Chapter 4
Collecting and documenting the Kiwai

Gunnar Landtman was a dedicated and keen collector of artefacts. At first his collecting was carefully planned: ‘Right from the beginning, too, I endeavoured to found two distinct main collections the principal one for the National Museum at Helsingfors [Helsinki], in case a complete duplicate set was not obtainable, and a similar one for the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology [Anthropology]’ (Landtman 1933: 10). However despite his plans Landtman could not control the accumulation of objects and when local people realised that he was paying good prices for artefacts he was inundated. Consequently, many objects are provenanced as ‘mouth of the Fly’, a generic term Landtman used to refer to his study region as he was unable to accurately document the origin of some pieces. This was not only a problem for Landtman. After the mid-1870s, when social, economic and political life in the Torres Strait was interrupted by the effects of pearling, missionary and administrative activities, the movement of Islanders and non-Islanders resulted in relocation of large numbers of artefacts and the Haddon collection also contains objects provenanced to places of purchase rather than place of manufacture (Kaus 2004: 95). Haddon at Cambridge had first choice of the artefacts collected by Landtman and this duplicate collection contains about 700 objects (Landtman 1927: ix Landtman 1910–12: letter dated 19 November 1912). In addition, Landtman gave artefacts to museums in Berlin and Stockholm and to his old school in Helsinki.

Both Haddon, as an avid collector also, and Baron Anatole von Hügel, the notable explorer of the Pacific, particularly Fiji, and first Curator of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology [Anthropology], were generally pleased when the collection was unpacked. However, it appears the lack of decoration on the objects was one comment Landtman had to endure (Landtman 1910–12: letter dated 3 September 1912). On the return journey home Landtman stayed in Cambridge and in the time between sorting the artefacts for shipment to Helsinki, Landtman finalised a paper on the wandering of the dead in Kiwai folklore for submission to the festschrift celebrating Edvard Westermarck’s birthday. In this, his first published paper on the Kiwai, Landtman described the legend of Sido as the story of the first man to open the road for humans to Adiri, the land of the dead. Landtman’s rich folklore collection led him to understand that the beliefs of the Kiwai regarding their dead ‘convey some idea of a people gifted with a singular power of imagination and displaying in various branches of folk-lore their astonishing faculty of interpreting, according
to their own minds, the phenomena both of nature and their own lives. Their legends reveal to us the real Papuan Wonderland’ (Landtman 1912b: 80). He understood the importance of the Sido story as one of a series of linked myths that serve to connect the peoples of the southern Papuan lowlands into concrete social relationships and patterns of communication. While we now know more about these interrelationships and are aware that people from different areas have ancestor hero legends that are not identical, that occasionally other people have different perspectives and often these stories may conflict, but there is a generally accepted common history of association between groups, and an exclusion of others (Busse 2005: 455), this early interpretation by Landtman was in marked contrast to contemporary writers who saw rituals and beliefs as evidence of primitive, irrational native minds.

Haddon’s contribution to the Westermarck volume was a broad study in material culture describing housing styles from all known areas of New Guinea, both eastern and western, largely using secondary sources including Landtman’s research notes. Landtman complained in his letters home that Haddon made frequent use of his material, photographs and quotes and that this was of some concern (Landtman 1910–12: Letter dated 3 September 1912). It appears that his relationship with Haddon was professional, formal and courteous but not intellectually stimulating.

Although Landtman was a protégé of Haddon and dutifully acknowledged his assistance in facilitating his research in Papua, he remained intellectually a student of the Frazer-Westermarck school. Westermarck’s most influential work published in English at this time was The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas [Moralens uppkomst och utveckling] (1906–08) which was an attempt to rationalise the concept of moral philosophy. His conclusion was that morality is a social phenomenon and that moral judgments can be traced to altruistic and objective feelings of approval and disapproval, according to social rewards. Westermarck argued against the view that moral judgments were universal facts common to all people and he put forward the proposition that morality is a product of a long period of development, and ultimately based upon emotions and these vary in different individuals. This he based on anthropological, ethnological and historical data. Westermarck remained Landtman’s intellectual guide. Westermarck also held a professorial position in sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science between 1907 and 1931 at a time of the paradigmatic changes taking place in social anthropology that resulted in the ideological differences between the conservative evolutionists like James Frazer and the radical functionalists like Bronislaw Malinowski (Isotalo 1995). Landtman remained an ethno-sociologist despite his embryonic leanings towards anthropology (Wikman 1940).
The Landtman collection of Kiwai material culture

Landtman finally shipped his collection of 1326 objects home to Finland in 1913 and the Antell funds paid him 1700 Finnish marks (Suomen markka) for the artefacts and 300 marks for cataloguing the collection. The collection is now housed in the Museum of Cultures (Kulttuurien museo) in Helsinki, part of the National Museum of Finland (see Landtman 1933). It remains the most significant and comprehensive collection of Kiwai material culture available for research and complements the more famous Haddon collection of Torres Strait Islander material culture at Cambridge. The catalogue of the Kiwai ethnographic collection was not published until 1933 and this explains, in part, why Landtman used photographs of Torres Strait and Fly River material culture from the Haddon collection at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology [Anthropology] in his main text published in 1927 (Landtman 1927 and 1933).

When Landtman made his collection of Kiwai material culture there was no philosophical separation between social and cultural anthropology and ethnology or the collection of artefacts for museum display. Fieldwork required the ethnologist to collect as much material culture, songs, stories, and documentation of a social and culture life of a people as was possible in a given time. At the time Landtman was collecting his Kiwai artefacts material culture was seen either as a measure of the developmental stages of cultures (social evolutionism) or as examples of the geographical spread and development of cultures (diffusionism). These theoretical aspects remained current until the 1920s and 1930s when anthropology moved in new directions (Kaus 2004: 100). Later, material culture came to be designated a kind of technological substrate that contrasted with the more abstract ideas of culture and the codes of social and spiritual life (Strathern 1990: 38). In a clear statement on tradition and transition in the Torres Strait, Florek (2005: 62) remarked that while material culture does not convey historical narratives, artefacts reflect change in the historical process. Significantly, artefacts, like photographs, cast light on the collector and on the collector’s beliefs and expectations for ‘the origin of artefacts and the mode of collecting strongly influence indigenous, historical and scientific values embedded in these collections’. Current museology is devoted to putting objects into their cultural context and producing functional and interpretative exhibitions where the artefacts are displayed as cultural objects and not as art (Strathern 1990: 39; Lahdentusta, Parpola, Vainonen and Varjola 2001). This is especially true of the Landtman collection and its links to the Haddon collections. Landtman’s collection may be divided into four categories: subsistence, ornamentation and dress, ceremony and dance and warfare (Lawrence 1994).
Subsistence

This includes objects used as a means for supporting human life, in food getting, cultivation of the ground and for cooking and hunting. In the Torres Strait and Fly estuary dugong harpoons, bamboo water containers, mats, baskets, shell tools and utensils, stone-headed axes and adzes, coconut fibre fishing lines and brooms were all used during the pre- and post-contact periods. Following contact with European traders, more durable items like enamel bowls, knives, forks and spoons as well as rope and metal tools were gradually substituted for many of these artefacts. Also included in this category are watercraft such as canoes and canoe hulls. Other items such as bows, arrows, bamboo knives and spears may have been artefacts of warfare as well as subsistence.

