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Shell Rings of Power: Gender Relations in Material Culture Production on the Aitape Islands, Papua New Guinea

Abstract

This article first introduces shell ornaments and pottery on the Aitape Islands in New Guinea, discussing the role of women in their production during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It then turns to material culture produced by men—cult houses and canoes—that depended on supplies obtained by trading women’s products like shell valuables. By discussing these two gendered art forms together, this article shows how integral women’s labour was to the larger social and economic structures in New Guinea that have predominantly been associated with men. It concludes by discussing how colonisation, missionisation, and the introduction of a monetary economy impacted the gendered relations of art production in the islands.

Keywords: *Aitape Islands, Papua New Guinea, women’s labour, women’s labor, shell ornaments, canoes, religious art*

In this article I introduce shell ornaments and pottery on the Aitape Islands, discussing the role of women in their production. I then turn to material culture produced by men—cult houses and canoes—that depended on supplies obtained from trading women’s products like shell valuables. By discussing these two gendered art forms together, this paper will show how integral women’s labour was to the larger social and economic structures that have predominantly been associated with men. Unless otherwise stated, I describe production and social relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the pre-colonial and early colonial period. I conclude by discussing how colonisation, missionisation, and the introduction of a monetary economy impacted the gendered relations of art production in the islands.

The Aitape Islands

Aitape is a small harbour town on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea in West Sepik Province. Several kilometres offshore, there is a group of four small islands commonly known as the Aitape Islands that are inhabited by Austronesian speakers. Although land-poor, with limited means of subsistence and the need to import essential foodstuffs and materials from the mainland, the islands were a thriving centre of shell valuable production until colonial intervention at the end of the nineteenth century. Economic prosperity was generated largely through the labour of local women who specialised in the production of valuable shell goods, which were subsequently traded by their male relatives to mainland communities both near and far from Aitape.¹

