knew but have forgotten, from the products of ancient fetichism and grouping by tribes. Modern Europe has its art, of course, which at its best is characteristic of it, and which is beyond the intellectual range of the primitive. The same may naturally be said of the great civilizations of the Orient in China and Japan. But with growing sophistication, the civilized world has tended to lose a kind of native artistry that is instinctive with most primitive peoples and firmly founded in racial beliefs and emotions. To find a living primitive art in all its first ingenuousness, Faure says we most now go to the Tropics, or perhaps to the far north, where races have been retarded in the general march of civilization, and where men, in the heart of modern times, have preservd practically intact the spirit of their most distant ancestors. Even this is a statement of the case which grows constantly less true. If we wish to speak at first hand of living primitive arts, it must be soon, before the subtle influences of white civilization have distorted their last vestiges.

It is in Africa and Oceania particularly that Faure describes arts worthy of our interest and admiration as types of our ancestral cultures. In the remarkable sculpture in wood and metal of the modern African Negroes, he visualizes a possible first sketch or presentiment of the early Egyptian art which was later to become one of the foundation stones of our art of Europe, a first sketch which may carry us back in essentials as far as the first appearance of man in Africa. In the comparative immobility of the African jungle, he imagines a kind of preservative which has kept intact, in the most general sense, the very beginnings of our own art. So, too, in the region of the Pacific Ocean, he distinguishes the artistic affinity of Polynesia with Asia. Just as he finds a characteristic European realism in African art, he sees a more decorative Oriental tendency in Polynesian forms. And in the end he cannot forbear linking Polynesia, tentatively, with America, in view of striking resemblances which he finds in the spirit of the more archaic arts of Peru and certain islands in the Pacific.

All this recalls the similar surmises of Ernest Fenollosa, in his "Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art," not only with regard to African art, but, correspondingly, to the effect that the early beginnings of Pacific art, common to both Asia and the Americas, may presumably be reflected in the modern primitive arts of Polynesia and Melanesia. Fenollosa definitely adopted the hypothesis "of the existence of a substantial unity of art forms, caused by actual dispersion and contact, throughout the vast basin of the Pacific, and including the arts of Peru, Central America, Mexico, and Alaska, as well as those of Hawaii, Micronesia, Macronesia, and the early inhabitants of Formosa, China, and Japan." He believed in a

"Pacific School of Art," sharply differentiated from the schools of all other parts of the world, not wholly exclusive in its later development, since the art of China and Japan at certain periods shows strong influences from the Mediterranean, but in its beginnings definitely a thing by itself. He instances some of the oldest forms of Chinese design, preserved in ancient bronzes, as identical with motives widespread in the Pacific islands and in the Americas. There is decided interest in the impressions of such art historians as Faure and Fenollosa, but it would be unwise to overstress their conjectures, without modern ethnological support. Polynesian relationship with Asia is plain enough, in many respects, but it must be said that the American connection is opposed, so far, by the whole weight of an important American school of ethnology.

More apposite to our present purpose is Faure's generous appraisal of the Polynesian race, in its more appealing aspects. It may be repeated in roughly condensed paraphrase. A beautiful race of men, he terms them, high of forehead and artists by nature, living in the open air, in the wind from the sea, on countless islands which cover the broad ocean as the Cyclades of Greece strew the eastern Mediterranean. There men feel in themselves the poetry of nature which surrounds them and which formed them. Their language is harmonious; dancing and war and music are loved; flowers are woven into crowns and garlands. The mythology of the race is very near—through its triumphant grace, its perfume of the dawn and the sky, and through its crystalline symbolism —to the old Ionian legends. Had life been a little less facile, he says, and had the dispersal of the race through thousands of islands and vast expanses of sea not pre-

ANCIENT HEAD USED TO GUARD THE EMBANKMENT OF AN IRRIGATION DITCH ON KAUAI
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

FEMALE GOD
Trocadero Museum, Paris

vented the necessary cohesion of peoples, a great civilization and a great art could and should have been born here in the Pacific.

It would be an interesting study to determine whether Polynesia was still on the upward trend when it was discovered by the first explorers, or whether decadence had already in any way set its inevitable course. Whether it was in the ascendant or not, the old Polynesian culture is now being effectually destroyed by the intruding white man. But we have had it here, within our sight, to touch with our own hands, a neolithic civilization and a neolithic art of the highest type, still intact at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The admiration of a modern art historian, or a modern artist, for a vigorous primitive art need not be couched in any half-hearted or apologetic terms. The savage has strong beliefs and emotions. War and magic are mainsprings of his existence. The art in which he expresses his needs, his fears and his desires is frank and violent, fiercely cruel at times. He yields readily to his sense of the horrible and the grotesque, a sense that has dwindled with us since the great Gothic Age. He is still able to frighten himself, and his enemies, with terrific gods which he carries before him into battle. At the same time, he often possesses to an extraordinary degree an elementary and unreasoned feeling for rhythm and symmetry in design. He is accustomed to work with his hands, his skill being necessary to his well-being. The very exigencies of the controlled technique proper to the use of the tools he can make for himself, may be credited, in part at least, with the production of a formal beauty which becomes a fixed style of ornamentation.

The modern artist looks at the naïve art of the savage

with an amazement not unmixed with envy. We may not wholly understand the significance of some atrocious wooden fetish from the Congo or an equally monstrous ancestral figure from Polynesia, but we sense, in the best specimens, both vigor of expression and an unerring instinct for organization and workmanship. We should like to have the will and the ability to make gods of our own with the same artistic conviction. We should like to have as compelling a reason and as consistent a technique for the ornamentation of our belongings as the Maori displayed in the carving of his house fronts and his canoes. We might even wish, if our sailors, in emulation of their ancient British ancestors, must cover their skins with absurdities in blue ink, that they had for their use some system of stylized decoration comparable in beauty and significance to the tattooing of the Marquesans.