Shell implements and shell utensils

The coastal Papuans employed shell hoes (*wedere moa*) for clearing gardens and digging in preparation for planting (Landtman 1933: 23; National Museum of Finland VK 4902: 563). Shell obtained from the Torres Strait Islanders were used for a variety of domestic utensils. Pottery was unknown in this region. The principal use for large bailer shells (*Melo* sp) was as a pot for boiling food or as a fire pot (VK 4902: 418) (see VKK 323). Old shells were often used as canoe bailers and other large shells such as *Fusus* sp. *Cassis* sp. and *Tridacna* sp. were used as water vessels (Haddon 1912, IV: 122 and Moore 1984: 64).

Illustration 1. Shell cooking pot (VK 4902: 418)
Stone tools

While smaller shell hoes were used to clear gardens and prepare areas for planting, heavier, hafted stone axes and adzes (*emoa*) were used for felling timber or for cutting and scraping wood. Landtman (1927: 33) was emphatic that the origin of all stone used by all coastal Papuan peoples was the Torres Strait, as the only naturally occurring stone along the southwest coast is the granitic outcrop of Mabudawan, and he wrote:

> According to what I was told at Mawata, the Torres Strait Islanders obtained the stones out of which axes (or adzes) and club-heads were made principally from the bottom of the sea, by diving. The diver had a long rope attached underneath one shoulder, by which his companions in the canoe helped him up to the surface when loaded with a heavy stone ... The shaping of the stone was effected by a hammer stone ... and the grinding by means of a somewhat softer stone (Landtman 1933: 45).

Landtman believed that Mabudawan was the principal centre where grinding stones were obtained by the Kiwai of Mawatta and these stones were exchanged with peoples further east and into the Fly estuary (Landtman 1933: 45). He would have based this on the evidence of being taken to see Wawa’s grinding stone at Mabudawan. However, Haddon, on a later visit to Yam Island in 1914, was shown an isolated place in the bush called Konakan where large stone slabs with deep depressions, used as grinding stones for the manufacture of stone implements, were seen and photographed (Haddon 1935, I: Plate I, figures 1 and 2, and Plate II, figure 1). The stone slabs at Konakan may still be seen today and, according to the present day Yam Islanders, were places where the heads of stone axes (*gabagaba*) were ground.

The eastern Torres Strait Islanders brought armshells to Awridh Island and exchanged these for stone used in making club-heads and presumably stone axe and adze heads. Haddon (1935, I: 88) wrote that stone was obtained from the rocky Sir Charles Hardy and Forbes Islands off Cape Grenville on the coast of north Queensland. It would appear that the Torres Strait Islanders journeyed even further south than the Forbes Islands. The anthropologist, Donald Thomson wrote:

> The Koko Ya’o [Kuuku-Ya’u speaking people] of Lloyd Bay, which is the greatest stronghold on the [Cape York] Peninsula of hero cults of Papuan type [see Thomson 1933], stated that the people from Torres Strait came frequently in big canoes to Mitirindji (Quoin Island) off the mouth of the Pascoe River, to obtain supplies of stone for their axes (Thomson 1939: 82).
Thomson believed that this was further evidence of the contact and exchange between Torres Strait Islanders and the Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula. The large green turtle nesting sites of Eel Reef lie between Quoin Island and the mainland and it is likely that Torres Strait Islanders journeyed south on hunting and fishing expeditions long before European contact with Aboriginal groups along the eastern peninsula. The extent of this intermittent contact has been documented by Moore (1979).

The possibility that stone was transported down the Fly River was first mentioned by Haddon (1898: 221):

> In this district [Iasa on Kiwai Island] there are a number of very large stone implements (the largest I saw in Chalmers house [at Saguane] was 18 inches [46 cm] long). They are now placed round the graves but their significance is now entirely lost. The large implements are so cumbersome and heavy that it is difficult to see how many of them could ever have been used and I suspect that they were merely articles of barter — money in fact. As no stone occurs for many miles and none (of this kind) is known in the district — the implements have in all probability come down from the Fly River, and it is also probable that stone implements have been out of use for perhaps a century owing to the natives getting iron from passing ships and wrecks and then bartering it to their neighbours, thus in two or three generations the knowledge of stone implements could readily die out.

However, this was speculation as the possibility of stone being exchanged down the river is slight. Haddon changed his opinion largely on the basis of Landtman’s research. The shape of all the larger axes or adze heads in museum collections is the same and quite distinctive. All are fine grained closely textured igneous rocks which appear to be holocrystalline. They are generally basalt or basaltic andesite, or andesite todacite but in general would appear to be volcanic or shallow intrusive rocks. It is more likely that stone was sourced within the Torres Strait or further south. As Landtman (1927: 34) remarked:

> As regards the shape of the stone axes, the Marindanim [the Tugeri] on the Dutch side of the boundary [now Indonesian Papua] have a tradition according to which, the first axe of this kind was obtained from one of the very large teeth of a certain being or man named Monubi [or Monuhi in Landtman 1933: 46], who had come from far away. The shape of an axe is in fact, very like that of a human front tooth.

Knowledge of their hafting and use was still strong when Landtman undertook his fieldwork in 1910–12. Among the Kiwai, an axe head was hafted with the cutting edge parallel to the handle between two blocks of timber, which were
strongly bound on to an elbow or shoulder of timber. An adze head was hafted in a similar fashion, but with the cutting edge horizontal to the vertical wooden handle (VK 4902: 528). The size of the blade varies considerably with the largest stone blade in the Landtman collection almost 54 cm in length (VK 4902: 529) and the smallest only 8 cm in length (VK 4902: 559) (Haddon 1912, IV: 126 and Landtman 1933: 45-47).

