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# BEYOND THE RIM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KAVA BOWLS FROM SAMOA, TONGA AND FIJI

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The consumption of an infusion made from the root of a pepper plant (*Piper mythisticum*), known as *kava* in Polynesia and its outliers, but as *qona/aqona/yaqona* in Fiji, has been intricately linked to political, religious and economic systems. The various shapes of mixing and drinking containers and the different ways in which the liquid was and is still consumed bear testimony to its importance and prolonged presence in the Pacific.

A comparative study of *kava/yaqona* bowls from Sāmoa, Tonga and Fiji is of interest as they often share common features and were part of a complex system of moving people and goods. Even though much has been written about those exchange systems (Aswani and Graves 1998, Barnes and Hunt 2005, Calvert 1858, Ferdon 1987, Gunson 1990, Kaeppler 1978, Sahlins 1985), little information has been gathered on *kava* bowls. The first Western Polynesian *kava* bowls to reach Europe were collected by James Cook and his men in Tonga between 1773 and 1777. The majority of bowls in museum collections, however, arrived in the mid and late 19th century, collected by seafarers, missionaries, explorers, colonial personnel, anthropologists and scientific expeditions. The general lack of documentation, however, gives us little indication of their origins and formal evolution. In the past this led to a general confusion where *kava* bowls were often rather randomly ascribed to Sāmoa, Tonga or Fiji. Attribution is further confounded by the presence of Sāmoan-derived hereditary carpentry specialists (*mātaisau*<sup>1</sup>) in Tonga, Lau and Fiji. The fact that many bowls were not made in the place where they were finally collected complicates the picture even more. The only typological classification of *yaqona* bowls was attempted by Laura Thompson while working in southern Lau (Thompson 1940: 187-88). It is based on field-collected oral information from Lauan carpenters of Sāmoan descent but does not take into account other bowl types from Western Polynesia.

This study tackles the problem by cross-referencing documented collection histories with bowl typologies. Initially, the collections of the British Museum (BM), the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) and Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) were studied in depth. Extending the survey further, bowls from museums in Europe, New Zealand and the United States were also included.<sup>2</sup>

## SĀMOAN 'UMETE AND TĀNOA 'AVA

Sāmoan *kava* bowls were made from a variety of hardwoods and can be divided into oval or lenticular 'umete and circular tānoa 'ava. Krämer mentions *ifilele* (*Intsia bijuga*—the Fijian *vesi* and Tongan *fehi*) and *pau* (*Sapota achras*) as the woods most commonly used (Krämer 1994 [II]: 244). Erskine (1853: 46) also mentions the use of *fetau* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*—the Fijian *dilo* and Tongan *feta'u*), a sacred tree that was also used in Tonga, the Society and Marquesas Islands for important objects such as bowls, canoes and headrests (Mu-Liepmann and Milledroques 2008: 25). *Milo* (*Thespesia populnea*) and *toi* (*Alphitonia zizyphoides*) were other wood types also used for *kava* bowl making (Whistler 2000: 191, 205). The villages Falealupo and Asau on Savai'i were well known production centres for 'ava bowls (Mallon 2002: 17).

Throughout their stylistic evolution Sāmoan 'umete and tānoa 'ava have always retained a straight and upward pointing rim that is defined by the thickness of the bowls' wall. A particularly early tānoa 'ava was given in the 1880s to a German resident of Sāmoa, Dr Bernhard Funk. It came from the chiefly family of Senitima, his Sāmoan wife, who was a daughter of Chief Talea (Fig. 1). With a diameter of 28 cm it is of rather small size. The short legs and the trapezoidal lug shape are similar to bowl types that have been collected in Fiji. This relationship will be discussed more fully in the following sections.

The majority of tānoa 'ava that entered predominantly German collections in the 1880s are of larger diameter (35–50 cm), metal tooled and invariably surrounded by a flat horizontal rim from which the interior abruptly falls away (Fig. 2 left). Their four legs are often less tapered and considerably longer than on old Sāmoan tānoa 'ava, lifting the bottom of the bowl some 20 cm off the ground, giving it a somewhat suspended look when viewed from the side. Mack's assertion (Mack 1982: 246) that Sāmoan bowls can be recognised because they have their legs closer to the rim seems unlikely, as many Fijian bowls have similarly set legs.

Towards the end of the 19th century a new type of many-legged tānoa 'ava started to be produced; they bear a striking resemblance to Sāmoan sub-circular big houses (*faletele*). According to Buck, the additional legs were the result of a growing tourism in Sāmoa. Tourists were charged according to leg number, which increases with the size of the bowl (Buck 1930: 150). Such many-legged Sāmoan bowls may have a distinctive small lip that extends the flat rim horizontally. The introduction of numerous legs left less space for the lug, which became a longer and narrower version of what has often been called a V-shaped lug. Rather than being rounded, the upper part of the legs, or even the entire legs, were sometimes squared. Responding to



Figure 1. An early and well-worn, possibly stone carved Sāmoan *tānoa'ava* (Private collection).

the tourist traffic, 20th century bowls can have the flat rim area incised and filled with lime. These many-legged bowls came to be used for actual *'ava* consumption by Sāmoans and replaced the older four-legged bowls by the end of the 19th century.

With lenticular *'umete* neither lug nor leg shape allows us to clearly distinguish them from Fijian or Tongan examples. The legs are tapered and rather than being fully rounded are sometimes keeled on the outside. They have a central ridge on their lower side running from tip to tip. Buck reported how in Savai'i legless lenticular bowls with flat bottoms were used for *'ava* consumption (Buck 1930: 150).



Figure 2. (top): MVD 48685 (diameter 52.3 cm), a *tānoa'ava* that was given by Chief Tamasese to the German consul Dr Oskar Stübel in the 1880s. It shows the clear distinction between the flat rim and sloping inner walls of this comparatively shallow bowl (photo S. Hooper). (bottom): TPTM FE011948 collected in 1875. It typifies the many-legged broadly rimmed *tānoa'ava* that became popular in the late 19th century. Its stained bowl indicates the bowl was in use before being turned into a painted and non-functional tourist item.<sup>3</sup>

## TONGAN KUMETE KAVA AND TĀNO 'A

In Tonga both circular and lenticular *kava* bowls are generally referred to as *kumete kava*, the bowl used by the Tu'i Tonga however was called a *tāno 'a* (Gifford 1929: 161). As in Sāmoa, *fehi* (*Intsia bijuga*) certainly was the most sought after hardwood for *kumete kava*. According to Whistler (1991: 31-119), both *feta'u* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) and *tamanu* (*Calophyllum neo-eudicium*) were also being used for making *kava* bowls, while *ngesi* (*Manilkara dissecta*), *kau* (*Burckella richii*), *manai* (*Garuga floribunda*) and *mo'ota* (*Dysoxylum forsteri*) were other wood species out of which *kumete* for food preparation and presentation were fashioned.