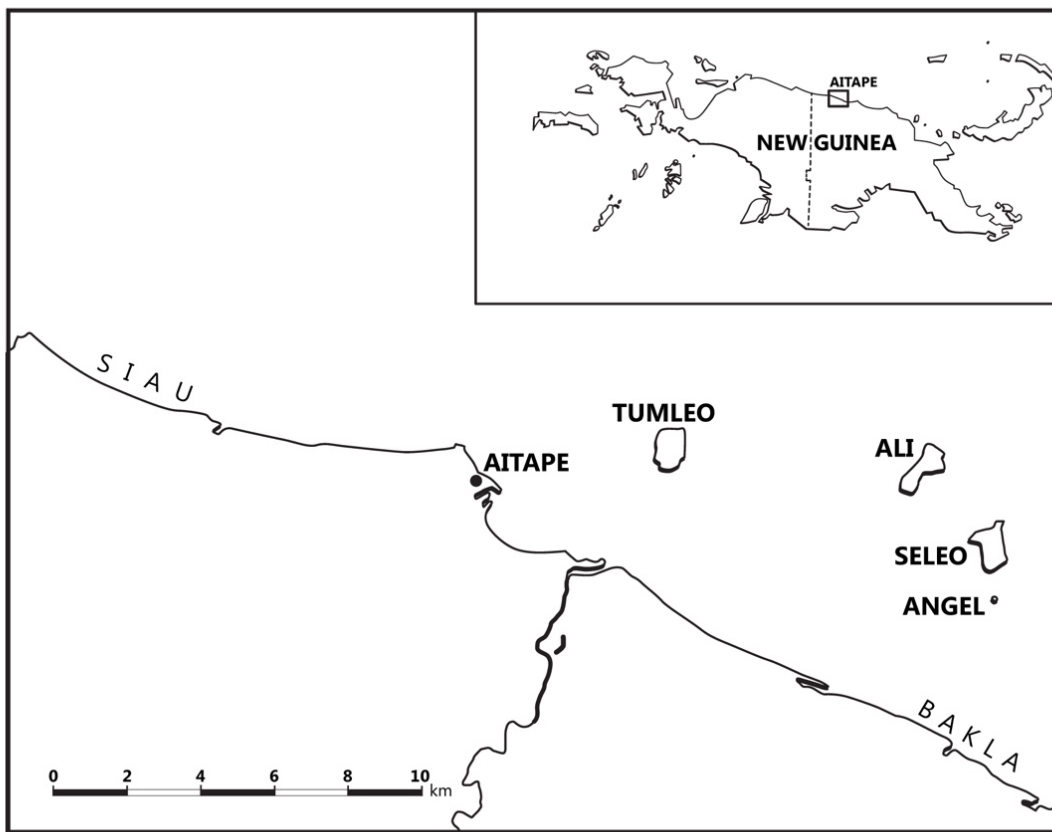


Figure 1. Map of the Aitape Islands. Courtesy of Lukasz Borusowski

The largest island in the Aitape Islands group, Tumleo, is a continental island about two kilometres long and one kilometre wide. Three other islands—Ali, Seleo, and Angel—are small coral isles (Fig. 1). The shortage of land resources required that the bulk of raw materials and staple supplies—particularly sago flour—had to be procured from the New Guinea mainland. Because the *lalal* (stormy season) and its north-westerly winds made it too dangerous to undertake trading expeditions from November through April, contact with the mainland was limited. These drawbacks, however, were compensated for by easy access the islanders had to valuable reef resources—in particular, a vast range of shells—and by an abundance of marine animals such as turtles, crabs, lobsters, and fish.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the Aitape Islands were part of a large economic zone that extended approximately fifty to seventy kilometres west and east of Aitape, from the coastal settlements of Serra to villages situated on the sandbanks of Murik Lakes. The region was, and still is, diverse with regarding the range of inhabited ecosystems, as well as the ethnic and linguistic composition of its people. Through a regular exchange of materials, artefacts, goods, and services, these varied—and, in some cases, quite distant—communities were integrated into a complex network of social and economic obligations.²



Figure 2. *Rapa* (shell ring) from Seleo Island, late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Clamshell, diameter 10.2 cm. Collected by M. Wronska-Friend in 1991. British Museum collection (Oc1992,01.161). Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Production of Shell Valuables

Women of the Aitape Islands developed skills that enabled them to turn reef resources, especially shells, into valuable commodities. Of paramount importance was the production of *rapa* (shell rings) drilled from the shells of giant clams (*Tridacna gigas*) (Fig. 2). The process of their manufacture was known to a small group of elderly women, often widows, who lived on Angel and Seleo (Fig. 3). One large clamshell could yield three to four *rapa*, while a smaller one would produce just one ring. The diameter of the largest *rapa* known exceeded ten centimetres, and some were decorated with an incised ornament. Although smaller *rapa* were worn as personal ornaments, they principally functioned as currency units, being exchanged with mainland communities for food and commodities. American anthropologist Albert Lewis, who visited the Aitape Islands in 1909, stated that one large *rapa* would buy thirty bundles of sago, each twenty to thirty pounds, while a smaller one would buy ten bundles.³ According to information I obtained during my fieldwork in the area from 1987 to 1992, three generations ago one *rapa* could be exchanged for sago flour that would have fed a large family for four to six weeks. The elderly women of Angel and Seleo operated, therefore, a type of a shell currency mint, and by controlling the supply of *rapa*, they were able to regulate local economy.

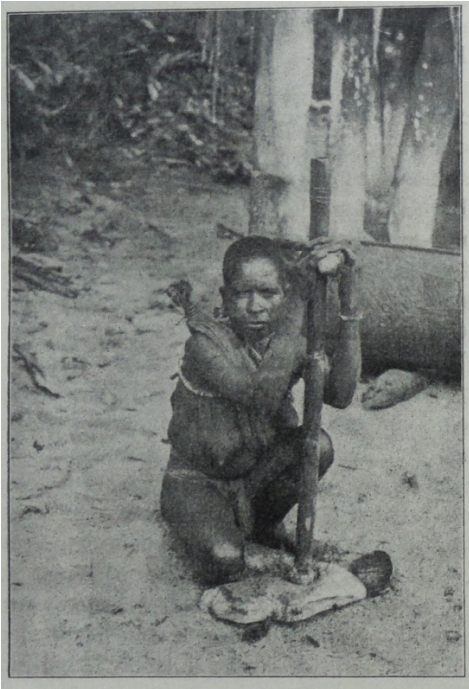


Figure 3. Woman on Angel Island drilling a *rapa* ring, 1898. Source: Richard Parkinson, "Die Berlinhafen-Section. Ein Beitrag zur Ethnographie der Neu-Guinea-Küste," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 13 (1900): 37