The truth is, if we are to find anything but strangeness and ugliness in alien art forms, we need a considerably wider definition of art than that suggested by the picture galleries of Europe. In recent centuries, we have become so accustomed to a close pictorial imitation of natural forms that the very word "art" calls up a mental image wholly inapplicable to the greater part of the historic artistry of the world. Art, basically, does not aim at exact imitative representation, but at the visual expression of ideas which seem important or interesting to the man expressing them. And because it is inherent in human nature to arrange and to organize, art very generally aims also at the adaptation of such visual expressions to the balanced and rhythmic decoration of any surface to which they are applied. In fact, until some formal element, of arrangement at least, has been added to the first effort at expression, mere representation may

SMALL FEMALE GOD
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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SMALL FEMALE GOD
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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be considered no art at all. Moreover, we must be wary of supposing that there is any universal concept of beauty, unless we limit the meaning of the word, as many artists end by doing, to a kind of structural expressiveness and excellence of workmanship, that is to say, effectiveness of the means to the end. Art is not even limited to the expression of agreeable themes—quite the contrary. The god of one's fathers, at a given stage of culture, must be fear-inspiring, perhaps terribly and atrociously so, not only to the "out-group," but to the recalcitrant of the "in-group." The symbolism of early magic in general, a basic element in art which reappears here and there to the present day, represented to the savage important realities of nature as he saw it, and often took forms that are repugnant to our sensibilities. It is with some such considerations in mind that we must approach any primitive art, if it is to be more to us than a mere series of documents, interesting to the ethnologist and archaeologist alone.

III

When we turn our eyes to the native art of the Hawaiians, evidently we must not expect too much, nor the wrong thing. It is little enough, after all, that our museums have to show. Hawaiian art was strictly an art of the stone age, up to the moment of Captain Cook's discovery of the islands. This "stone age" of Polynesia should not be understood as denoting any very true analogy with the stone age of Europe, but the resemblance was real to the extent of a total lack of metals, either as tools or as materials of craftsmanship. The Hawaiian could not even fell a tree for a canoe without resort to his adze of polished stone. Whatever of art we find in Hawaii will have been made, up to the coming of the white man and after, with such tools as stone adzes, shark tooth and shell knives, coral rasps and sand and water, together with a great deal of patient labor. Not only was there no use of metal, but even pottery, as elsewhere in Polynesia, was conspicuously absent. Pictorial art was of the crudest, if not wholly lacking. The most characteristic medium of Hawaiian artistry was wood, a comparatively destructible material. In fact, many, if not most, of the wooden idols were burned, out of hand, in a fury of reformation after the breaking of the tapu in 1819, or, in order that they might not be burned, were so successfully hidden by the faithful, in secret caves, that only chance has brought them to light. After wood, the Hawaiian devoted his powers of decoration to materials even more fragile: gourds, tapa, woven mats, featherwork and, lastly, the most evanescent of all mediums of applied design, the living human skin. The art of old Hawaii is now virtually dead, except for an interesting

SMALL GOD. POSSIBLY THE POISON GOD KALAIPAHOA, TO WHOSE IMAGE OF A POISONOUS WOOD A PECULIAR MALIGNITY WAS ATTRIBUTED.
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

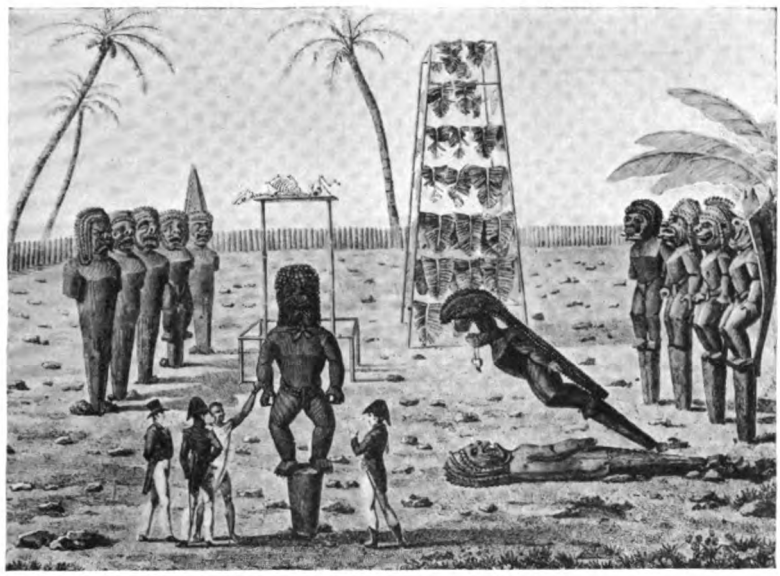
LARGE TEMPLE IMAGE
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

remnant of former craft to be found in the weaving of mats from the leaves of the native hala. Evidently we must content ourselves with a meager showing from a comparatively short period, with little likelihood, moreover, of unearthing any very ancient treasures to carry our knowledge further back.

The Hawaiians applied decorative, low relief carving to very few objects, compared with other Polynesians, but carved representations of their gods and goddesses in the round. It is the sculpture in wood that constitutes the most imposing and interesting part of Hawaiian art, and of this sculpture, the larger pieces, the big wooden gods of the temples, are the finest. For wood carving in general, Hawaii must take a second place to New Zealand. The climate in which the Maoris lived, and the consequent need of more elaborate shelter, together with a large and varied supply of softer woods and better stone for tools, carried the New Zealand artist along to a decorative exuberance, rich to the point of diffuseness, to which there is nothing comparable in Hawaiian art. Still, the very avoidance of any too easy fluency lent emphasis to Hawaiian carving. If we were forced to choose a single specimen to represent the characteristic art of Polynesia, it might well be one of the extraordinary wooden gods of Hawaii.

The large temple images are fantastic, yet possessed of an unexpected and strenuous realism that is not usually found in the more decorative art of the Maori. Squat and powerful in form, but lively to a degree, with enormous heads of demoniacal expression, with elaborate crests or formalized hair masking the brows, with open mouths carved in the shape of horizontal "figure eights" and showing the teeth, they are idols well fitted to fill the

LARGE TEMPLE IMAGE
Peabody Museum, Salem



HEIAU OF LIHOLIHO AT KEALAKEKUA
(From a drawing by Arago, 1819, in Freycinet: Voyage autour du Monde.)

enemies of the king, and his followers as well, with fear and awe. The eyes stare characteristically over upturned nostrils, and, in some specimens, tongues protrude from the snarling mouths in a common Polynesian gesture of defiance. The arms and legs are heavily muscular, but flexed in the attitudes which give the figures their animation. These were the images that the early explorers found guarding the royal tomb of Keawe at Honaunau. They were to be found on the central platforms of all the larger temples, set up in semi-circular groups like high chiefs in grim ceremonial conclave, while other figures of similar menacing aspect stared hideously from the outer walls to give warning that the ground within was sacred.