Documented Tongan *kava* bowls are extremely rare. The only eight existing provenanced circular *kava* bowls were collected during the voyages of Captain James Cook, Alejandro Malaspina and Dumont d'Urville. They have diameters ranging from 37 to 72 cm and their heights range between 11 and 17 cm. Unlike their Sāmoans counterparts the rim area of Tongan bowls collected in the late 18th century exhibit a unique outward flare (Fig. 3).

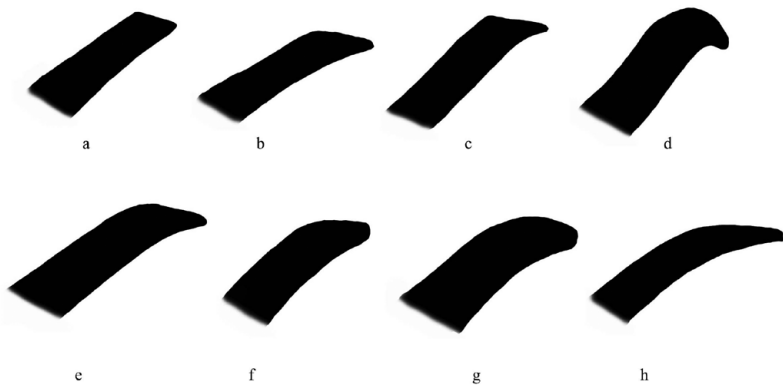


Figure 3. Rim cross-sections of the eight provenanced *kava* bowls collected in Tonga: (a) PRM 1886.1.1513 (diameter 42 cm) and (b) GAU Oz 409 (diameter 52 cm) were both collected by the Forsters in 1773/4. (c) BM Oc1971.05.1 (diameter 49 cm) was collected on Cook's second or third voyage. (d) BM OC1921.0205.1 (diameter 38 cm) was collected by James Ward in 1777. (e) MDA 13060 (diameter 72 cm) was collected by Malaspina in 1793. (f) MQB 72.84.347 (diameter 38 cm), (g) MQB 72.84.348 (diameter 45 cm) and (h) MQB 72.56.736 (diameter 38 cm) were all collected by d'Urville in 1827.

The first two specimens were collected by Johann and Georg Forster in 1773-74 and clearly show this tendency to extend the rim area (Figs 3a, b). The bowl collected by Midshipman James Ward on Cook's third voyage in 1777 (Fig. 3d) develops this feature giving the rim a curved wavelike shape. Curved rims can also be found on bowls collected by d'Urville 50 years later (Figs. 3f, g and h).

Cook described a very large bowl from which he was served *kava* in a plantain leaf cup (*pelu*) at Mu'a in 1777 during the mourning ritual for one of the sons of Tu'i Tonga Fatafehi Paulaho (Beaglehole 1967: 141).<sup>4</sup> The bowl held four to five gallons of liquid, the equivalent of around 20 litres. Given the size and occasion it might very well have been the Tu'i Tonga's *tāno 'a*. During his stay in Tonga between 1806 and 1810, William Mariner also witnessed the use of large bowls during important ceremonies with diameters of up to 90 cm and depths of 30 cm (Martin 1827 [II]: 156). Such exceedingly big *kava* bowls were not produced in Tonga because of the lack of suitable big *fehi* trees. As will be discussed in the following section, they were the product of Lauan workshops on the island of Kabara.

Thomas Williams stated that Tongan *kumete kava* are lighter and prettier than Fijian *yaqona* bowls (Williams 1858: 78). Newell also insisted that Tongan bowls were lighter and had thinner walls than Fijian examples (Newell 1947: 373). This, however, cannot be confirmed, as Fijian bowls can be equally thin-walled and of similar weight. Actually, the weight depends not only on how much wood was removed during carving but also on the type of wood used. Bowls, such as the one given by Rātū Seru Cakobau, Vūnivalu of Bau, to Mrs Jeannie Wilson in 1855 (MAA Z3340) are much lighter than smaller Tongan *kumete kava* as they were carved in what is most likely a light-weight *damanu* (*Calophyllum neo-ebudicum*) wood.<sup>5</sup> One of d'Urville's bowls brought back from Tongatapu (MQB 72.84.348) weighs 3200 g, which is more than twice the average weight of a similarly sized Fijian bowl.

On Webber's original pencil drawing for the engraving by Sharp (Blackburn Collection, illustrated in Kaeppler 2010: 62), that was to figure in the Cook and King 1784 edition as Plate XX, the *tāno 'a* is only roughly sketched and it is not surprising that in the subsequent engraving it looks like a large flat dish with stubby little feet. Feet length cannot be considered a reliable feature for discriminating Tongan from Fijian bowls. Those collected in Tonga in the late 18th century, however, have columnar rather than tapered legs, a feature only otherwise shared with some early Fijian *yaqona* bowls. The existence of three-legged bowls, as suggested by Anderson (Beaglehole 1967: 908), Collocott (1927: 27) and Newell (1947: 373), could not be confirmed in this study.

Two lenticular *kumete* were collected in Tonga by Cook. One is in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, another was formerly in the George Ortiz Collection. Their rims differ from Fijian or Sāmoan counterparts by having both the inner and outer walls of the bowl meeting in a pointed tip, rather than the inside wall ending in a rounded ellipse. Labillardière (1971 [1800], Plate 31) illustrates a lenticular *kumete* with an elliptical Fijian type rim. Even though the bowl was collected in Tonga, the rim shape suggests it may well have been imported from Fiji.<sup>6</sup>

Judging from the few *kava* bowls collected in Tonga it seems that by the late 18th century *kava* bowls with a distinctive extended horizontal or curved rim were in fashion.