In addition to *rapa*, smaller rings called *rep* or *ratot* were cut from the base of a cone-snail shell (*Conus*). Most widespread, however, was the production of cut cowrie shells (*Cypraeidae*) known as *tjamew*. Smaller shell valuables were traded unprocessed, as raw materials, or were incorporated into personal finery including headbands, earrings, nose ornaments, necklaces, armbands (Fig. 4), breastbands, legbands, and more.



Figure 4. Armbands decorated with *rapa* shell rings, Seleo Island, early twentieth century. The plaited band was imported in long strips from the Murik Lakes (Yinai area), and on the Aitape Islands it was cut into sections to produce armbands. Collected by M. Wronska-Friend in 1991. British Museum collection (Oc1992,01.187 a,b). Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Although *rapa* production was the responsibility of women, like all other economic activities it required the involvement of both genders. While the local reef provided clamshells, all other materials for *rapa* production had to be brought

from the mainland: the hardwood base on which pieces of clamshell were drilled, the lengths of bamboo used as drills, and even quartz sand—an abrasive material necessary to increase friction in the drilling process and thereby accelerate it. As trade was the prerogative of men, it was their responsibility to support women's work by procuring materials necessary for *rapa* production; women visited the mainland only rarely.

As the Aitape Islands sit on the only reef on a coastal stretch of 140 kilometres, the shell jewellery produced there was in high demand over a large area. Men from the islands distributed it west of Aitape town in the villages situated between Aitape and Serra—an area known as Siau—as well as to Bakla, a section of coast to the east, between Aitape and Suain. They sailed even further south-eastwards, establishing trade contacts with Murik Lakes villages (Yinai area). Through a dense network that covered all of New Guinea island, shell valuables were traded to the villagers in the Torricelli Mountains, who would use them to barter further into the interior. Thus, by a rough estimate, the small group of women from the Aitape Islands supplied shell jewellery to at least twenty to thirty thousand people who lived on the northern coast of New Guinea, but this number was probably much higher.⁴

Pottery Production

While the women of Angel, Seleo, and Ali Islands exploited reef resources, the women of Tumleo secured their economic position by taking advantage of the clay deposits there and developing extensive pottery production (Fig. 5). The assortment of pots they made was quite diverse: there were *pier* (cooking pots), *sal* (sago stirring pots), and *tapel* (frying pans), as well as *suyanu* (large storage jars for sago flour). Some of the pots were decorated with abstract motifs such as zig-zags, wavy lines, circles, and lozenges that were engraved using fingernails or a piece of wood.⁵

Tumleo pots were in high demand among the mainland communities. They entered the local trade network in a similar way to shell ornaments, traded by sailors from Ali and Seleo to mainland villages between Serra and Suain. Pottery production was of paramount importance to the Tumleo economy, and potters were the most sought-after wives as their work guaranteed a stable income for the family.



Figure 5. Tumleo women with clay pots prepared for sale. In the background, a man in a white shirt displays trade goods, including *rapa* shell rings or their ceramic imitations. Photograph by Br Clarentius SVD, 1908–14. Collection of the Missiemuseum Steyl, Netherlands (no. 388-3/18NG26). Courtesy of the Museum

***Ano Barak* (Cult Houses)**

The profits from women’s labour allowed men to procure not only everyday necessities—such as food supplies, tobacco, betelnut, and firewood—from the mainland, but also a range of materials necessary for the construction of family dwellings and men’s houses, as well as two major art forms of the islands: the *ano barak* (cult houses) and *lepil* (large trading canoes). Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the landscape of each of the Aitape Islands was dominated by the spectacular, richly decorated *ano barak* with two protruding gables. Their architecture was similar to sacral buildings erected in coastal villages between Serra and Tarawai Island, but the construction of such monumental structures on material-poor islands posed a major challenge.⁶