Illustration 2. Stone adze (VK 4902: 528)

Illustration 3. Stone axe head (VK 4902: 529)
The true origin of stone axe and adze heads remains obscure although recent archaeological research in the Torres Strait (McNiven and Quinnell 2004) has broadened our understanding of the movement of stone across this region. Local quarry sites have now been investigated and the large stone heads from a number of collections have been examined. From this research it is becoming clear that stone was obtained principally from Dauan Island and from Moa [Mua] and Badu in the western Torres Strait and from the rocky volcanic eastern islands. Stone and stone axes were items of trade, exchange and looting and moved easily between ethnic groups (McNiven, von Gnielinski and Quinnell 2004: 271–89 and McNiven 1998).

Because of earlier contacts with Europeans and South Sea Islander maritime workers, the introduction of iron tools in the Torres Strait predated the introduction of iron into the coastal Papuan region. However, prior to European settlement the trade in stone tools was an integral part of customary exchange, and with the introduction of trade store tools, the replacement of iron for stone in the customary exchange system was a logical, rapid functional substitution.

Canoes

Formerly canoes (pe) were hollowed out, laboriously, using stone tools but the introduction of iron tools permitted easier and more sophisticated manufacture. The maritime technology of the Torres Strait Islanders and the Kiwai Papuans was of the highest order. Rutherford, a British naval officer passing through the region in the early 19th Century, wrote:

the canoes are very long and narrow, swimmingly light, which renders the aid of outriggers necessary to prevent their upsetting. These outriggers consist of two long bamboo spars laid and fastened with grass ropes across the centre of the canoe, distant from each other about six feet [two metres], and on the outer ends of these two spars, on either side, another spar is tied parallel to the canoe itself, about seven feet [two and a half metres] from it, that is, beyond the gunwale or edge, and resting on the surface of the water, which, of course, must considerably impede the velocity of the vehicle, but which effectively prevents the risk of upsetting. The space between the cross spars on the canoe, and to the distance of about two feet [two thirds of a metre] beyond its gunwale or edge on each side is fitted or filled up with a bamboo hurdle, covered with a grass mat (Rutherford 1834: 195).

Decorated vertical boards were inserted in the bows and sterns of canoes of the Torres Strait Islanders (Haddon (1912, IV: 207 and 214, figure 209) and Landtman (1933: 77) reported that it was common practice for the people of the Fly estuary to place these oblong shield-like boards in the bows of canoes supported by
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stays and decorated with leaves or cassowary feathers. These carved and ochred gope were placed facing into the canoe for they served a practical purpose: they stopped water from splashing into the canoes (Landtman 1933: 21, figure 22). Gope were also hung outside longhouses as protection against illness.

In the Torres Strait this figurehead, there called a dogai, was fitted to canoes on Saibai on the journey from the place of origin in the Fly estuary to the eventual owner in the Torres Strait (Haddon 1912, IV: 207). Examples were collected by Haddon (Moore 1984: 50 and 59; plates 10 and 23; Haddon 1912, IV: 214, figure 209) from the Torres Strait islands of Saibai, possibly from Dauan, and from Mabuiag. The early descriptions of canoes described in detail the size of the canoes, the way in which they were well built and the sailing skills of the Islanders:

Their canoes are very large, some being as much as 70 feet in length [20–25 metres], and capable of carrying from 25 to 30 people with ease, they are cut out of a single tree, broad and full in the bow, but narrower and rising out of the water abaft, with topgallant bulwarks of bark neatly sewed on and rising about a foot above the bow. Two outriggers extend about 6 feet [2 metres] on each side of the canoe amidships, to the ends of which is fastened a long canoe-shaped piece of light wood which prevents the narrow vessel from capsizing and also adds a good deal to buoyancy. The amidships part of these is decked over so as to form a kind of platform, on part of which some earth is usually laid by way of a fireplace. At the end of each side of the platform is built a sort of netting in which to keep provisions, fishing tackle &c ... They sometimes carry a large mat sail of an oblong shape which is stuck up in the bow of the canoe, there being two masts in one step but wide apart at the top, and the sail being trimmed by hauling of the masts aft, or vice versa (Sweatman 1842–47: 70–72; Allen and Corris 1977: 35).

Sweatman also described the use of large flat mat sails before they were replaced by cloth sails in lug rig copied from the pearling and bêche-de-mer fleets (see Haddon 1912, IV: 65 and 67; 1912, IV: Plate XXVI figures 1 and 2; Lawrence 1994: cover).

Before the introduction of fibreglass dinghies the main inshore and riverine watercraft in coastal Papua was the tataku, a small single outrigger canoe. It was long and narrow and used for fishing as well as for travelling to garden places along the rivers. Generally a tataku could take three or four people comfortably and could be either paddled or sailed, using a single cloth sail. The Kiwai from Katatai and Kadawa villages near Daru used a distinctive square cloth sail while the Fly estuary people, particularly the people from Kiwai Island, used an inverted triangular sail.
The second type of canoe using a dugout log was the *puputo*. This was principally used by the people living near Daru but also by some Oriomo River people and Binaturi River people who obtained their canoes from their Kiwai neighbours. The *puputo* had one mast, two sails, two outriggers, built up washstrakes and a large platform deck built over the raised planked sides. The main sail of the *puputo* was square. The *puputo* was used as an all-purpose fishing vessel and for carrying groups of people to and from the Torres Strait and Fly estuary villages. The *puputo* was similar to the larger *motomoto* but was lighter, could be used in coastal waters and be handled by a smaller crew. It was steered in the traditional fashion using a large, heavy, plank as both a rudder and centre board.

The *motomoto* (VKK 431) was the largest double outrigger canoe used in the Torres Strait and had two masts and three sails, a form adopted from the pearling luggers. While the *motomoto* was heavy and slow and required a large crew it was excellent for long trips, especially to the middle of the Torres Strait or the Warrior Reef. Turtles could be carried in the cargo area under the platform erected over the hull or on the outrigger booms although dugongs were usually carried on top of the platform due to their bulk and weight. *Motomoto* were almost exclusively used by the Kiwai from Mabudawan, Mawatta and Tureture villages who had to travel long distances over difficult waters to reach Daru or the Torres Strait islands. It was ideal in bad weather and although the ride was wet and cold the canoe was stable. They were ideally suited for carrying large cargoes of artefacts, people, foodstuffs and raw materials. Canoes were made from a variety of timbers: tall straight trees suitable for canoe hulls were generally only found in the well-timbered country along the northern Manowetti coast. Softer timbers, such as *Bombax* sp and *Erythrina* sp, were more common along the southwestern Daru coast and this material could be used for outriggers and planking needed to raise the decking high above the rough ocean of the Torres Strait.

Landtman took numerous photographs of canoes, both large and small, and they illustrate the gradual change in form of the *motomoto* that was previously sailed without a full platform. The canoe was the most important item of material culture for both the Torres Strait Islanders and the coastal and riverine dwelling people of the southwest coast of Papua prior to the introduction of European maritime technology. Occupation of island, inter-ethnic contact and the maintenance of some form of equilibrium in the subsistence pattern across Torres Strait would not have been possible without a sufficiently sophisticated maritime technology.