ESTED IMAGE. FROM HALE-O-KEAWE AT HONAUNAU
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

For the most part, it is no longer possible to give them definite names. There is some diversity in form, even if we consider only the few large images now preserved in our museums. If we accept the testimony of early drawings made by explorers who visited the islands, and particularly if we include smaller gods, there was considerable diversity in the appearance of the idols. But their identities escape us. The difficulty does not lie in our ignorance of the religion of Hawaii or of its gods. On the contrary, the students of the subject have achieved an impressive acquaintance with the larger aspects of religious belief in Polynesia. It is the smaller detail of religious practice which is lost. In Hawaii, since 1819, no man has seen the ancient rites of the temples in actual operation, and the early observers before that date hardly gave a very clear picture of what they saw. The mere identities of the more important idols would seem to be a kind of information available to almost any interested onlooker, but as no one took the precaution of labelling them while they were still in use, it is proving very difficult to do so now. We know many Hawaiian gods and their attributes, and much of the part they played in Hawaiian life, but the definite assignment of their names to the idols of our museums is nevertheless almost impossible. For the present, we must be content to view these images simply as the relics of a cult long disused and works of art whose value would not be increased by giving them designations of doubtful authenticity.

To dismiss these gods as ugly is to miss their plastic quality. They were no doubt meant to be terrifying. The artists were thinking in terms of magic and violence, and they had skill in giving expression to their thought. The firm strokes of the stone adze mark out the express-

CRESTED IMAGE. FROM HALE-O-KEAWE AT HONAUNAU
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

LARGE POST IDOL FROM KAUAI, CORNER POST OF THE FENCE AROUND A HEIAU.
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

ive planes of trunk, legs and shoulders, or the more elaborate decoration of mouth and headdress, with admirable boldness. They understood the use of wood. Sometimes the surface is worked down to a handsome dark polish, but more often the marks of the tool are left untouched. And even in examples long weather-worn, or partly burned in the reformation of 1819, the rugged surfaces still retain their character. In this Hawaiian sculpture of the wooden idols, there is practically no era of degeneration resultant from the adoption of European tools and ideas. The manufacture of the images came to so early and so definite a close with King Liholiho's breaking of the tapu, that we may almost take it for granted that all the larger temple gods were made in the full flush of the old Hawaiian tradition.

The strangely distorted features of the temple images are unmistakably symbolic in some respects. The monstrous heads, the peculiar treatment of the mouths and eyes, and the detail of hair or headdress, all show the mark of a symbolism we cannot now trace. The "figure eight" mouth is a convention found also in New Zealand. The staring eyes, many of them characteristically slanted, are conspicuous features which Fenollosa found prominent throughout his "Pacific School of Art," from New Zealand to Alaska. He termed them "spirit" eyes, symbols of "demonic force." The heads of the images are noticeably huge, wasting nothing of the original tree trunks from which they were made. Various students, in dealing with such figures elsewhere, have thought that the selection of a log of wood or a block of stone, with priestly ritual, made it already potentially a god, whose shape, consequently, was altered no more than was consistent with the depiction of the desired features. Some

such thing would account for the heads of the Hawaiian gods; in fact, one or two idols are preserved, whose original post form is unaltered, the head being merely a kind of surface decoration.

Beyond their probable symbolism, however, the distorted forms of the images have undoubtedly their literal significance. There is realism of a sort in their wild appearance. The grotesque has always been a powerful means of expression, though there is naïveté in its use. The Hawaiians obviously had no modern inhibitions to interfere with their satisfaction in it. To the Polynesian in general, "making faces" at the enemy was an accepted means of winning battles. There is no doubt that the Hawaiian cultivated an ideal of ferocity for its own sake. The exaggerated features of the idols were proper embodiments of the spirit of a people whose foremost god was the god of war. The snarling countenances were the faces of warriors, plunging into battle with the grimace of desperate conflict. They were the faces of ancestor heroes, whose assistance was much to be desired, but whose malevolence, under adverse circumstances, was equally to be feared. The images here show only one aspect of the life of the Hawaiian, but in this his ingenuous ardor is at its strongest. The wooden gods are monstrous, but alive. There is cruelty in their countenances, but potential heroism as well.

Not all Hawaiian images are greatly distorted, however. Polynesian art in general, decorative and fantastic as it is, gives ample testimony here and there of a close power of observation. In the Hawaiian islands, there is a large series of small household, or family, gods, which, in comparison with the large temple images, are naturalistic in conception. Here, again, it is almost impossible

SMALL IMAGES
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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to give distinguishing names that will not be contradicted. Many of these gods, no doubt, are *aumakua,* the ancestral patrons and protective deities who constitute a large part of the Hawaiian pantheon. There are well-known examples, among these small gods, which show the strongly symbolic features of the large images. There are two fine specimens in the Bishop Museum which have not only the characteristic "figure eight" mouths and upturned nostrils, but headdresses also which are somewhat more elaborate than any found in existing larger figures. In general, however, the small wooden gods have little of the conventional appearance of the big temple idols. They are small statuettes, varying in size and excellence of execution, and for the most part consistently naturalistic in intention.

Their naturalism takes on a variety of forms. Ferocity plays its part, as in the temple gods, but a more common type is the solid warrior, crested and severe. There are many representations of women, usually in a vigorous and aggressive guise that proclaims them leaders along with the men. Probably the finest of all the small gods are two female figures which were found in a burial cave near Kawaihae on Hawaii. These statuettes, first described by William T. Brigham, are so realistic in effect that he called them portraits. The description is not lacking in plausibility. It might be said, however, that the subject of such a portrait would be a personage not far removed from godhead, a chiefess, a descendant of the gods and the sacred vehicle of the divine *mana,* so that the distinction drawn by Brigham would be, in Hawaiian eyes, to a great extent a distinction without a difference. The two figures are clearly in the same tradition with other gods of the series, and there is no good

SMALL GOD
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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reason for putting them in any different category. The lively pose, already described as characteristic of the Hawaiian gods, has here become definitely lifelike. The firmly cut contours, body, breasts, legs, even the naturalistic face and head, with real hair pegged in, are all strikingly true to a physical type of Hawaii. The artist has maintained his usual mastery of wood as a material. The modelling is accomplished in large, handsome planes, the dark wood was chosen so that the sapwood shows light on protuberant parts of the body, and the whole surface is polished to a soft, warm gloss. For a thoroughgoing and successful realism, there is perhaps nothing in Polynesian art to surpass this spirited pair of statuettes.