Figure 6. *Ano barak* (cult house) on Seleo Island, 1893. Photo by Richard Parkinson. Published in A.B. Meyer, R. Parkinson, *Album von Papua-Typen. Neu Guinea und Bismarck-Archipel* (Dresden: Von Stengel und Markert, 1894), pl. 49



Figure 7. Lower section of the Seleo *ano barak* (cult house), 1890s. Photo by Richard Parkinson. Published in A.B. Meyer, *Album von Papua-Typen II. Nord Neu Guinea, Bismarck-Archipel, Deutsche Salomo Inseln* (Dresden: Von Stengel 1900), pl. 13. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia

The tall, two story-buildings were erected on posts, approximately one-and-a-half metres above the ground (Figs. 6–7). Their walls and gables were covered with panels of sago spathes with images of spirits painted with brown, yellow, white, and black pigments. The façade and walls were further enhanced with carvings of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures. Besides the high, protruding gables, the characteristic features of *ano barak* were elaborate ladders, the side beams of which were openwork carvings representing rows of elongated, interconnected figures of humans, birds, fish, crocodiles, and other animals (Figs. 8 and 9). The interior of the building was used to perform secret rituals and served as a repository of ritual paraphernalia including masks (Figs. 10–11), ancestral skulls, water flutes, and slit gongs.⁷



Figure 8 (left). Side-beam of the elaborate ladder leading to the Seleo *ano barak* (cult house), prior to 1894. In figure 7, this is the first beam from the left. Carved wood, 270 x 13 x 25 cm. Übersee-Museum Bremen, inv. no. D4722. Photo Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of the Museum

Figure 9 (right). Side-beam of the ladder leading to the Seleo *ano barak* (cult house), prior to 1894. In figure 7, this is the second beam from the left. Carved wood, 263.5 x 13 x 30 cm. Übersee-Museum Bremen, inv. no. D4721; 263. Photo Matthias Haase. Courtesy of the Museum



Figure 10 (left). Mask from the Seleo *ano barak* (see Figs. 6–7), prior to 1912. Wood, carved and painted, 43 x 20 x 13 cm. Collection of Übersee-Museum Bremen, inv. no. D4574. Photo Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of the Museum



Figure 11 (right). Mask from the Seleo *ano barak* (see Figs. 6–7), prior to 1912. Wood, carved and painted, 40 x 18 x 13.5 cm. Collection of Übersee-Museum Bremen, inv. no. D4576. Photo Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of the Museum

The *ano barak* was a place of crucial significance to the community, as it was there that rituals and ceremonies to propitiate the ancestral and local spirits, essential to ensuring the wellbeing of local people, took place. Similar to other Melanesian societies, the men of the Aitape Islands believed that female sexuality could jeopardise ritual tasks that were vital to maintaining community's welfare. For this reason, women were excluded from the space inside and around the cult house under a penalty of death; they never participated in the construction of the houses or in the rituals conducted there by men. The contemporary understanding of religious art and iconography of *ano barak* is limited. It was sacred knowledge, restricted to the group of initiated men, and it was never documented at the time the houses were used.⁸

***Lepil* (Voyaging Canoes)**

The second major art form of the Aitape Islands that was, to a large extent, enabled by women's production of shell valuables, was the *lepil* (large voyaging canoe), constructed mainly by Ali and Seleo Islanders. Similar to cult houses, all materials for their construction had to be brought from the New Guinea mainland, and were obtained in exchange for shell wealth, pottery, and fish through bartering.⁹ The largest of those vessels, equipped with big platforms, could carry up to twenty persons plus a load of sago flour over one tonne. The effort put into *lepil* construction went far beyond utilitarian necessity. Richly embellished with elaborate carvings, incised and painted sideboards, and mastheads decorated with pendants of shells, feathers, and leaves, the canoes were akin to huge floating art installations (Fig. 12).

Each canoe was owned by a lineage group of men, although at times non-cognatic community members could be involved in their construction. The process of *lepil* construction was a complex, arduous task that integrated the lineage of men, strengthened group identity, and conveyed technical knowledge and aesthetic standards to the next generation.