#### LAUAN TĀNOA AND THE ISLAND OF KABARA

In the mid-18th century two master carver clans, originating from Manono Island in Samoa, were resettled under the patronage of the Tu‘i Tonga in the island of Kabara where the best and largest *vesi* grew (Clunie 2013: 180, Hooper 1982: 54-57). This highly desirable and resistant hardwood was not only ideal for house and canoe construction, but also a preferred wood for war clubs, priestly oil dishes and *kava* bowls. The two *mātaisau* that came with their entourage were Lehā, who was the Tu‘i Tonga’s principle carpenter and canoe builder, and his junior kinsman Lemaki. Following the premature death of Lehā his clan moved back to Tonga. From that time onwards, Lemaki and his descendants were the dominant canoe builders and *kava* bowl producers in Kabara.

Very large *kava* bowls, such as those seen by Cook and Mariner, were products of Kabara. The variations in bowl cavities and rim profiles, however, indicate that other production centres existed besides Kabara. From Lau these bowls were exported to Fiji, Tonga and (via Tonga) to Sāmoa by Tongan navigators.<sup>7</sup> In Fiji this new bowl type became known as *tānoa*. The large



Figure 4. Two characteristic types of *tānoa* profiles encountered in the survey.





Figure 5. Three *tānoa* all collected in Fiji showing typological variations that are most likely the result of different workshops: (top) MAA Z3973 (diameter 57 cm) and (middle) MAA Z3984 (diameter 61 cm), both collected by Sir Arthur H. Gordon, have a curved extended rim but show differences in height and leg shape; (bottom) MAA Z30939 (diameter 57.5 cm) was collected by Walter Coote before 1882 and has a horizontally extended rim. (Photos by L. Carreau)

size of many of them (their diameters vary between 35 and 100 cm) and the particular treatment of the rim area serve to identify them.<sup>8</sup> The *tānoa* rim extends either horizontally or in a gentle curve. Both types can be seen as stylistic continuations of Tongan bowls collected in the late 18th century (Fig. 3). Some very large *tānoa* can have six or more legs. Thompson attributes this innovation to the Lemaki carpenters of Kabara (Thompson 1940: 188).

It is possible that *tānoa* profiles derive from the *tāno* 'a, that originally was Tu'i Tonga's prerogative. With the waning influence of the Tu'i Tonga, the *tānoa* type could have become less sacred and more accessible to other chiefs. It is telling that when Laura Thompson in the 1930s interviewed Lemaki carvers in Kabara they insisted that the round and gracefully curved *tānoa* was the true *tānoa* (*tānoa ntchina* [*dina*]). All other forms were called *sesenitānoa* (errant versions) (Thompson 1940: 187). Unfortunately no written or drawn records exist that allow us to know which rim profile the *tāno* 'a had.

The arrival of *tānoa* bowls in Fiji was immortalised by the naming of Tānoa, future Vūnivalu of Bau, who died in 1852 (Clunie 1986: 173). It is therefore likely that the *tānoa* was introduced to Viti Levu in the late 1700s, which coincides with the arrival of the Sāmoan derived *mātaisau* in Lau.

#### FIJIAN YAQONA BOWLS

Until the introduction of the Sāmoan/Tongan *kava* circle to eastern and north-eastern Fiji around AD 1000-1200 (Clunie in prep.) and its wider establishment in the 16th century (Best 2002, Marshall *et al.* 2000), the consumption of *yaqona* was reserved for priests (*bete*) and chiefs who consumed it as part of indigenous *būrau* rites during which gods were invoked and consulted. Unlike in Polynesia, where the fresh root was masticated, Fijian *yaqona* was grated and mixed in a bowl, filtered through a wooden or wickerwork funnel packed with a mesh of fern leaf and poured into a shallow drinking cup or dish. The liquid was then sucked from centre of the dish, sometimes through a tube that could be incorporated into the middle of the dish where the *yaqona* accumulated (see Plate 70, item 589b, Oldman 2004). Judging from reports of first-hand witnesses, *yaqona* was consumed at the end of the rite as an offering to god who had entered the worshipper (Clunie 1996: 14, Williams 1858: 225). The direct transfer from the dish to the invoked god inside the *bete*, without having to desecrate the *yaqona* by handling the dish, clearly showed its *tapu* character.<sup>9</sup>

*Yaqona* was also prepared and sucked from circular earth pits lined with *vudi plantain* (*Musa* species) or giant taro (*Alocasia macrorrhizos*) leaves (Clunie 1986: 169, 1996: 8; Lester 1941: 111-12).<sup>10</sup>

Circular, round-bottomed earthenware *yaqona* drinking bowls (*dariniyaqona* or *sedreniyaqona* in two different dialects<sup>11</sup>) appear in the

archaeological record from AD 1500 onwards (Marshall *et al.* 2000: 92).<sup>12</sup> Those examined in this study have a diameter of 25–35 cm and the raised rim can be decorated by circular lines and indentations or serrations.

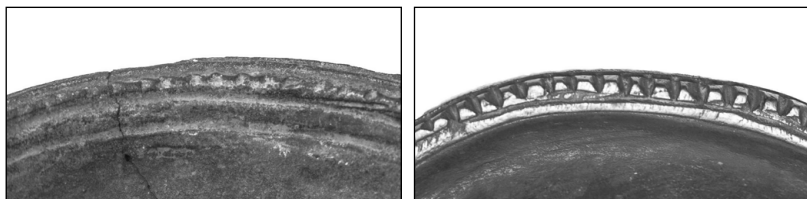


Figure 6. (left) Detail of the rim of a ceramic *dariniyaqona* (BM Oc, Fi.12) with the rim area decorated with two circular bands of which one has been indented. (right) A wooden *dariniyaqona* (PRM 1909.30.86V5) with a similarly carved, instead of indented, decoration.