Both Haddon (1908, VI: 186) and Landtman (1927: 214–15) recorded descriptions of formal or ceremonial practices associated with the exchange of valued items. Although Landtman stated that ‘in the canoe traffic, as in any other form of barter, there is no clearly marked difference between actual commerce and the
exchange of friendly presents’ (Landtman 1927: 215) he recorded precisely the formality of such an ‘exchange of friendly presents’ in the westerly movement of canoes from the Fly estuary and into the Torres Strait and the easterly movement of a variety of artefacts in ‘payment’ or exchange. The formality of exchange partnerships stimulated and activated the flow of other material culture. Along the lines of exchange also moved food, plants, animals and marriage partners.

Mats and baskets

Mats and baskets, as well as other plaited articles, such as belts and bands, continue to be made by Islanders and Papuans. The variety of forms and manufacture was noted by Quiggin (1912: 63) who remarked: ‘Basketry and plaitwork are the most important of the native arts of the Torres Strait Islanders, though here also, as is found to be the case with so many other artefacts now in use, importations from New Guinea are met’.

Plaited mats, from both coconut and pandanus leaf, are still items of daily use in Islander and Papuan homes. This applies even in mainland Australian cities where Islanders have settled and in towns and cities in Papua New Guinea. The spreading of mats has social as well as practical meaning. Guests are welcomed in Islander and Papuan homes by placing clean, often new, mats on floors or on outside seating platforms. It signifies welcome and hospitality and as Landtman (1933: 64) stated, in former times, a man conducted into a men’s house would have been filled with foreboding if no mats had been spread for him for it signified that blood could be shed without fear of soiling the flooring.

Mats are cool and soft to sleep on particularly in hot and rainy times and are still preferred to European-style beds and mattresses that cannot be aired or dried easily in the tropics. A common form of sitting mat used outside can be made by plaiting trimmed coconut leaves. A form of pandanus mat was made from slips of pandanus leaf sewn together, not plaited (Quiggin 1912: 67–68). This mat could be folded lengthwise and rolled up for storage (see Landtman 1933: 21, figure 22). In Kiwai it is referred to as a tiro and Landtman (1927: 41) states that this form of mat came originally from Kiwai Island (VK 4902: 736). Such mats are no longer made or used in the Torres Strait but are still used in coastal Papua where they are principally used as ‘sleeping bags’ because they are warm and waterproof if used outside or on the deck of a canoe. Landtman (1927: 41) illustrated that they could also be used as rain hoods (hoboro).
Illustration 4. Tiro mat (VK 4902: 736)

The now commonly used pandanus leaf mat (*hawa*) was introduced to Kiwai Island from Mawatta (VK 4902: 732 and 733). It is therefore possible that the *tiro* was introduced into the Torres Strait from the Fly estuary along with canoe hulls and other exchange items. Conversely, the *hawa* commonly made in the eastern and central islands may have been introduced to the coastal Papuan region from the Torres Strait for it is generally considered to be more recent in origin than the *tiro* mat.

Illustration 5. Hawa mat (VK 4902: 732 and 733)
Coconut leaf baskets (sito) were, and still are, made and used in both the Torres Strait islands and in Papua (VK 4902: 394). They are used principally for carrying garden foods and personal belongings. One form of basket, made from the green coconut leaf, is used as a disposable rubbish basket. However, the plastic supermarket carry-bag is replacing this form of basket and, along with the disposal of cans, bottles and containers, is adding to environmental problems around village areas.

Illustration 6. Coconut leaf basket (VK 4902: 394)

Another type of fine grass or tuberous root basket (gatere) is readily available on Daru. These soft and beautifully decorated baskets were noted and collected by Landtman (1927: 41) and were, and still are, used largely by men for personal articles and by some older men as ‘magic’ bags (VK 4902: 402) (Moore 1984: 42; Plate I). These bags are brought through the Agob and Bine areas from the Suki Lakes in the middle Fly and for this reason are generally referred to as ‘Suki bags’. A similar bag called by Quiggin in Haddon (1912, IV: 84, and Plate XVII figure 2) a ‘check basket of Flagellaria’ was obtained on Mer. Suki bags were important exchange items and continue to be popular accessories.
Illustration 7. Suki basket (VK 4902: 402)

Dugong harpoons

The principal tool used by both Islanders and coastal Papuans in hunting dugong was the harpoon (wapo) that consisted of a harpoon dart (kuior), a small barbed head inserted into a terminal hole in the butt end (kumu) of the main harpoon shaft (paike) (Haddon 1912, IV: 166, as well as Plate XXIII, figure 1–4, and Landtman 1933: 27 and 28). The ends of the harpoons were often decorated with cassowary feathers and the butt end finely carved or incised.

The harpoon, especially the butt end, was often made from wongai wood and the best wood came from the Torres Strait islands particularly Muralag and Mabuiag (Haddon 1912, IV: 169 and Plate XXIII, Figure 4). A fine harpoon from Muralag is illustrated in Haddon (1912, IV: 169) and a number of harpoon darts are in the Haddon collection (Moore 1984: 43 and Haddon 1912, IV: Plate XXIII, Figure 2). Landtman collected a similar harpoon from Mawatta. This was cut into three main parts for transportation to Finland: only the dart, the butt end and the base of the shaft are in the Landtman collection (VK 4902: 588, VK 4902: 586, and VK 4902: 587)(see Landtman 1933: 27). As items of exchange the dugong harpoon was highly regarded:
The Miriam [eastern Islanders] valued them [harpoons] more as ornaments or works of art, and like the imported spears they indicated the wealth of the owner; they were exchanged or given as presents at marriages. The wooden shafts of fishing spears, likewise, constituted important items of exchange (Haddon 1912, IV: 169).

Ropes

Ropes made from lawyer cane (*Calamus* sp.) or possibly coconut root fibres as well as eight-ply dugong ropes (*amo*) made from the tough climbing *Apocynaceae* plant were taken from Papua into the Torres Strait (VK 4902: 527) (Moore 1984: 43 and Plate 2). This buoyant rope was an essential part of the dugong harpoon equipment but at present hunters use strong nylon ropes readily available in tradestores on Daru. Other fine quality ropes were also made by the Kiwai from bush materials (VK 4902: 525).

Illustration 8. Dugong rope (VK 4902: 527)

Brooms

Brooms (*mihere* or *koumiri*) made from coconut leaf midribs have always been important items in Islander and Papua households. Brooms continue to
be significant items of material culture although they are rarely collected by museums. It is still common for both Islander and Papuan women to use coconut leaf brooms both indoors and outdoors in preference to European style brooms.