While several examples of *lepil* are known from photographs taken by anthropologists who visited the Aitape Islands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as with the local cult houses, their construction process and iconography have never been fully documented. Such an opportunity arose only during the years 1990 and 1991 when the Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden commissioned a full-size Ali Island voyaging canoe, and asked me to document its construction. The canoe was built over a period of fourteen months by Wilhelm Baggore (clan Pa'on) and Filip Birapin (clan Arei Seklal), assisted by a group of men from Ali and Seleo Islands. As it was the first fully decorated canoe built in more than three decades, it was the first opportunity for many inhabitants of the islands to see a fully adorned canoe such as their ancestors would have used and, for some of them, to learn the construction skills.

Airama, the carved and painted motifs of the Ali Island canoes, have been classified by their builders into two groups: some are of a generic nature, and can be used by any member of the community, while others are restricted to the use of a particular lineage. The first group, among others, includes figures of local fish, birds, and other animals that help to impart speed and lightness to the canoe. For example, the prow of the 1990 Ali Island canoe was carved in the shape of a dog's head, so "it would run towards its destination as fast as a hunting dog."¹⁰



Figure 12. Newly constructed trading canoe on Ali Island beach, 1893. Photograph by Richard Parkinson. Published in A. B. Meyer and R. Parkinson, *Album von Papua-Typen. Neu Guinea und Bismarck-Archipel* (Dresden: Von Stengel und Markert, 1894), pl. 45



Figure 13. Front section of a *lepil* (voyaging canoe) constructed on Ali Island for the Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden, 1991. The prow has been shaped as a dog's head, and the splashboards decorated with lineage motifs of the face of *awang taming* (bewitched woman) and *rama mata-krieng* (men's eyes). Courtesy of Maria Wronska-Friend



Figure 14. Masthead of a *lepil* (trading canoe) decorated with feathers, shells, and small carvings. Ali Island, 1991. Courtesy of Maria Wronska-Friend



Figure 15. Filip Birapin making lashings joining major parts of a canoe. Ali Island, 1991. Courtesy of Maria Wronska-Friend

Designs that indicate one's lineage affiliation are inherited bilaterally through maternal and paternal sides. They have sacred connotations and in the past were also used in the decoration of cult houses and ritual objects. In the case of the Ali Island canoe constructed from 1990 to 1991, the motifs used were *rama matakrieng* (men's eyes) and *awang taming* (face of a female witch) (Fig. 13). The masthead decorations—carved wooden figures; bundles of cassowary, cockatoo, and hornbill feathers; shells; and leaves—arranged in various configurations also express group identity. Distinctive mast attachments helped to recognise the canoe from a distance, so that when it was approaching the village of trading partners or returned home, a welcome party would come to the beach, help pull the canoe ashore, and stage celebrations to commemorate its safe arrival (Fig. 14).¹¹

The canoes were built with a great attention to detail and an exceptional care went into making them visually impressive objects—the pride of their owners and the envy of their trading partners. Attention was paid to make even the structural components aesthetically pleasing. For example, the lashings joining various parts of the canoe were modelled in several ways not necessitated by their utilitarian function. The 1991 Ali Island canoe featured nine carefully shaped types of lashings, the most complex ones assembled from five separate components (Fig. 15).

Similar to cult houses, canoes were associated with male agency, and it was believed that the seafaring ability of the vessels could be compromised by female sexuality, especially menstrual blood. For this reason, women were not directly engaged in the canoe construction but performed only supportive duties, such as providing meals for men who built the canoe, and organising a large launch party upon the completion of the work. However, women supported the work in a more direct way at two stages of canoe construction: they prepared materials for caulking the hull and stitched the sail from pieces of coconut fibre. I observed these customs in 1990 and 1991 (Fig. 16–17). The first task, caulking, is labour-intensive and must be done quickly before the material hardens. The sails are stitched out of coconut fibre and this work is similar to other tasks performed by women, who customarily process soft, pliable materials such as tree bark, string, pandanus, and palm leaves.¹²



Figure 16. Women preparing materials for caulking a canoe hull. Ali Island, 1991. Courtesy of Maria Wronska-Friend



Figure 17. Women stitching pieces of coconut fibre to make a sail for the *lepil* (trading canoe). Ali Island, 1991. Courtesy of Maria Wronska-Friend

Social and Economic Changes of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

In pre-colonial Aitape society, the gender roles and obligations of men and women were clearly stated, and compliance with these rules was vital for the integrity and social wellbeing of small community groups. While men controlled religious and ritual aspects of life, women, by producing *rapa* and clay pots, were in a position to secure material prosperity and regulate the local economy. The male–female relationship was of a differentiated nature but, at the same time, it was complementary rather than conflicting or competitive.