The bowl surfaces are glazed by the application on the heated ceramic of *makadre* resin from the *dakua* tree (*Agathis vitiensis*). Nowadays, pottery *dariniyaqona* production only continues along the Sigatoka River. Nevertheless the bowls are still traded throughout Viti Levu and have recently been recorded in use among the Nasau of Ra Province (Cayrol-Baudrillart 1996–97: 44). *Dariniyaqona* can also be made of wood.<sup>13</sup> Their rim can be plain, but many have notched decorations similar to their clay homologues (Fig. 6). When not in use *dariniyaqona* are hung from a coir suspension cord that is either passed through two rim perforations or a lateral pierced suspension lug, a feature that is absent in *dari* used for domestic and cosmetic purposes.

*Dariniyaqona* need to be stabilised by the use of a plaited ring (*toqi*) that was occasionally made from *vesi* wood (see Herle and Carreau 2013: 41, Fig. 3.33). Other round-bottomed ceramics, such as *saqa* vessels used for water storage, were similarly stabilised.

Shallow oval or lenticular *bowls* with pointed ends were much used in Fiji and Lau, are generally under 30 cm long and are called *draunibaka* ‘leaf-of-baka tree’,<sup>14</sup> referring to the *baka* (*Ficus obliqua*) tree, which was considered sacred by Fijians since ancestor spirits inhabited them (Parham 1972: 138). *Draunibaka* often have four stubby *sucu* ‘feet’; some three-legged ones can have a handle as illustrated by Lester (1941: 97, Plate IIB). Legless examples are sometimes referred to as *bavelo* ‘dugout or canoe without outrigger’. Some *draunibaka*, often lacking legs, are deeper so the *yaqona* can be mixed in the bowl. The liquid is then drunk from small coconut cups (*bilo*), an innovation that was most likely introduced with the Tongan *kava* circle.



Figure 7. (top) A ceramic *dariniyaqona* with coir sennit suspension cord and notched rim, collected by Sir Arthur H. Gordon in the 1870s (BM Oc, Fi.12, diameter 24.5 cm). (bottom) A wooden example with four raised double lines on the rim area collected by Captain R. W. Stewart, R.E. in 1877 (MAA 1937.322, diameter 33 cm).

Larger circular and lenticular four-legged bowls with pointed ends are clearly distinguished from *draunibaka* by their size, which allows mixing of the *yaqona* in the bowl. Provenanced specimens were collected in Nadrogā in southwest Viti Levu, Bau in southeast Viti Levu and in the Lōmaiviti group. The length of those studied generally ranges from 30 to 50 cm, their width from 20 to 36 cm. Exceptionally large examples can have a length of up to 65 cm. Their underside is often decorated with two ridges that start from the pointed rim and taper off towards the centre. On some bowls the ridges run sideways away from each other when they reach the centre (a feature not recorded on *draunibaka*). If inspired by botanical forms, the origin of the shape of these bowls could be the seed pod of the tropical almond *tavola* (*Terminalia catappa*) which is common in the littoral and lowland forests of both Melanesia and Polynesia.



Figure 8. (left): A lenticular *draunibaka* with four feet and a central ridge on the underside collected by Anatole von Hügel in 1875 (MAA Z3475, photo L. Carreau). This item has no lateral lug and the suspension cord is passed through a perforation on one of the tips (length 41.5 cm). (right): The leaves of the *Ficus obliqua* (photo A. Lang, 2011).

The rims of these bowls are rarely notched. The legs are generally short and tapered with an oval cross-section. One large bowl, collected on the island of Ovalau by Anatole von Hügel in 1875, has the entire lower surface carved in relief. Another similarly adzed surface can be found on a circular bowl in the Fiji Museum (Clunie 1986: 94, 172). Such intricately adzed surfaces do not appear on later bowls and suggest that *yaqona* bowls were hung facing the wall so that the underside was visible and the inside protected from dust and dirt. The heavy black patina that has built up on the underside of many old bowls testifies to the presence of constantly burning fires in the living quarters (*vale*) or god houses (*burekalou*).

Only few bowls have been collected in the western highlands of Viti Levu. They have a deep circular bowl, four elongated legs and diameters ranging from 25 to 35 cm (Fig. 10 left). The bowls are well finished and their rim decoration can be notched like ceramic and wooden *dariniyaqona*. The legs, however, can look surprisingly clumsy and do not seem to be part of a well-established canon. It is quite possible that they represent an early type of four-legged bowls that might have evolved out of wooden *dariniyaqona*. Given the likely presence of Sāmoan *mātaisau* in the region in the 16th century (Clunie 2013: 164), they could represent a marriage of legless *dariniyaqona* with four-legged early Sāmoan *tānoa* 'ava bowls. Heavy patination from handling, oils and smoke, as well as the use of stone carving tools, testify to the antiquity of some of these bowls.



Figure 9. (top and bottom left): An almost circular lenticular bowl with the underside ridge tapering off sideways (MAA Z3492, photo L. Carreau). (below right): The seed pods of a *Terminalia catappa* (photo C. Elevitch in Thomson, Evans and Evans 2006: 3).

Circular bowls with shorter legs and a similar or larger diameter have also been collected in coastal areas, although their exact origin is not known (Fig. 10 right). Unlike the highland bowls of western Viti Levu, they are shallower, have thinner walls and have more diversified lug and rim shapes. By the 1900s these bowls were called *tānoatavatava* to distinguish them from their lipped counterpart, the *tānoa*. *Tavatava* denotes a simple upwardly pointing rim.<sup>15</sup>

A separate class of bowls are *daveniyaqona* or *ibuburau* dishes that can have circular, humanoid or bird-shaped forms and sit on an elaborately carved stand. They are a purely Fijian development and intricately linked to the *būrau* way of *yaqona* consumption. (They will not be discussed further in this article).<sup>16</sup>

Turtle-shaped *yaqona* bowls were comparatively common on Viti Levu, particularly along the northeastern coast of Rā.<sup>17</sup> The depiction of a turtle associates these bowls with the zoomorphic *daveniyaqona* dishes (Clunie



Figure 10. (left): A *tānoatavatava*-type bowl collected from the western highlands of Vitilevu by Alfred Maudslay in 1875 (MAA Z3421, diameter 25 cm). The rim is notched and thick *yaqona* residues cover the inside wall (photo L. Carreau). (right): A larger, more standardised and possibly later *tānoatavatava*-type with notched rim decoration collected by Anatole von Hügel at the same time (MAA Z30106, diameter 48 cm).