**Bamboo water containers**

Bamboo water containers (*obo-marabo*) (Landtman 1933: 61) were used on canoes and by people travelling to gardens and fishing places (VK 4902: 412). They could be easily cut from the large bamboo stands growing along the coastal waterways. A small hole was cut in one end node and the container filled with fresh water. It could be stoppered with clay or grass. A cord of bamboo was then tied to each end of the bamboo stick that could be carried over the shoulder. A similar, decorated, object in the Haddon collection was obtained on Mer (Moore 1984: 64, Plate 28).

**European tradestore goods and tools**

The introduction of European tradestore goods and tools, such as metal axes, knives, metal spikes, ropes, sails and textiles, resulted in the substitution of many material culture items used and made by both Islanders and Papuans prior to European contact. The trader, John Cowling who had operated a pearling station and store on Mabuiag in 1898 commented on the long distances over which tradestore goods passed from hand to hand across the Torres Strait when he wrote:

... when I first went to the Bamu in [18]98 I was surprised to see the prints the natives were wearing that I had sold in Mabuiag. I know they were mine as I bought them from patterns sent from Manchester and imported direct, no other store had them, but this is only one instance of the distance trade-goods travel and change hands ... (Haddon 1898: 225).

This was the same John Cowling who was Landtman’s host at Mibu Plantation in the Fly estuary.

**Ornamentation and dress**

Fibre skirts, plaited belts and bands were used as clothing. However, a great variety of objects were used as personal adornment for the head, arms, body, legs and feet. This included various types of marine shell ornaments, dogs’ teeth and boars’ tusks, plaited and feather headdresses, plaited frontlets, armguards and leglets. The range of bird plumes used was considerable: feathers from
cassowaries, birds of paradise, Torres Strait pigeons, herons, and parrots were worn and exchanged. In addition coloured ochres, threaded seeds and bone ornaments were used for personal adornment, as markings of status or as decoration. Following contact with European traders, and the introduction of Christianity, cotton calico or *rami* [turkey red cloth] became important items of dress.

**Pubic Shells**

![](image)

**Illustration 9. Shell pubic covers (VK 4902: 231 and 232)**

Both Landtman (1933: 33) and Haddon (1935, I: 297) noted that a common item of men’s dress in Papua and in the Torres Strait was the pubic shell (*wedere*) usually made from the bailer shell (*Melo sp*) often incised with designs. This was not worn at all times and the people living in the inland region did not wear pubic shells at all. In most cases the pubic shell covered the genitals although a Landtman (1933: 34, Figure 40) photograph taken at Buji shows the pubic shell worn as a cover only over the penis. Other men wore the shell over a cotton calico wrap. For warfare or for ceremonial occasions and dances, temporary coconut leaf skirts and belts were worn with a variety of other, often elaborate, ornamentation, such as arm, leg, nose and ear decorations, masks, headdresses, necklaces and breast ornaments.

Landtman was able to collect pubic shells (VK 4902: 232) and Haddon collected a shell pubic cover in 1898 on Mer similar to those from Kiwai Island and the Fly River (Moore 1984: 97 and Plate 76). Other examples in the Landtman collection
are not decorated with incised designs and show the usual variety in size (VK 4902: 231). A similar pubic shell in the Australian Museum collection (E 17284) in Sydney was collected at Mer in 1907 by Charles Hedley and Allan McCulloch, zoologists at the Australian Museum, and has been decorated with buttons and calico attachments. It was most likely traded from Papua to be worn in dances. The introduction of European clothing, and mission control, led to the demise of both the shell pubic cover worn by men and the fibre skirt worn by women, on all occasions except when dance dress was acceptable, in which case the shell was worn on men’s hips. It became common for the fibre skirts to be worn by women over cotton dresses and for men to wear the pubic shells over cotton lava-lavas at dances.

**Fibre skirts**

From puberty Kiwai women wore a fibre skirt (*wapa* or *eere*) as a covering. These fibre ‘petticoats’ consisted of two fringes, one longer than the other, joined by a plaited band (VK 4902: 275 and 276). The longer fringe worn at the back was brought forward between the legs and tucked into the waist band forming a thick fibre apron in front. In the Torres Strait sometimes more than one fibre skirt was worn to make this ‘petticoat’ continuous around the body (Haddon 1912, IV: 60). In the ‘top’ western islands of Boigu, Dauan and Saibai the band of fibre was not continuous and the right thigh was shown.
Women’s skirts were made from a variety of fibres, such as the swamp grass (*Philydrum* sp.), *Ficus* sp., *Hibiscus* sp., or even banana (*Musa* sp.) and sago bastis. The use of the leaves of the ‘waterwort or flag’ plant, possibly the *Philydrum* sp., was common for fibre skirts in both the Torres Strait islands and even among the Aboriginal people of nearby Cape York (Haddon 1912, IV: 61). The fibres were either left in their natural dried colour or marked with vegetable dyes, the more common being red dye from crushed mangrove roots. The connection between Papuan and Islander women’s coverings was documented by Landtman (1933: 34):

The same type of petticoat is seen in Waboda, Sageru [Wabuda Island, Segera village near Dibiri Island] and Mawata and is said by my Mawata informants to have been worn in ancient times by the women in the Torres Strait islands.

**Hair and nose ornaments**

The hair of both men and women was adorned with combs (*ipegi*) and ochres or clays. Women generally clipped their hair and wore it short. Both Islanders and Papuans wore a wide variety of ornaments, notably those made from shells and teeth. In early times the septum of the nose was pierced and smooth curved pieces of clam shell (*Tridacna* sp.), cone shell (*Conus* sp.), *Cassis* sp., or even bailer shell (*Melo* sp.) pointed at both ends, were inserted. Thick stubs of clam or *Cassis* sp. shell were worn as common daily ornaments but long nose sticks (*ini*) were worn on ceremonial occasions (Haddon 1912, IV: 39; Moore 1984: 69 and 45, and Plates 5 and 33; VK 4902: 168 [nose stick], VK 4902: 160 [nose plug]).