The colonisation and missionisation that commenced in the Aitape area in the late nineteenth century upset this well-balanced social and economic system and created a major shift in gender relations. In 1884, Germany annexed the northeastern part of New Guinea, naming it “Kaiser Wilhelmsland”—the Land of the Emperor Wilhelm. In 1895, the German New Guinea Company opened a trading station on Seleo, while the following year, German missionaries from the Society of the Divine Word set up a mission station on Tumbleo and began converting people to Christianity. The mission and colonial authorities initiated a range of economic enterprises, including setting up several coconut plantations. With the monetary economy in its infancy, the Indigenous labourers expected payment in traditional shell currency. In its place, however, plantation managers, traders, missionaries and even anthropologists who organised vast ethnographic collections used industrial, mass-produced, ceramic replicas of *rapa* and *rep*. Bead producer Albert Sachse in Gablonz (Austro-Hungarian Empire) and the Risler & Cie button factory in Herzogenrath, Germany, exported a large number of these goods to New Guinea. They used not only industrially produced shell rings of diverse sizes but also ceramic replicas of other valuables, such as dog teeth and pig tusks.¹³

The replacement of local shell currency in the Aitape area with ceramic replicas and, in later years, German and Australian coins, greatly affected the pivotal position of local women as economic producers. The uncontrolled, large-scale introduction of fake objects into the local economy resulted in the rapid devaluation of *rapa* and other local shell valuables. Ethnographer Richard Parkinson, who had in 1893 documented production of *rapa* on Angel, found five years later that the production of authentic shell rings had diminished drastically.¹⁴ In the following years, the thriving settlement of Angel was abandoned, with the population moving to Seleo Island and the mainland.

Social and economic changes of the twentieth century affected two major art forms created by Aitape Islands men: cult houses and canoes. The arrival of

Christianity was responsible for the fast and total demise of local sacral art. With the growing number of Christian converts, in the first decade of the twentieth century cult houses fell into disrepair and were never rebuilt.¹⁵ New places of worship—Catholic churches and chapels—were built on the islands by outsiders, such as German carpenters, and included no references to local aesthetics or art traditions. However, as the Catholic church favoured men’s involvement in religious rites over women’s, local men retained their paramount position in ritual and ceremonial life, albeit of a new faith.

As regards canoe construction, the watershed was the Second World War. During the violent military actions of Japanese and Allied forces, people of the Aitape Islands abandoned their villages for several years and lived in hiding on the mainland. Upon returning, they built trading canoes out of some of the materials left by the military forces.¹⁶ Prior to the Dresden Museum’s commission in 1990, the year 1956 was the last time that a large, fully decorated Ali Island trading canoe was built. From that time forward, with the support of the Catholic mission, canoes began to be replaced by plank boats with diesel engines. The new vessels are more efficient and, unlike traditional canoes, are able to provide transport between the Aitape Islands and the mainland all year round. Plank boats are just utilitarian vessels, constructed without any attention to aesthetic qualities.

In July 1998, a powerful tsunami hit the coast of Papua New Guinea approximately twenty kilometres to the west of Aitape, destroying villages situated around the Sissano Lagoon. With more than 2,000 people killed or lost, the tsunami had a disastrous effect on the life of mainland communities, resulting in the relocation of several villages.¹⁷ However, the tsunami largely spared the Aitape Islands and had little impact on the production of local material culture.

Contemporary Production of Gendered Objects

Today, material culture and local art forms continue to be produced on the Aitape Islands, although only on a small scale. While shell rings are not manufactured any longer, women on Seleo and Ali continue to process cowrie shells for necklaces sold at the Aitape market or used as gifts for friends and families of trading partners (Fig. 18). Production of Tumleo clay pots—objects of everyday, practical application—has survived and continues today, although it is of minor commercial significance. Occasionally, the pottery is still used in exchange with trade partners on the mainland, but more often it is sold at the market in Aitape.