The carved wooden gods we have discussed, primitive as they may be, are still a kind of sculpture that fits easily into our traditional categories of art. When we meet with an oddity for which we have really no counterpart in our own art, judgment fails us for lack of a standard. Such an oddity is to be found in the portable featherwork representations of the Hawaiian war god Kukailimoku. These images, which were actually carried into battle, were made over a strong wickerwork of the aerial roots of the *ieie,* which in turn was covered with a tightly fitting net of *olona* fiber to which the feathers were attached. Staring eyes of pearl shell were added, and sometimes human hair, and the brutal mouths were lined with dog teeth saved from ceremonial priestly repasts. At first glance, these heads seem hardly to possess the plastic quality of the thoroughly sculptural wooden idols. Still, they are not to be too lightly dismissed. The ceremonial use of feathers was widespread throughout Polynesia. The war god, Ku, was all in all the dominating figure of

FEMALE IMAGE, FROM CAVE AT KAWAIHAE
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

the Hawaiian pantheon. Kaili, the true war god, in a more special sense, of the kings of Hawaii, was supposed to have existed in the form of two feathers from the forehead of the bird Hinawaikolii, who came from Tahiti. These were bound with a cord and preserved in a coconut vessel. This god was not taken into battle, but its power, by prayer, was vested in Kukailimoku, who carried out the instructions of Kaili and the kings. In using the brilliant red feathers of the native *iiwi* to cover the surface of the images of Kukailimoku, the Hawaiian priest-artist was employing, not only the most vivid and costly pigment at his command, but also a material of the greatest symbolic potency. There was no lack of expression in the completed image, nor of the stark violence of barbaric emotionalism. These feather gods were peculiar to the Hawaiian islands, and are a striking product of the specific Hawaiian imagination.

To do full justice to the Hawaiian gods, whether of wood or of feathers, much might be added of the religious beliefs behind them. E. S. C. Handy's exhaustive study of "Polynesian Religion" offers a background that is rich in suggestion. It appears from his analysis that the elemental gods, who embodied the basic phenomena of nature, were not often given any anthropomorphic shape in Polynesia. The gods of common worship in the temples, Kane, Lono, Ku, and Kanaloa in Hawaii, were derived from and acted as specific functions of the elemental deity. After them came many others, lesser divinities and ancestor heroes made demigods, protecting spirits and patrons of special industries, from whom direct assistance was more readily to be expected. The term "idol" in itself, as it is commonly used, is perhaps misleading. Handy gives various references which indi-

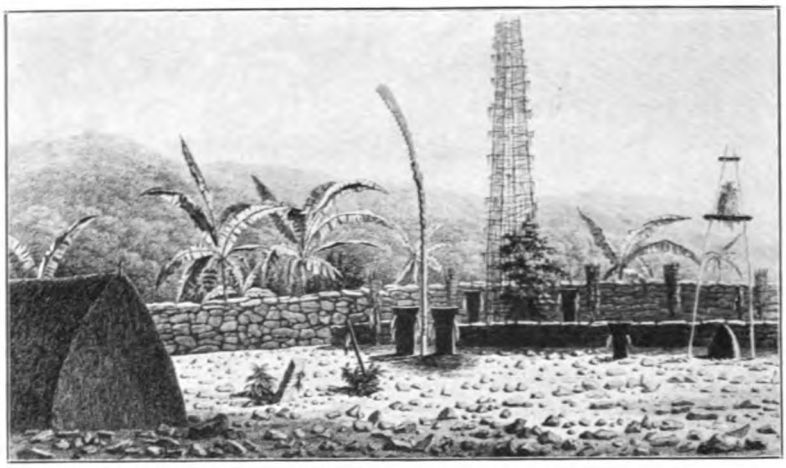
KUKAILIMOKU, A FEATHER GOD
British Museum

KUKAILIMOKU, SHOWING IEIE FRAME WITHOUT FEATHERS
Trocadero Museum, Paris

cate that it was not the alteration the tools of the carver had effected in the appearance of the wood that gave the images their potency. They were rather shrines, appropriately shaped, into which the god could be induced to enter by means of the proper ceremonies.

The examination of such sculptured figures as the Hawaiian gods, would lead directly, in many places, as in New Zealand for instance, to a discussion of their architectural use, and of architecture in general. In the mild climate of Hawaii, however, architecture was very nearly non-existent. The structural interest of the grass house was only barely architectural, and the element of carving did not enter into it. The Hawaiian temples, or heiaus, were in some ways the most elaborate and the most imposing of Polynesia, with the extensive stonework of their walls and platforms, the latter sometimes terraced in roughly pyramidal form. On the platforms, the sacred figures of the gods were set up, along with such necessary buildings as the "oracle tower" and the houses of the priests and king. In ground plan, the term "architectural" would certainly not be misapplied. But it is characteristic of Hawaiian aesthetic ideas that the final effect for ceremonial purposes was more dependent on a profusion of greenery and flowers and sweet-smelling sacred vines, such as the *ieie* and the *maile,* freshly gathered for the occasion, than on any detail of permanent architectural features.

So, too, in the Hawaiian islands, there was very little sculpture in stone. The few examples of stone carving discovered on the larger islands of the archipelago are either obviously influenced by European ideas, or mere accidental lumps in which the chance resemblances of nature have been reinforced by a little rough chipping.



HEIAU ON KAUAI
(From a drawing by Webber in Cook: Voyage to the Pacific Ocean.)

On the islets of Nihoa and Necker, however, remnants have been found of a culture which, though not typically the culture of the larger Hawaiian islands, must nevertheless be allied to it. On Necker Island, particularly, a series of small stone idols was preserved, archaic in appearance and much broken by long weathering. These are squat little gods, neckless, with heads firmly planted on their chests between their shoulders. They are cut in a hard basalt, but in some important respects are apparently the work of wood carvers forced by circumstance to use stone. The implications of these stone images, and other objects found with them, as set forth by Kenneth P. Emory in his "Archaeology of Nihoa and Necker Islands," are interesting in their bearing on the probable sequence of colonization in the Hawaiian islands. The images seem to represent a prehistoric culture which was formerly existent in Hawaii, but which has long since disappeared from the larger islands. They

STONE IDOLS, FROM NECKER ISLAND
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

represent an earliest wave of Polynesian colonization to Hawaii, probably from the Society islands, which was later submerged, and driven in part to the outlying islets, by the twelfth and thirteenth century migrations, also from the Society islands, of the familiar and "historic" type of wood-carving Hawaiians that we know. If we accept the thesis, these little images may be considered a true archaic type of Hawaiian sculpture, turned to the uses of stone on treeless Necker Island.