1986: 175). The addition of four or more legs to some of them seems to be a later phenomenon, the early pieces all being legless in the Fijian *dariniyaqona* tradition. A paramount example was collected by James Calvert in 1886 (MMA Z3972, Fig. 11). Both the large size (97 cm) and the *tānoa* style rim suggest that it is of Lauan origin and quite possibly from Kabara. The carving is rather simple and there is no evidence of *yaqona* use. The popularity of turtle bowls as early as the 19th century is illustrated by a four-legged example that Augustin Krämer collected in 1895 in Apia, Sāmoa (Krämer 1994 [II]: 245, Fig. 73). With growing tourism turtle-shaped bowls became increasingly popular and smaller sized ones are still being made for sale today.

The study of Fijian *yaqona* bowl profiles clearly shows that bowls with an extended rim area are a more recent development that can be dated to the 18th century. All other Fijian bowl types have a rim that is defined by the thickness of the bowl's wall, as illustrated in Figure 12. Even though the rim area can be decorated by adding notches or, as found on some examples, by an additional raised band below the outer rim area, it is essentially directed upwards. Occasional circular burnt-in depressions in the upper rim area of bowls should not be considered decorations but represent a tally system of their various keepers.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 11. (top): MAA 1937.321, a turtle-shaped *yaqona* bowl given by Rātū Seru Cakobau to Captain R.W. Stewart, R.E. c. 1876 (64 cm from head to back flippers). The plaited hibiscus cord is passed through a perforation of the right front flipper as such bowls have no lateral lug. (bottom left): MAA Z3972, the large four legged turtle-shaped *tānoa* (97 cm from head to tail) collected by James Calvert, probably in 1886, and subsequently in the collections of W.D. Webster and von Hügel (photos L. Carreau).

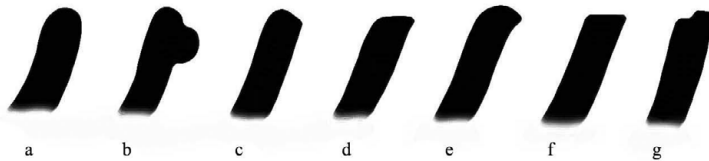


Figure 12. Rim profiles found on *dariniyaqona*, *daveniyaqona*, *draunibaka* and *tānoatavatava*. The first one is frequently found on bowls from the Viti Levu highlands and can be notched, the second is a less frequent type with a raised band encircling the rim. The last example corresponds to the *tānoatavatava* represented on the right of Figure 10.



## SUSPENSION LUG SHAPES

As previously mentioned, most Fijian and Western Polynesian *yaqona/kava* bowls are fitted with a suspension lug that allows the bowl to be hung on the wall by a plaited coir cord, the inside being kept dust and soot free. As these bowls were used to communicate with ancestor spirits and gods, they were considered *tapu* to all but their dedicated holders, necessitating circumspect and respectful treatment and storage.

In Fiji the lug is generally called *mata* 'eye, face, front of something'; in Lau the name is *daliga* 'ear' or *sau*, the latter also designates the white cowrie shells that can be attached to the coir cord. Both *mata* and *sau* also refer to something that is perforated. In Tonga the lug is referred to more prosaically as *taunga* 'hanger'. The evolution of the suspension cord into an elaborately plaited sacred cord (*wātabu* or *wā ni tānoa*) embellished with white *bulidina* (*Ovula ovum*) shells, a symbol of godliness, is a Fijian innovation and was first documented at Bau in 1838 by Dumont d'Urville (Clunie 1986: 172).

The great number of provenanced *yaqona* bowls collected in Fiji allows a more thorough study than the fewer and mostly later examples collected in Sāmoa, not to speak of the very few Tongan ones. Similar to rim profiles, Fijian *mata* types are a mixture of indigenous as well as imported and transformed forms from different periods of contact with West Polynesian *mātaisau*.<sup>19</sup>

Fijian *mata* can be traced back to very simple square or trapezoid forms, sometimes notched in two or more places. They bear a strong resemblance to the *salue* 'knobs' that ran down the middle of the fore and after deck covers of plank-built Sāmoan *va'aalo* 'bonito fishing canoes', where they were used to attach egg cowries (*pule*) (see Haddon and Hornell 1975 [1936]: 236, Fig. 166). It is conceivable that in Fiji twin-notched *mata* of this type evolved into an M-shaped form (Fig. 13, left column). On some later and large, many-legged *tānoa* bowls from Kabara the side bars are detached and have almost turned into legs. The side bars can also be absent, leaving just the middle part that has been described by Thompson as a V-shaped lug (Thompson 1940: 187). The term V-shaped lug, however, might more properly apply to a form that lacks vertical sides (Fig. 13, middle column).

Semi-circular lugs, like the lowest two in the central column of Figure 13, could have evolved out of V-shaped lugs or vice-versa. More intriguing is their close resemblance to the perforated leads (*sau*, Tongan *hau*) through which the running stay of the Micronesian rigged Tongan/Fijian sailing canoes (such as the *kalia/drua* or the *hamatafua/camaka*) was passed (see Haddon and Hornell 1975 [1936]: 308, Fig. 225).<sup>20</sup> These particular vessels were built by the Lemaki in Lau as a replacement for the older sailing canoes such as the Polynesian-rigged *tongiaki*, which in lacking running stays had no need of *sau*. This would date this particular shape to the late 18th century. Since