Figure 18. Woman processing cowrie shells used to make necklaces. Ali Island, 1991. Courtesy of Maria Wronska-Friend



Figure 19. Modern canoe built in the style of old trading canoes. Seleo Island, circa 1987. Courtesy of Maria Wronska-Friend

Large trading canoes are no longer constructed but at times men decorate splashboards and prows of smaller canoes with carved and painted designs reminiscent of the old canoe decoration (Fig. 19). Those motifs have neither lineage affiliations nor sacred connotations and, unlike designs that decorated trading canoes of their ancestors, they are deemed to be just decorative ornaments that bring aesthetic enhancement to everyday life.

Tourism in the twentieth century played a significant role in encouraging local art production in certain parts of Papua New Guinea. This resurgence, however, did not affect the Aitape area. As the Aitape Islands are situated away from the main tourist routes of the country and are only sporadically visited by outsiders, there is no incentive to produce traditional art forms for an external market. In the same way, the barter exchange with mainland partners, already greatly reduced by the introduction of a monetary economy, is of little significance. Nowadays, this exchange has social and ceremonial significance rather than an economic one. The complex economic interdependence between the islands and mainland communities has declined, as the bulk of economic transactions are conducted at the market in Aitape town.

During the last 150 years, the processes of colonisation and missionisation, accompanied by the introduction of a monetary economy, affected not only economic and social life of the Aitape Islands people but also their gender relations. The pre-colonial production of material culture and art was based on close cooperation between men and women and the complementarity of male and female obligations. The shift to a market economy that commenced towards the end of the nineteenth century upset the close interdependence of both genders, while the new religious ideology introduced at the same time compounded these changes and became the leading factor responsible for the demise of local artistic expression, in particular of the region's sacral art.

Maria Wronska-Friend is an anthropologist and museum curator whose research is primarily object-based. She uses material evidence to investigate social and historical processes of contact, change, and continuity in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Laos) and Papua New Guinea. One of the outcomes of her research in the coastal area of the West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea (1987–92) was the construction of seven full-sized canoes which were deposited at museums in London (Museum of Mankind, now the Ethnographic Section of the British Museum) and the Museums of Ethnography in Berlin, Dresden, and Szczecin, Poland. Since 1992, she has been associated with James Cook University in Cairns, Australia, where she is currently an adjunct senior research fellow.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all information was collected by the author during her fieldwork conducted in the Aitape area from 1987 to 1992. Additional data was obtained from studying the Aitape area collections at the British Museum, London; Missiemuseum Steyl, the Netherlands; and in several museums in Germany: the Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden, the Übersee-Museum Bremen, and the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin. As regards early German records on the Aitape Islands, most important are: Mathias Erdweg, “Die Bewohner der Insel Tumleo,” *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 32 (1902): 274–310, 317–99; and Richard Parkinson, “The Aitape Coast,” in *People of The West Sepik Coast, Record Number 7, National Museum and Art Gallery* (Port Moresby: Trustees of the National Museum and Art Gallery, 1979), 35–107. The latter is an English translation of Parkinson’s paper that was initially published in German as “Die Berlinhafen-Section. Ein Beitrag zur Ethnographie der Neu-Guinea-Küste,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 13 (1900): 18–54.

² The first extensive study of the trade network in the Aitape area was conducted by German anthropologist and museum curator Frank Tiesler. See Frank Tiesler, *Die intertribalen Beziehungen an der Nordküste Neuguineas im Gebiet der Kleinen Schouten-Inseln* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1969–70). In the 1990s, this topic drew the attention of American anthropologist Robert Welsch, who complemented the statistical analysis of Albert Louis’s collection at the Field Museum in Chicago with fieldwork conducted in the Aitape area. Among others, see Robert L. Welsch and John Terrell, “Continuity and Change in Economic Relations Along the Aitape Coast of Papua New Guinea, 1909–1990,” *Pacific Studies* 14, no. 4 (1991): 113–28; and Robert L. Welsh, “Language, Culture & Data on the North Coast of New Guinea,” *Journal of Quantitative Anthropology* 6 (1996): 209–34. I have studied cultural change and trade relations in the Sissano Lagoon villages in the western part of the Aitape area, see Maria Wronska-Friend, “Kulturelle Wandel an der Lagune—Sissano im 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Von Kokos zu Plastik*, ed. Markus Schindlbeck (Berlin, Museum für Völkerkunde, 1993), 149–81.