IV

In the secondary arts of Hawaii, there is no sharp distinction to be made between the arts of decoration and what should be called simply handicraft. The Hawaiian was a consummate craftsman always. We see it plainly in everything he did, in his wood carving, of course, in the tools he made to work with and in other objects of daily use, in the ornamental sennit lashings used in the construction of his houses and canoes, and in his netting, braiding, and mat-weaving. At all points this craftsmanship is strongly infused with the spirit of artistry, and at times it rises to a high level of art.

It has been remarked that the Hawaiian had little interest in low-relief ornamental carving. The carved beaters and stamps used in making tapa show that he had all the necessary technique, but some sort of artistic restraint prevented him from using it on most objects of ordinary use. It is significant that his handsome wooden bowls and other like utensils are without ornament of any kind, other than their extraordinary shapeliness and the native sheen of the *kou, milo,* or *kamani* woods of which they were made. There have been preserved a number of very interesting bowls and platters, of special use, no doubt, which are ornamented with strangely contorted figures, not unlike the smaller gods already described, vigorously carved in the round and ingeniously posed in grotesque attitudes to act as supports. It is also true that among the various bowl shapes, designed to meet all exigencies of Hawaiian table etiquette, there is one type, the *ipu aina,* or refuse bowl, which was ornamented, as a mark of disrespect, with the teeth of enemies, when such relics were obtainable. Even these utensils, however,

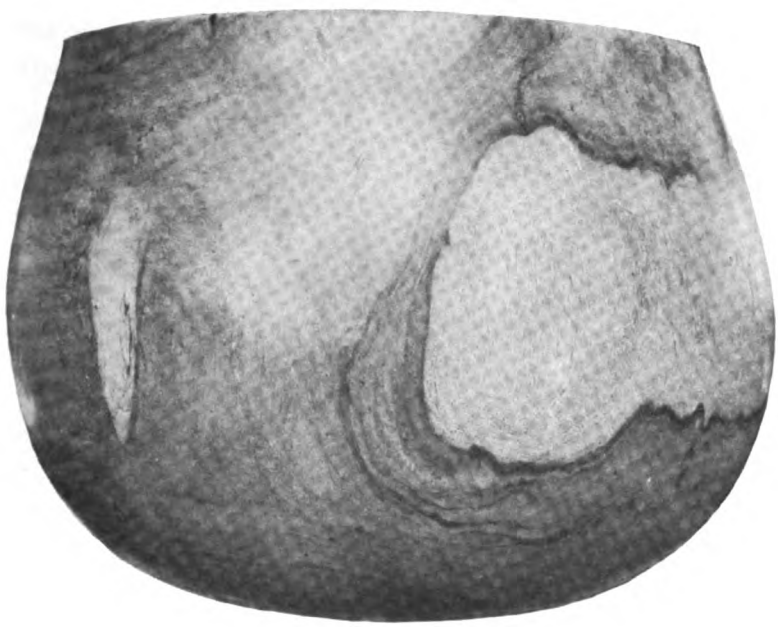
MEAT PLATTER WITH SUPPORTING FIGURES OF KING KAHAHANA OF OAHU AND HIS WIFE KEKUAPOI, WHO WERE DOUBTLESS SO REPRESENTED BY THEIR CONQUEROR AS A MARK OF DISRESPECT

Bernice P. Bishop Museum

showed no low-relief carving, and they are exceptions to a general rule. Most of the bowls, of whatever shape or size, and some of them are enormous, are strictly without decoration. There are many types: poi bowls, food containers in general, low dishes, meat platters, the refuse bowls, the finger bowls which were the usual accompaniment of polite eating, and even the spittoons which, because of the danger of hostile magic, were necessary to the lives of the chiefs. All were given distinction of shape. The *umeke* or poi bowls, particularly before their subtle contours were contaminated by the intrusion of foreign methods, worked down to almost perfect roundness with stone tools, by test of eye alone, and polished by hand, remain marvels of primitive elegance.