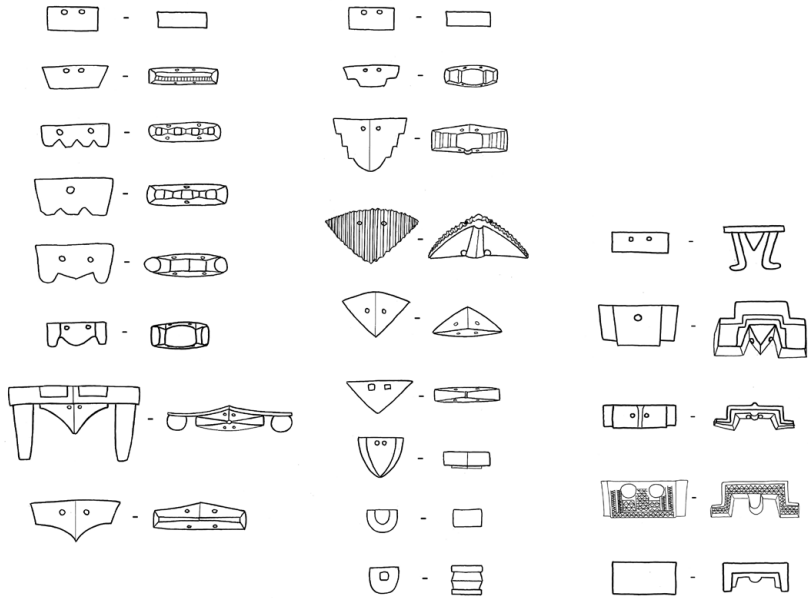


Figure 13. *Mata* types recorded on *yaqona* bowls collected in Fiji. (left): A possible evolution of the M-shaped lug (frontal and top view). The last type is still produced today on Fijian *yaqona* bowls. (centre): A possible evolution of the V-shaped lug. The bottom two examples are semi-circular lugs. (right): The adhering M-shaped lug. The first one was collected on Ovalau Island by Anatole von Hügel, the fourth was a present from Rātū Seru Cakobau to Mrs Jeannie Wilson, wife of the Rev. William Wilson, in 1855 and has a unique *tavatava* decoration.

it occurs only on very few bowls it seems that this lug shape was quickly replaced by the M-shaped type. A purely Fijian variant form of the M-shaped lug is illustrated in the right column of Figure 13. Rather than facing outward, it faces downward clinging to the underside of the bowl, forming a decorative feature visible when the bowl is hanging on the wall.

When comparing lugs of Sāmoan *tānoa* 'ava with their Fijian counterparts, it must be remembered that the majority were collected in the late 19th century, whereas some Fijian *yaqona* bowls were evidently made in the 18th century. The early bowl collected by Funk (Fig. 14 left) has a trapezoidal lug similar to Fijian types and its association with Sāmoan *va'aalo* bonito fishing canoes could make it a Sāmoan type that was subsequently transferred to

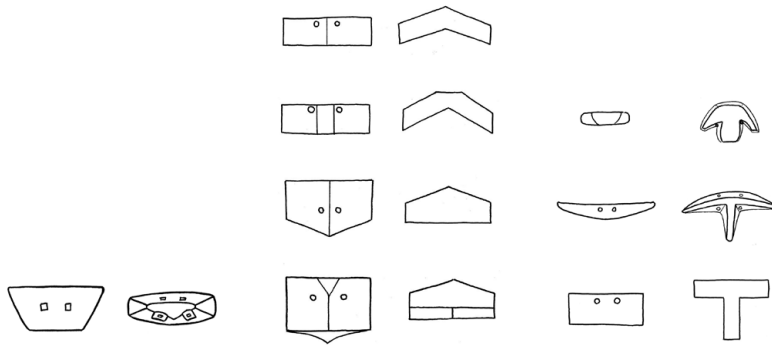


Figure 14. (left): The suspension lug of the Funk bowl shares strong resemblance with Fijian trapezoidal lugs. (centre): Metal carved suspension lug types from four-legged and flat-rimmed Sāmoan bowls collected between 1880 and 1906. The second one with cut-off chevron is absent in the Fijian corpus. (right): T-shaped suspension lug types: The first lug is from a Fijian *draunibaka*, the second from a small *tānoatavatava*, both collected in 1875. The lowest is from a flat-rimmed Samoan *tānoa'ava* collected before 1889.

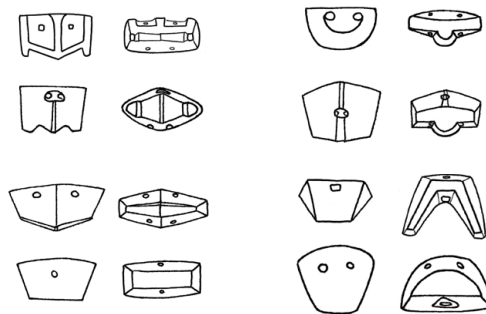


Figure 15. Lug shapes from *kumete kava* collected in Tonga. (left): The first two (BM Oc 1971.05.1, PRM 1886.1.1513) were collected in Tonga during Cook's second voyage in 1773. The third (MDA 13060) was collected at Vava'u by Malaspina in 1793 and the fourth (MQB 72.56.736) by d'Urville in 1827. (right): BM Oc 1921.0205.1 was collected in 1777 by James Ward, the one below (MQB 72.84.347) by d'Urville in 1827. Both have a T-shaped cross-section. The third (GAU Oz 409) was collected by Georg Forster in 1773 and bears strong resemblance to the Sāmoan lug type with cut-off chevron illustrated in Figure 14. The fourth (MQB 72.84.348) represents a unique type on an exceptionally heavy and roughly hewn bowl collected by d'Urville in 1827.

Fiji. The absence of M-type lugs on Sāmoan bowls reinforces the suggestion that they are a purely Fijian, Lauan or Tongan development. Larger 19th century Sāmoan bowls with a flat rim are metal-carved and their lugs are more geometric and stylised (Fig. 14 middle). Their sides are vertical and some have a cut-off tip of the chevron, a feature that is absent in the Fijian corpus. T-shaped Sāmoan lugs clearly relate to the more fluid T-shaped lugs of some older Fijian bowls (Fig. 14 right).

The small number of provenanced Tongan *kumete kava* makes it impossible to get a representative sample of lug shapes comparable to those of Fijian and Sāmoan bowls. Many show both Fijian and/or Sāmoan influences, such as the M-type lug, chevroned fronts as well as trapezoidal or semi-circular shapes.

\* \* \*

In comparison with clubs, ornaments and sculptural carvings in wood or ivory, the study of West Polynesian *kava* and Fijian *yaqona* bowls has remained marginal; studies have mostly concentrated on *kava/yaqona* circle protocols and procedures. Reading carefully through 19th century sources it becomes clear that newly carved bowls were considered commodities that could be freely exchanged, whereas older bowls, which reflected their keepers' histories and provided a means to communicate with ancestor spirits and gods, were treasured items that could only be exchanged under exceptional circumstances. Many bowls still retain notches or marks that testify to the many important occasions in which they were used and to the various generations of their keepers. The paramount importance of such bowls and of their exchange is illustrated by those that were given as highly prized valuables to the representatives of the new colonial powers by Fijian and Sāmoan chiefs.