**Necklaces and breast ornaments**

Many types of necklaces worn close to the throat and chest pendants or breast ornaments attached to a cord and hung to the middle of the chest were worn by men and women. Necklaces were usually fashioned from shell, teeth or seeds and necklaces made from dogs’ teeth attached to fibre cords (*genaio* or *gesa*) were highly valued for only the four canine teeth could be taken from one dog. Strings of teeth were worn by women and girls on ceremonial occasions and formed a ‘considerable part of the price of a canoe or of the gifts given in exchange for a bride’ (Landtman 1933: 41; Haddon 1912, IV: 41). Necklaces of dogs’ teeth were commonly worn by people along the whole southwest coast as far as present day West Papua (VK 4902: 203). Other necklaces were made from reef shells and one form, made from ‘olive’ shells (*Oliva* sp.), was of considerable value. It too could be used as part of exchange for canoes (Haddon 1912, IV: 41 and 44).
Illustration 11. Dogs’ teeth necklace (VK 4902: 203)

Crescent-shaped breast ornaments of pearl-shell (nese) constituted important exchange items right across the Torres Strait and Fly estuary region. Usually, most of the shell was left undecorated and only the outer edge incised or lightly decorated. A small hole, for attachment of a cord or fibre, was bored through the base but the shape of the pearl-shell itself was generally retained (VK 4902: 183).

The circular polished bases of the cone shell (Conus sp.) termed bidibidi (Kiwi) [dibidibi (Meriam) or dibidib (Kala Lagaw Ya) in the Torres Strait] were one of the most valuable breast ornaments worn by Islanders and coastal Papuans and of singular value in the exchange of shells for canoe hulls. The whole of the flattened base of the shell was removed and ground down to make a thin white disk with the upper surface generally convex. Occasionally the edge was nicked and a hole was bored into the side. Fibre or cloth was attached as a cord. Haddon (1912, IV: 44) wrote:

The dibidibi, even more than most ornaments, except the waiwi or wauri [mabuo (Kiwi) armshells] ... served also as a kind of currency. They varied much in size and finish and had a corresponding value, thus no table of equable exchange can be drawn up. I [Haddon] gathered that
ten or twelve *dibidibi* of fair size would be equal in value to a large shell armlet ... to a canoe, to a dugong harpoon, or to a wife. Three or four *dibidibi* would constitute an annual instalment for a canoe …

Cone shell breast ornaments were collected by Haddon and his associates on Mer (Moore 1984: 70 and Plate 36) and other examples of cone shell breast ornaments can be found in the Landtman collection (VK 4902: 189). One example, consisting of six cone shell bases strung together on a plaited base forms part of the Landtman collection (VK 4902: 194). However, strings of *bidibidi* were not as common as the single *bidibidi* breast pendant.

Illustration 12. Breast ornament (VK 4902: 189)

Other breast ornaments of shell, European tradestore cloth and even boars’ tusks were worn as ornaments. Boars’ tusk breast ornaments were obtained from the coastal Papuans who hunted in the open savanna lands between the inland riverine swamps and these tusks were worn on Mer at initiation ceremonies by the men who controlled the Malo-Bomai cult ceremonies (see Haddon 1912, IV: 50–51, and in Moore 1984: 78 and Plate 47). Boars’ tusks were worn as armlets. Imitation boars’ tusk pendants could be made from the shell of the giant clam (*Tridacna* sp.) or, in the Torres Strait, from the shell of the large *Trochus* sp. (Haddon 1912. IV: 51).
Belts

Varieties of shell and seed ornaments were attached to belts (*bata* or *bage*): the more usual being of cowrie shells (*Cypraea* sp.) or *Coix* sp. seeds. Many of the shells which hung from belts served as rattles especially in dance for the collective coordinated sound of the rattles could be very impressive. In coastal Papua various seeds and shells, most commonly small cowries, were attached to belts and armlets as decoration (Landtman 1933: 44).

Armlets and leglets made from fibres

Plaited armlets and leglets (*susare, tusare or tutabe*) made from plaited rattan or coconut leaves were also worn for dances and warfare. At dances crotons or other coloured leaves were inserted in the arm and leg bands which, like belts, could be plain or decorated. Plaited armlets were often ornamented with shells, seeds or calico (VK 4902: 327). The Haddon collection contains numerous examples of armlets plaited from cane, coconut midrib or fibre from the swamp grass that were worn right across the region (Moore 1984: 46, 47, 58, 72 and Plates 5, 6, 21 and 37).
Forearm bracers (*adigo*), usually worn as protection against the recoil of bow strings, and made from sago palm spathe or plaited rattan, were worn by men both in warfare and in ceremony (VK 4902: 311 and 314). Commonly a decorated plume of cassowary feathers (*kioma*) was inserted into the forearm bracer. Into the armguard could be inserted a loop or a series of loops of cane decorated with cloth or cassowary and pigeon feathers (Haddon 1912, IV: 57–58). This cane loop was representative of one or more spare bowstrings worn by coastal Papuans on the lower arm, but had become a ‘functionless dance ornament’ in the Torres Strait islands (Haddon (1912, IV: 58; D’Albertis (1881, II: 173). Landtman (1933: 43) noted that the *koima* was commonly worn by all those Papuan peoples who habitually carried bows and arrows for hunting and fighting and agreed with Haddon’s interpretation that the *koima* represented a spare bowstring modified to become a dance ornament.

**Armlets made from shell**

Pigs’ tusks (*boromo kokai*) could be used as armlets on the upper arm. Haddon collected examples of these armlets from Mer that were decorated with *Coix* sp. seed and seed tassels and bound with calico (Haddon 1912, IV: 55 and figure 75). A fine example is illustrated and documented in Moore (1984: 77 and Plate 46). A similar object in the Landtman collection (VK 4902: 380) consists of two boars’ tusks bound with fibre. Hanging from a cord attached through a hole in one tusk is a variety of decorative items including a European button, a crustacean claw and a *goa* seed (*Pangium edule*).

Undoubtedly, the most prized armlets, and the most important artefacts in the pre-European exchange of shells for canoe hulls, were armshells made from cone shells (*Conus* sp.) called *wawri* by the western Islanders and *wauri* by the eastern Islanders of the Torres Strait and *mabuo* by the Kiwai. Both Haddon (1912, IV: 56) and Landtman (1933: 43) noted the prized value of these arm ornaments that were largely obtained by the central Islanders from the reefs around Tudu or the Warrior Reefs. While the base of the shell could be made into a valued breast ornament, the remaining cone could be cut off. If the shell were large then a circlet of shell, with faint black spots, could be removed and used as an upper arm ornaments (see VKK 513 and 514).

Even more prized were the top portions of the cone after the removal of the bases. Part of the cone could be removed and the remaining conical shell with a strong circlet base could be worn as an upper arm decoration. Few examples of these valued armlets have been collected by museums. The Landtman collection has no examples of *mabuo* armlets although they were obviously seen and photographed by Landtman in the field (see Landtman 1933: 44, Figure 52 and VKK 513 and 514)[see Figure 27]. It is perhaps indicative of the high
value placed on such objects that Landtman was not able to obtain examples for those photographed are fine specimens. Haddon collected examples of the base-ring shell armlet in 1889 from Mer and he was able to procure an unmodified *Conus* sp. shell from Mer in 1898 (Moore 1984: 73 and 74 and plates 37 and 41). However, one full set of cone shaped *mabuo* and one circlet of shell was collected in 1986 during research in the Fly estuary (Lawrence 1994: 358 and 437–38).