MEAT PLATTER, WITH SUPPORTING FIGURES SERVING AS FINGER BOWLS

Trocadero Museum, Paris



LARGE BOWL OF KOU WOOD
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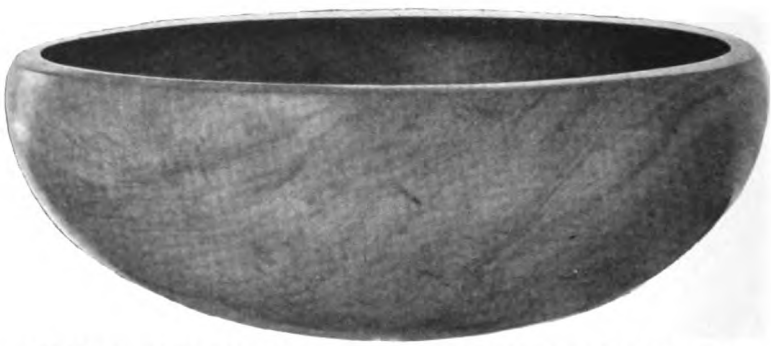
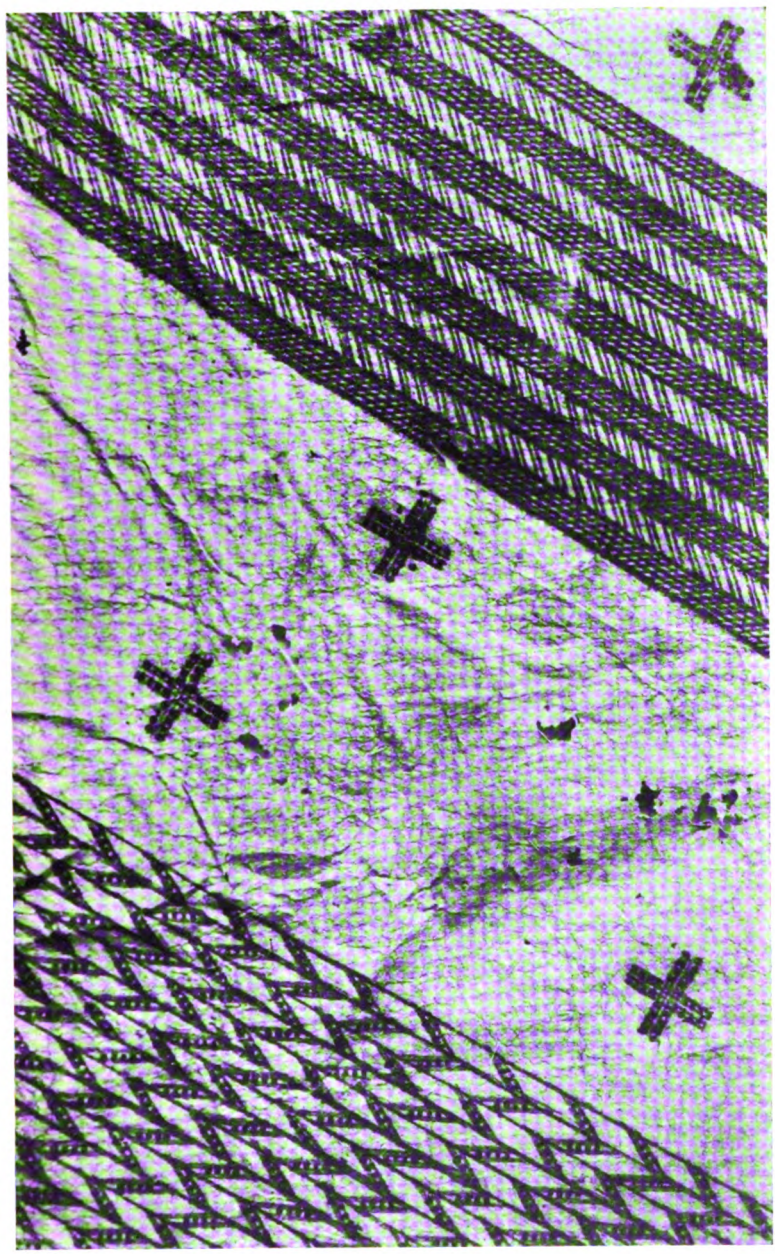
The Hawaiians used netted fabrics for various purposes, but they had no looms of any sort nor any art of true weaving as applied to the making of cloth. Their needs, for clothing, were supplied by the native tapa or bark cloth, made everywhere in Oceania except New Zealand, and similar, both in the material used and in the manner of making, to the ancient paper of China. Of pleasing and rich texture, decorated with native vege-

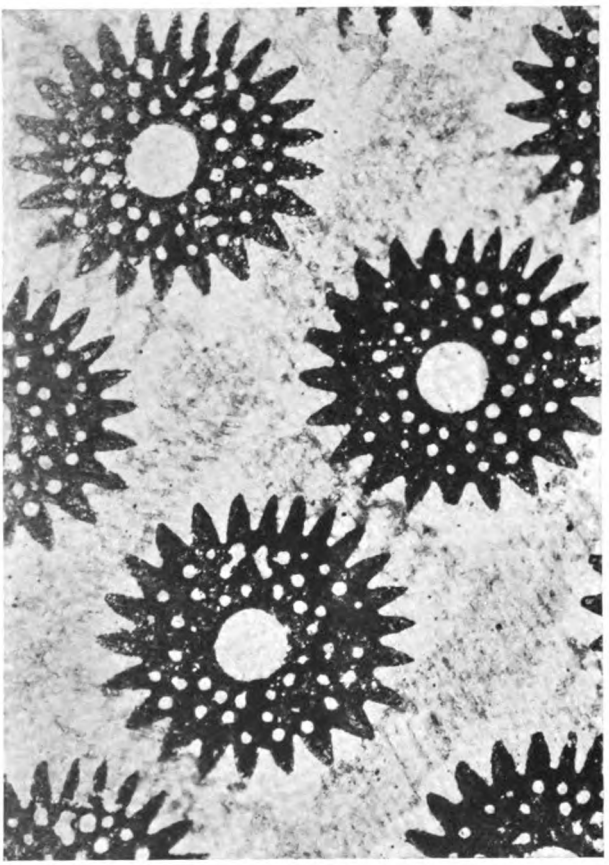


POLISHED BOWL, EDGE UNDERCUT INSIDE WITH GREAT DELICACY
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

table colors that still hold their own very well with even moderate protection from exposure, this characteristic paper cloth has perhaps the greatest general appeal of anything that remains of the vanishing Hawaiian culture. In view of the prevalent use of the human figure in the wood carving, it is remarkable that the designs employed in tapa decoration are wholly geometrical. With the exception of a few doubtful motives, like the "sea urchin" design and a possible plant shape or two, no living form is now discernible in the decorative systems used. The texture of the finest tapa is rich in itself, with its fibrous and glossy surface. Much of it was used with-