³ Robert L. Welsch, ed., *An American Anthropologist in Melanesia: A.B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field Expedition, 1909–1913*, Vol. 1 (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 104.

⁴ Frank Tiesler estimated that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Siau area alone was populated by 6,500 to 7,000 people. See Tiesler, *Die intertribalen Beziehungen*, 58.

⁵ For a description of the production of Tumleo pottery in the early twentieth century, see Erdweg, “Die Bewohner der Insel,” 350–55; and Welsch, *American Anthropologist*, 84–87. Regarding the late twentieth-century production of Tumleo pottery, see Patricia May and Margaret Tuckson, *The Traditional Pottery of Papua New Guinea* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2000), 306–13.

⁶ For a comprehensive study of cult houses in the Sepik area, see Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, *Kulthäuser in Nordneuguinea* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989). However, note that illustration no. 64, taken by Bethke in 1905, represents not a Tumleo cult house but a deteriorated Seleo cult house that was photographed fifteen years earlier by Richard Parkinson (see Figs. 6–7, this article).

⁷ Several carvings from the Seleo *ano barak* are in the collection of the Übersee-Museum Bremen (see Figs. 8–11, this article). They were collected by Dr. Ludwig Cohn who was the zoology assistant at the Städtisches Museum für Natur-, Völker- und Handelskunde (today, Übersee-Museum) in Bremen and who brought them from his visit to New Guinea in 1912. American anthropologist A.B. Lewis purchased two masks on Seleo Island in 1909. See Welsch, *American Anthropologist*, 102.

⁸ Erdweg describes the structure and outer elements of the *ano barak*, but he does not provide any explanation regarding the symbolism of artworks associated with those houses; see Erdweg, “Die Bewohner der Insel,” 362, 374. Sections of the Tumleo cult house are in the collection of Missiemuseum Steyl.

⁹ For example, the tree trunk used for the hull of a canoe could be exchanged for ten Tumleo clay pots and two to three baskets of fish.

¹⁰ Filip Birapin, personal communication, Ali Island, November 1990.

¹¹ A similar tradition of decorating masts with the insignias of descent groups was practiced in villages in the Murik Lakes that Ali men visited on their trade expeditions. See Kathleen Barlow and David Lipset, “Dialogics of Material Culture: Male and Female in Murik Outrigger Canoes,” *American Ethnologist* 24 (1997): 4–36.

¹² The caulking is made of the inner bark of the *ral* tree (*Parinarium laurinum*), mixed with the charred leaf of the sago palm.

¹³ Until the end of First World War, Gablonz was in the Austro-Hungarian Empire but today is Jablonec nad Nisou in the Czech Republic. See Maria Wronska-Friend, “From Shells to Ceramic: Colonial Replicas of Indigenous Valuables,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 28 (2015): 50–69.

¹⁴ Parkinson, “The Aitape Coast,” 37.

¹⁵ See Erdweg, “Die Bewohner der Insel,” 374, for comments on the deterioration of local art, especially sacral carvings. A.B. Lewis, who visited Tumleo in 1909, mentions that the men’s house was in a state of decay; see Welsch, *American Anthropologist*, 84. The *ano barak* on Seleo was already in very poor condition in 1905.

¹⁶ John Woichom, “Canoes to Boats: Ali Exchange. Tradition in Transition on the Siau Coast of the Northwest Papua New Guinea since 1896” (paper presented at the 49th Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, Auckland, 1979).

¹⁷ United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination South Pacific Team, July 23–August 6, 1998, *Mission Report (Rev. 1). Papua New Guinea: The Aitape Disaster Caused by the Tsunami of 17th July 1998* (Port Moresby: UNDP, 1998).