**Headdresses made of cassowary feathers: the *daguri***

**Illustration 14. Daguri headdress (VK 4902: 13)**

The most commonly worn men’s headdress made of black cassowary feathers was the *daguri* and this was most commonly worn by men of the southwest coast of Papua and the Fly estuary during warfare. Young boys first put on the headdress at initiation (Haddon 1912, IV: 36; Landtman 1933: 37). It is now worn for special dances and ceremonies. The basic form of the headdress was common throughout the region. Small bunches of plain, undecorated cassowary feathers were bound together tightly and inserted into a plaited headband usually stiffened with rattan. The shape of the headband varied only slightly but the usual ceremonial or dance band was a lozenge-shape with curved sides. Two thin cords attached at the sharpened edges tied it to the head. The cassowary
feathers were tightly plaited into the woven fibres at the back, and the front was often decorated with over-plaiting and coloured with ochre. These headdresses are still made in the inland villages, notably near Wipim. Haddon and Landtman both collected a number of examples of daguri headdresses (Moore 1984: 48, 76, 77, and 102 and Plates 7, 45 and 78; VK 4902: 13/14/20 and 26). Variety was added to these headdresses by the addition of bird of paradise plumes, pigeon or cockatoo feathers, or pieces of European tradestore cloth. In some cases the whole bird of paradise was used, its beak being used as a pin (VK 4902: 94/95 and 99, 101 and 103). These plumes are now extremely rare.
Headdresses made of reef heron feathers: the *dori*

The finest headdress worn by the Torres Strait Islanders and coastal Kiwaispeaking peoples was the *dori* (Kiwai). Its importance as a cultural item is still such that it is a most visible symbol of Islander culture, particularly for the eastern Islanders and the *dari* (eastern islands) is the most prominent symbol on the officially recognised Torres Strait Islander flag.

The headdress consists of a woven rattan frame in either an ‘n’ or an ‘m’ shape. Cords at the feet of the frame were tied around the forehead so that the rattan frame stood high above the head. The feathers of the white reef heron (*Demigretta sacra*) or the Torresian pigeon (*Ducula bicolor*) were inserted into the frame to form a fan shape. Often one long frigate bird feather, preferably black, was inserted in the top so as to extend vertically. At the base of the feather a red bean (*Mucuna* sp,) was placed. The white feather tips were clipped into various stylised shapes for effect and two long feathers projected from the base almost at the level of the wearer’s cheeks. Both Haddon and Landtman collected examples of *dori* headdresses and the cane frames for the feathers (VK 4902: 121; Moore 1984: 76 and plate 44).

Illustration 16. *Dori* headdress (VK 4902: 121)
The *dori* were often quite large and elaborate. When worn in night dances with the dance ground illuminated with small fires or torches, the actions imitating the movements of the reef heron could be most spectacular and effective. Like the *dari* used in ‘Island dance’ the headdresses serve to frame the face and special dance effects are achieved by turning the head suddenly so that the image of the reef heron appears and disappears.

The most complete details of the construction of the headdress was given by Haddon (1912, IV: 37-39) who stated that all such headdresses were imported from New Guinea. However, as only the coastal Kiwai perform dances with *dori*, and generally they refer to this style of dance as Islander-style dancing, it would appear that the style of dance and the use of the headdress were borrowed from the Torres Strait and was incorporated into coastal Kiwai dance culture. The Torres Strait Islanders have elaborated the *dari* dances into an art form.

**Frontlets**

Other items of ornamentation and dress included a large variety of stiff frontlets (*makeso*) made from rattan or fibre plaited on to a bamboo frame that were worn across the forehead and tied at the back of the head. Frontlets were made in a variety of designs: triangular, semi-ovoid or even a lozenge shape (VK 4902: 108 and 109) (see also Haddon 1912, IV: 39 and Moore 1984: 76 Plates 43 and 44). Landtman (1933: 38) wrote that these frontlets could be used both with and without cassowary feather decorations. A variety of headdresses were made from plaited fibres, rattan and feathers and even cuscus fur (*Phalanger* sp.) was worn as a decorative fillet. Haddon (1912, IV: 35) collected one cuscus fur head decoration at Tudu in 1888 which he stated had come ‘from New Guinea’ and Landtman (1933: 39) collected from Kiwai Island a similar head decoration, with shells and rattles made from *goa* seeds attached (VK 4902: 113).

**Recreation, ceremony and dance**

The objects used on ceremonial occasions, such as masks and drums, are included in this category along with other sound-producing instruments and ornaments specifically made for dance performance such as dance-wands seed pod rattles and shell trumpets. Raw material for masks, such as turtle shell, was an important trade item and bamboo tobacco pipes were highly regarded.

**Drums**

Torres Strait Islanders obtained all their waisted drums from coastal Papua (Haddon 1912, IV: 278) and the common Torres Strait drum used on all present
day dancing and music occasions is still obtained from Papua. Originally there were two different types of waisted drums. The first, the older form, the *warupa* consisted of a hollowed out single piece of wood, with a definite, waisted central portion and a bowl-like tympanum end. Landtman (1933: 68) stated that the *warupa* originated in Saibai:

According to tradition, the first drum in Mawata was a warupa, and it came from Saibai, which is said to be the original home of all drums in that part of the country, the inhabitants of that island not having learnt the art of making drums from any other people.

These older waisted drums are still referred to as ‘Saibai drums’ even though they are no longer manufactured there. A fine *warupa* illustrated in Edge-Partington (1969, I: Plate 332 No. 1) now located in the British Museum was made for Rev. Samuel Macfarlane on Saibai. These drums were distinctive for their open ‘shark’ or ‘crocodile’ mouth ends and were described by Jukes (1847, I: 176) and Haddon (1912, IV: 280). However, few remain, even in museum collections. Fine old drums, like canoes, often had individual names and, like famous canoes, were often mentioned in stories.

Haddon noted that the average length of the *warupa* was about one metre with a diameter at the tympanum end of about 20 cm. The tympanum could be covered with file snake (*Acrochordus spp.*), land lizard (*Varanus spp.*) or wallaby skin, although lizard skin was the most common. While wallaby skin gave a deeper sound it could not be tightened for long. Beeswax added to the tympanum was heated over a fire in front of the drummer and the small pieces acted both to tighten the lizard skin and to give the skin and the hand a sticky surface which made drumming more effective. The outer surface of the old drums was heavily ornamented and often cassowary feathers and shells decorated the open end.