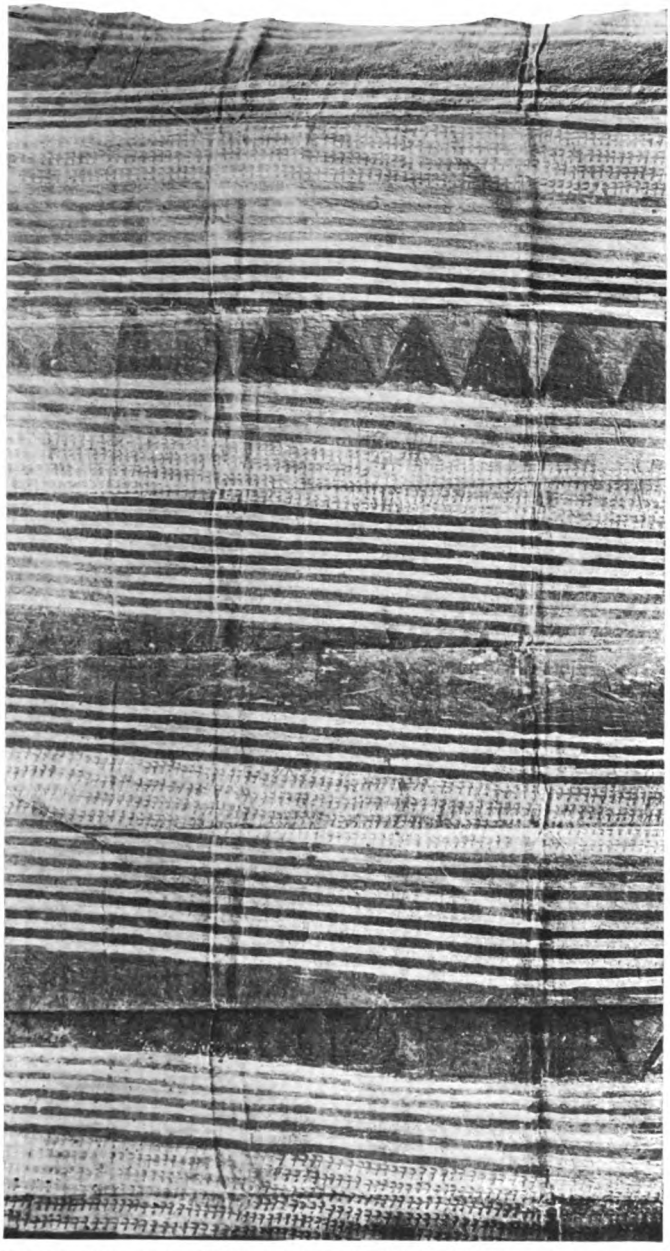


HAWAIIAN TAPA
Bernice P. Bishop Museum



HAWAIIAN TAPA, "SEA URCHIN" DESIGN
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

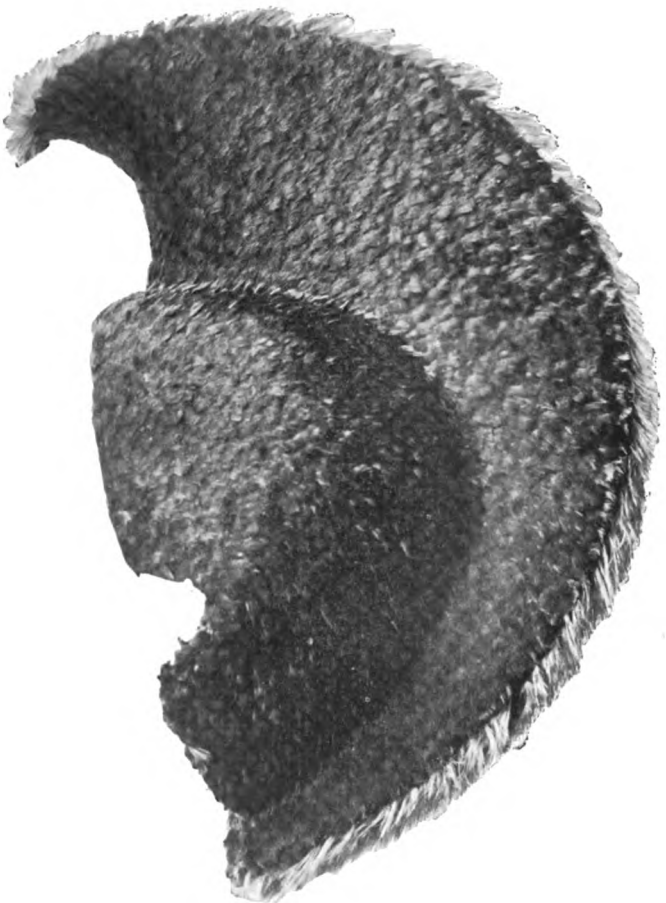
out decoration, creamy white as first bleached in the sun. With colors added, yellow, red, red-brown, rose, or blue, it becomes even sumptuous. Large areas, stripes, diamonds, and other more irregular shapes, are given a colorful intricacy by the repetition of smaller geometric elements. The widely varied patterns have an attractive and barbaric unexpectedness in their arrangements, yet at the same time dignity and elegance and finesse. The



HAWAIIAN TAPA, ALTERNATE PAINTED AND STAMPED LINES
British Museum

best Hawaiian tapa, made in limited quantities for the chiefs, is quite comparable in beauty and interest to many more familiar fabrics. Most early observers were agreed that there was nothing quite equal to it elsewhere in Polynesia, either in the delicacy of some of the thinner varieties or in the wide range of color used in the decoration.

The tapa was made from the inner bark of a number of different trees in Hawaii, of which the *wauke,* or paper mulberry, was the most esteemed. After a preliminary maceration, the strips of bark were beaten out to the desired thinness, gradually increasing in width at the same time. The natural juices of the bark, with water constantly added, provided the adhesive element which bound the fibers together, and native starches were employed to join a number of strips in one larger piece. The quality of the finished tapa depended on a complex technique by which the fibrous cloth was first "watermarked," in the making, by the variously carved surfaces of the wooden tapa beaters, so that when the more prominent color design was added, it was superimposed on an already diapered background. In Hawaii, the color of the decoration was applied in two ways. The larger elements were painted, either freehand or with stencils, but all the small design was actually printed, by means of what we would call block printing, from small bamboo stamps which carried the pattern. These carved tapa stamps, as well as the carved beaters, are of the greatest interest in themselves, as showing how completely a primitive art may sometimes anticipate the apparatus of civilization.



FEATHER HELMET
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

Of all the products of Hawaiian utilitarian art, that which most impressed the first explorers was the curious featherwork of the cloaks and helmets worn by the chiefs, and already mentioned in connection with the portable images of the war-god Kukailimoku. Not only to the early visitors, but to the Hawaiians themselves, no doubt, these articles were the crowning achievement of their craftsmanship. The material was the most costly that they used, both in the difficulty of gathering the necessary quantity of the bright-colored feathers of the small native birds, and in the time essential to its manufacture. The helmets, designed for protection as well as for ornament, were made over a strong wickerwork of *ieie,* as were the feather gods. In shape, these helmets were enough like the helmets of ancient Greece or of Europe in later times to have caused a vast amount of conjecture as to their possible European origin, but more truly corresponding forms are probably to be found in the much less exquisite headdresses of Melanesia. The cloaks, both short capes and ample robes trailing to the ground, were made on a close net of *olona,* to which the feathers were skilfully tied, so closely and in such profusion that the resultant surface has been compared to the thickest and richest velvet, of very long and soft pile. The distribution of color, opulent yellow, red, and black, was in large, simple masses. Evidently the featherwork was an art of texture and color, the latter having important symbolic connotations. Certainly all observers have agreed that the Hawaiian chiefs, with their helmets on their heads and their cloaks draped on their bronzed shoulders, made a splendid and regal display.