This study set out to identify factors that might help differentiate *kava* and *yaqona* bowls made in various production centres in Western Polynesia and Fiji. Thorough analysis of more than one hundred provenanced bowls revealed various features that can contribute to understanding their evolution and distribution. The most important single feature proved to be the rim form, followed by the suspension lug. By weaving together the strings of archaeological evidence, colonial history, collection histories and bowl typologies, a fascinating picture emerges that sheds light on dynamic evolutionary changes that effected *kava/yaqona* bowl production across Western Polynesia and Fiji between the mid-18th and late 19th centuries.

*Kava* and its consumption were most likely introduced to Polynesia from Vanuatu via Viti Levu where it evolved and became an integral part of indigenous *būrau* rites. Because *yaqona* was prepared and consumed

individually in accordance with Melanesian-derived practices, *būrau* bowls tended to be small. In fact many wooden ones were carved without legs, again suggesting their Melanesian heritage; they mimick pottery *yaqona* bowls which were seated upon a plaited ring-stand. The early presence of Sāmoan-derived carvers in Fiji in the 16th century in the wake of Tuʻi Tonga's stay there (Clunie 2013: 164) could explain the introduction of legged bowls and in particular a new type which in due course came to be called *tānoatavatava*. Its distinctive trapezoidal lug bears strong resemblance to lugs of early Sāmoan *tānoa* 'ava bowls as well as elements of Sāmoan fishing canoes, both produced by the same group of craftsmen. This lug type might very well have then evolved into the M-type that can be found on 18th and 19th century Fijian and Tongan bowls.

Tongan tradition relates the introduction of the *kava*-circle to the reign of the 10th Tuʻi Tonga, therefore approximately to the 12th or 13th century (Gifford 1929: 156). The organisation of the Tongan *kava*-circle suggests a Sāmoan origin, as does the ritualised and formal part of the ceremony which continued to be handled by ceremonial specialists of Sāmoan descent (*matāpule*, known as *tūlāfale* in Sāmoa). The Samoans, as outsiders and worshippers of their own "foreign" gods, were not bound by local taboos and were allowed physical contact with high-ranking chiefs. The rims of Tongan *kava* bowls collected during Cook's, Malaspina's and d'Urville's voyages are similar to four-legged Fijian and Sāmoan bowls but, in a uniquely Tongan way, show a tendency to extend and open the rim either horizontally or in a gentle wavelike curve.

In the late 1700s a new and often much larger bowl with a more exaggerated rim began to be produced in Lau by Sāmoan-derived *mātaītoga* that were under the patronage of Tui Nayau, the Rokosau of Lau. One of them, the Lemaki, became the driving force behind the production of this new bowl type on the island of Kabara. Drawing its name (and possibly shape) from the Tuʻi Tonga's *tānoa* 'a, it became to be known as the *tānoa*. Its extended rim can be regarded as a stylistic progression of the Tongan bowl type used in the late 18th century. With the island's renowned stands of high quality *vesi* wood, the Lemaki also specialised in making a revolutionary new type of voyaging canoe (*kaliā/drua*). The semi-circular lugs of some *tānoa* bear a strong resemblance to the perforated leads through which the running stay of these sailing canoes was passed, which could date them to the late 18th century. Sāmoan craftsmanship can also be seen in repairs on old *tānoa* in which cracks have been prevented from spreading, or degraded parts were replaced by new fragments. These restorations were done using the Sāmoan oblique drilling and concealed binding technique which was also used to lash the planks of wooden canoe hulls together.<sup>21</sup>

From Lau *tānoa* were dispersed throughout Western Polynesia by Tongan seafarers. *Tānoa* thus became part of the intricate exchange system between Tonga, Fiji and Sāmoa that involved the exchange and redistribution of valuables such as red feathers, mats, pottery, weapons, head rests, coconut oil and sandalwood. Their dispersal was further facilitated by the intermarriage of high ranking Fijian, Tongan and Sāmoan lineages. Yet, from early travel accounts we know that in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu *tānoa* remained a rare commodity throughout the 19th century.

In Fiji, indigenous *būrau* rites endured after the introduction of the Tongan-derived *yaqona*-circle in the 16th century; both ceremonies found their particular place in Fijian society. With the evangelisation, led by missionaries in the 19th century, *būrau* paraphernalia, including *yaqona* bowls, became objects associated with “false gods” and were mostly abandoned. Ironically they were replaced in the Christian Mass by a chalice that bears strong resemblance to priestly *daveniyaqona*. Unlike *būrau*, the *kava* circle was actively promoted in Fiji by its governor Sir Arthur H. Gordon because it supported his system of indirect rule of the Fijian population through hereditary and government-appointed chiefs. Today the use of *yaqona/kava* remains an important and integral part of Fijian, Tongan and Sāmoan society, and is consumed not only during chiefly rituals and ceremonies but also on more informal social occasions.

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#### NOTES

1. *Mātaisau* were hereditary carpentry specialists of mostly Sāmoan-derivation that were attached to the service of particular high chiefs. Some, such as Lehā who is mentioned later in the text, were also *matāpule*, highly skilled ceremonial attendants of Sāmoan descent that were in charge of the preparation and distribution of *kava* in the Tongan *kava* ceremony.