With this, we have seen the best of Hawaiian art. The geometric patterns painted on gourds are unexpectedly

FEATHER CLOAK OF KIWALAO
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

FEATHER HELMET
Trocadero Museum, Paris

different from any of the tapa designs, and poor in comparison. The woven mats of hala or of sedge are often handsome examples of plaiting, more nearly in the spirit of the tapa, though there is no color beyond the use of darker strands for certain parts of the weave. Hawaiian tattooing has fallen into disuse through the nineteenth century, but such information as we have indicates that it constituted no such consistent and admirable system of decoration as is found among the Maoris, the Marquesans, or the Samoans. And, lastly, there are the petroglyphs. These rock pictures, widely distributed over the islands, are too haphazard to be called a decorative art, but there is interest in the fact that, in accordance with Polynesian practice everywhere, the rock writings are definitely linked with the tattooing in subject matter. Both arts, in Hawaii, were crudely naturalistic and had little of the geometric character of the tapa, in so far, that is, as we have knowledge of the tattooing.

The Hawaiian petroglyphs show crudely conventionalized men, animals, and birds, which in earlier examples have an appearance of symbolic intention. So far, however, no Hawaiian has been found able, or willing, to interpret them. Questioning brings the answers that they were made for amusement, or "by the menehunes"—dubious explanations, at best. If they were, as they seem, an embryo system of writing, it was a system nipped in the making by the advent of the white man's alphabet. Such rock-writing, common to many primitive peoples, is not, strictly speaking, to be considered an artistic product, as the formal element is lacking. It is only when the problem of representation is given a solution which is endowed with some formal beauty, that art enters into the question. But it is plain, at least, that in

the petroglyphs and in the tattooing, the Hawaiian did attempt pictorial representation in the flat, as a kind of hesitating counterpart to his bold use of representative form in the full round of sculpture. Whatever his purpose, and whatever the haphazard nature of his efforts, he tattooed men, animals, and birdlike forms on himself, and he scratched the same forms on boulders all over the islands.

V

There is much more that we would like to know of the art of the Hawaiians, much, no doubt, that we cannot hope to discover. What were the origins of this art, what its connections with other arts that we know? Have the chance resemblances that we notice elsewhere any foundation in the real facts of human migration? And is there more to be learned of the underlying meaning of the art forms themselves?

The Hawaiians spoke of themselves as having come from "Hawaiki," a mythical birthplace that has been sought the world over by land and sea. There is little doubt of the solidarity of the Polynesian race, but such divergent theories have been formulated, with all the weight of learned opinion, as to its ultimate derivation, that we might almost choose an original homeland to suit our own fancy, unless, indeed, we prefer to pin our faith, with Fenollosa, to the hypothesis of an independent culture, born and developed in and about the Pacific Ocean.

Ethnology has not yet given the final answer. There are two hostile camps, as yet unreconciled, to be reckoned with in the study of racial connections. The protagonists of independent origins believe that similar phenomena may occur independently, simply by the pressure of like environment and through the innate similarity of human psychology. On the other hand, the transmissionists are equally certain that men have always moved around, not as rapidly as now, but as effectively, and that similar culture is a sure sign of some sort of transmission from a common source. The underlying obstacle to agreement, no doubt, is a difference of opinion as to what

constitutes true and conclusive similarity. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that the more trustworthy of the scholars now unite in giving the Polynesians a definite stepping-off place in southeastern Asia, to go no further back. They are brought into Polynesia proper, by

KONANE BOARD FOR PLAYING THE HAWAIIAN GAME OF CHECKERS
(In collection of David McHattie Forbes)

uncharted routes and with long stoppages on the way, probably some time within our era. And they are given a center of dispersion in the Society islands, from which lesser migrations reached such outlying island groups as Hawaii.

Problems of the underlying significance of the art forms met with are less pressing in Hawaii than elsewhere in Polynesia. Here, the wooden images of the gods speak for themselves, up to a certain point, owing to a kind of transparent realism in their conception, and the conventional element that exists in the carving is not

SMALL FEMALE GOD
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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SMALL GOD
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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of the sort that cries most urgently for explanation. The applied ornament, on the other hand, as we see it on the tapa and on the gourds, is so definitely geometrical, and so definitely merely ornament in the minds of living Hawaiians, that there is always the easy deduction that it means nothing at all.

Here again, however, is an unresolved dispute between two opposing schools of opinion. To the one, man is a naturally geometrizing and decorating animal, who began very early and spontaneously to decorate himself and his belongings with geometrical devices simply for decoration's sake. Another school remains skeptical at the idea that the savage, in the beginning, ever occupied himself with aimless ornament. To this latter school, the life of the savage is first of all utilitarian. He wants much and he fears much, and his means of helping himself is magic. He makes representations, as best he can, of the things that he knows, fears, or wants, as part of his incantations, and he marks the property of the chief with these representations, as symbols of the chief's magical powers. With constant repetition, the symbols become formalized, and by a process of degeneration, that which began in representation ends in geometrical ornament. By this time the savage himself may have forgotten the meaning of the marks he makes, and may be obliged to confess himself simply an ornamenter. No doubt the truer view will find in representation and in ornament two parallel activities of the human intelligence, overlapping, and often indistinguishable in the result, to neither of which can any proved precedence be given. In Hawaii, we have the two things side by side, without apparent connection of any kind; in the wooden gods, a definitely representative, though somewhat stylized, art

VERY SMALL WOODEN GOD
Bernice P. Bishop Museum

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of carving in the round, and in the tapa an art of geometric decoration which gives no visible sign of having degenerated from representative forms.

It is no doubt impossible, even with the most complete information, for us to look on any primitive art with the eyes of the men that made it. We satisfy our curiosity as best we can, in hopes that more and better clues will be the reward of our attention. But whatever our understanding of Hawaiian art, or our lapses of understanding, we still find much to admire in it, as a striking manifestation of a culture which, with all its savagery, has seemed admirable to many Europeans from the first moment of its discovery.