2. A total of 102 provenanced *kava* bowls from the three UK collections and the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB) in Paris were photographed, measured and inspected in the museums. Other examples from the following collections were studied only from photographs: Maidstone Museum, Kent; Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin; Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden (MVD); Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg; Georg August Universität, Göttingen (GAU); Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde, Leipzig; Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna; National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institute, Washington; Fiji Museum, Suva; Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu; Mark and Carolyn Blackburn Collection, Honolulu; Te Papa Tongarewa Museum (TPTM), Wellington. In this paper objects from museum collections are labelled with the initials of the respective museum and the object number.
3. *Tanoa fai 'ava* (kava bowl), Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Registration number FE 011948. This *tānoa 'ava* was given to Jaffa Solomon in 1875 and was in possession of the Solomon family of Asquith Avenue, Auckland until it was acquired by Te Papa at auction in 2006.
4. Both in Tonga and Fiji disposable folded plantain leaf cups were always used in rituals in which spirits were supplicated, as in the instance of the early morning *kava/yaqona* service. More durable and often personalised coconut shell cups were used in more casual/social drinking sessions. When such cups were in short supply, plantain leaf cups could be made on the spot.
5. Even though this remarkable bowl was collected in Bau, it is not impossible that it originated in Tonga.
6. In the same illustration a Fijian ceramic *saqā* vessel is depicted in its net bag, a container that was often used to store the water for mixing the *kava*. Labillardière mentions it as a Fijian import that was of much better quality than the crude Tongan ceramics (Labillardière 1971 [1800]: 350). This said, we lack evidence that ceramics were actually being produced in Tonga at the time.
7. In his journal of 1844 Thomas Williams mentions that newly made *kava* bowls from Lau were being traded by Tongan sailors for red parrot feathers with the people from Nasea in Taveuni (Henderson 1931: 239-40). Nowadays *tānoa* bowls are still produced in Lau and are traded throughout the archipelago. In Ra they are considered particularly valuable as they are not produced locally and have to be imported (Cayrol-Baudrillart 1996-97: 44).
8. Exceptional bowls, like the one Rātū Seru Cakobau, Vūnivalu of Bau, presented to Commodore Sir William Wiseman in 1865 (BM Oc.9076), were cut from a tree with a diameter exceeding 130 cm.
9. These *būrau* ceremonies had much in common with the indigenous *gi/gea/maloku* sucking cultures of northern and central Vanuatu where fully initiated men invoked ancestor spirits in a similar way (Clunie, in prep.).
10. Earth pit preparation has not entirely disappeared. In 2000 Françoise Cayrol-Baudrillart witnessed such an event among the Nasau people for the reactivation of an ancient ritual site. The *yaqona* was prepared in the plantain leaf-lined earth pit and was drunk from cups (Cayrol-Baudrillart, in prep.).

11. For reasons of clarity only the name *dari* will be used in this paper when referring to the *dari/sedre* bowl type. The suffix '*niyaqona*' specifies that the bowl is actually used for *yaqona* consumption and not as a food bowl.
12. The simultaneous appearance in the archaeological record of *dari*, *saqā* 'water jars' and chiefly/godly stone-faced *yavu* 'mounds' indicates that by 1500 the Western Polynesian *kava*-ring and its association with chiefly houses and god-houses was established in Fiji (Clunie, in prep.). It is quite possible that wooden *yaqona* bowls were simultaneously in use but have not survived burial conditions.
13. Ceramic *dari* are often referred to as *dariqele*, which literally means 'clay *dari*', whereas wooden ones are referred to as *darikau*, meaning 'wooden *dari*' (Clunie, pers. comm.).
14. In an inventory label (MMA Z3492) Anatole von Hügel wrote that "this particular form is styled the *dra ni baka*, the banyan leaf". The difference in spelling is a matter of dialect. Larger deeper lenticular bowls can also be called *draunibaka*. In Lau such bowl types are nowadays often used for domestic purposes and termed *vakalofau*.
15. The arrival of four legged circular bowls in Fiji brought with them a variety of names. In areas of stronger and sustained Tongan influence they kept their Tongan/West Polynesian names such as *kumete*. In other parts of Fiji indigenous names of bowls were used as for example *dari/dare/sedre* (from pottery and wooden bowls), *dave* (from *būrau* bowls) or *tākona* (from food mixing bowls) (Clunie pers. comm.).
16. For a discussion of these bowls refer to Clunie 1996: 3-18 and Clunie and Herle 2003: 101-110.
17. Information collected from the inventory card of MAA Z3459 written by Anatole von Hügel.
18. Traditional evidence maintains that these marks (as well as individual or small series of bold triangular notches cut out of the rim) are "death marks" commemorating the passing of individual owners/keepers. While hardly a precise dating mechanism, such marks accordingly provide some insight into the age of particular bowls at the time they were collected (Clunie pers. comm.).
19. Strictly speaking the term *mātaisau* applied exclusively to the descendants of immigrant carpenters who traced their origins back to the god Rokola. The latter arrived with the great god Degei, whom Clunie (in prep.) identifies with the Tu'i Tonga and his stay in Fiji in the 16th century. Sāmoan-derived carpenters, such as the Lemaki, who were transferred from Tonga to Fiji in the 18th century, or the Jafau who arrived in the 1840s, were termed *mātaītoga* (Tongan carpenters) in Fiji.
20. These semi-circular lugs also bear a close resemblance with ivory or whalebone beads of Tongan origins that were used in necklaces or as ear ornaments. Like *kava* bowls these were produced by specialists belonging to the clans of canoe builders. The origin of this shape could be the *pulekula* shell itself, a highly *tapu* heirloom orange cowry brought from Sāmoa, venerated by the Lemaki as a *tupua* 'ancestor/forebear' that embodied the Sāmoan goddess Lehalevao (Lyth, note 22 in Clunie 2013: 180).



21. The Samoan-style plank joining technique was first described in 1773 by Forster (Hoare 1982, [III]: 398). It resulted in a flush outside and a coir-bound inside joint as illustrated by Williams (1858: 74). This technique was used to restore a natural defect in the rim of bowl MAA Z3973 collected by Sir Arthur H. Gordon in Fiji. Beneath the rim of some bowls their carver left a rounded ridge that extends down the outside. It has been suggested that these helped the *kava* maker to feel the orientation of the bowl. In reality these were actually left by the carver to secure an incipient crack which might otherwise run and split the bowl asunder. In one of d'Urville's *kumete kava* (MQB 72.56.736) this ridge is pierced in two areas and reinforced with coir lashing to prevent an existing crack from developing further.

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#### ABSTRACT

The article presents a detailed comparative study of *kava* mixing bowls associated with the cultural complex of the West Polynesian *kava*-circle and its Fijian *yaqona*-circle offshoot. By cross-referencing archaeological evidence, documented collection histories and bowl typologies a clearer picture emerges of the centres where the bowls were produced and the formal evolution of these vessels, and also illustrates in a unique way how different groups of people and goods moved and were moved around Western Polynesia in the 18th and 19th century.

*Keywords:* *kava* bowls, *yaqona* bowls, museum collections, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, West Polynesian interaction

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