The sacred Malo drum of the Miriam people, Wasikor, is still kept on Mer under the protection of the Noah family of Kewaid village. It belongs to the Zagareb clan and was used in the last re-enactment of the Malo/Bomai dances performed by Murray Island people in 1977 for the St James Church building fund. Originally part of a pair of drums, the companion, Nemau, was burnt by the crew of the bêche-de-mer boat the ‘Woodlark’ about 1860 (see Haddon 1908, VI: 43, 190 and 296; Fisher 1856/57). It is the most famous ceremonial drum in the region.

Other open-mouthed drums, simpler in form were obtained from Kiwai Island (VK 4902: 622; Haddon 1912, IV: 280). This type of drum is known as *buruburu* (western islands), *boroboro* (eastern islands) or generally *gama* among the Kiwai but the onomatopoeic nature of the word *buruburu* makes it the more popular term. These are more cylindrical in shape, with a waist generally central across
the drum. The open circular end is not cut into a ‘shark’ mouth. A *buruburu* was collected by Haddon on Yam Island (Haddon 1912, IV: 279) and Landtman collected typical ‘contemporary’ drums from Kiwai Island (VK 4902: 625, 626 and 628). Photographs from Mawatta (VKK 323) show that Kiwai men had the knowledge of manufacture of *buruburu* or at least how to improve the sound of the drum but now obtain them from inland.

Illustration 17. Old style drum (VK 4902: 622)

Illustration 18. New style drum (VK 4902: 626 and 628)
Drums of this type, now used throughout the Torres Strait, originate from the villages located in the well-wooded inland region at the headwaters of the Pahoturi, Binaturi and Oriomo rivers. Waisted drums from the inland region all have handles carved from the same piece of timber as the body of the drum. They are generally about one metre in length with an even symmetrical shape, decorated at the base with carved diamond and triangular patterns. These carvings are usually repeated around the handle boss. The drums are left unpainted although the outer surface is usually blackened with charcoal before carving. At the present time these drums are used by most Torres Strait Islander dance groups both on the Australian mainland and in the islands although they are often recarved and overpainted with bright acrylic paint which adds to their visual impact during competitive dance performances.

Drums have been, and still are, important items of material culture in the Torres Strait and Fly estuary region. Perhaps the reason for this is that no readily transportable, functional substitute has been found that could reproduce the quality of sound and visual impact of the wooden hand drum.

**Shell trumpets**

Shell trumpets, *tuture*, were made by boring a lateral mouth hole in the whorl of a *Fusus* sp., *Syrinx* sp., or *Triton* (*Charonia tritonis*) shell (VK 4902: 637). They were used by men in canoes for signaling success in hunting and warfare but they were also used to decorate burial places (Landtman 1933: 73) or placed on the central poles of the old style round houses of the eastern Torres Strait Islanders (Haddon 1912, IV: 283).
Rattles
Hand held rattles (kokare) made from the shells of seeds of the goa (Pangium edule) tree were used in both action and ‘sit down’ dances by the Torres Strait Islanders. They are still used by both Islanders and Papuans. Landtman (1933: 72) collected examples of goa and shell rattles from the mouth of the Fly River (VK 4902: 655) and Haddon collected an example on Mer (Moore 1984: 83 and Haddon 1912, IV: 272). Rattles have an important place in coordinated dance movements that add sound and drama to performances.

Masks
Haddon noted (1912, IV: 296–97) that two varieties of mask existed: those made either from a single block of wood (mooa) (see VKK 511) or those constructed from pieces of turtle shell (karara) stitched together. Turtle shell, especially from the less common Hawksbill turtles, was traded across the Torres Strait. In the Queensland Museum, one beautiful turtle shell mask on a wooden base, with a fillet of cassowary feathers and other adornments, was acquired on the southwest coast of Papua late last century (Queensland Museum E 4777) and a similar mask in the collection (QE 4668 also numbered E 5929) was obtained on Erub. In the same way one well-made wooden mask with pearl-shell buttons for eyes in the Landtman collection (VK 4902: 135) collected at Mawatta, is similar to objects in the Queensland Museum obtained from on Mer (E 5930) and Saibai (E 5488). A heavily decorated piece of turtle shell, most likely part of a turtle shell mask, was obtained at Mawatta by Landtman (VK 4902: 1318). In 1888, Haddon (1888: 5 and 6) obtained turtle shell masks, drums, armbands and ornate objects, as well as tobacco pipes, bows and arrows on Nagi in the Torres Strait but noted that all these objects originated on the Papuan mainland.

In addition, Haddon collected a number of fine turtle shell masks from the central, western and eastern islands (Moore 1984: 48, Plate 7; 59, Plate 22; 75, Plate 41 and 42). Landtman (1933: 75 and 76) collected wooden masks at Mawatta, on Kiwai Island, and at Kubu between Gaima and the Aramia River. Of masks and masking in general Haddon (1912, IV: 296) remarked:

Highly characteristic of Torres Straits are the numerous masks and effigies which have been obtained on the islands. This art extends to Daudai [Papua], and it is probable that some specimens labelled “Torres Strait” in museums have come from the mainland, it is easy to determine whether a given unlabelled specimen came from the district generally, but not whether it belongs to the [Torres Strait] islands or to Daudai.
While material, such as cassowary feathers and *goa* shells, were probably obtained from Papua, it is likely that important ceremonial masks used on the mainland were made from turtle shell and ochres obtained from Torres Strait Islanders.

Illustration 20. Wooden mask with pearl-shell button for eyes (VK 4902: 135)

**Bamboo tobacco pipes**

Tobacco was the only narcotic used by the Torres Strait Islanders (Haddon 1912, IV: 141) and although it was used in coastal Papuan and the Fly estuary, the Kiwai also used *gamoda* (*Piper methysticum: kava*) made from tapping into the soft stalks at the crown of a coconut palm. *Gamoda* can be drunk at an early stage with no ill effects, but over time becomes highly fermented if left in its container on the palm. It is potent and may cause blindness if drunk in quantities. ‘Native’ or bush tobacco was probably introduced into the Torres Strait from the mainland north of the Fly and was generally known as *sukuba* (Haddon 1912, IV: 143). The introduction of European tradestore tobacco in the form of ‘black stick’ tobacco had an immediate social and economic impact. When Landtman conducted his field research stick tobacco had become a virtual currency and had quickly entered the customary exchange system:
Nowadays trade-tobacco, manufactured in Australia under Government control, is almost exclusively used among the natives. It is much in demand among them and constitutes one of the principal articles of barter with them. (Landtman 1933: 65–66)

Landtman paid his informants and servants in stick tobacco. Although he thought he made good bargains with his informants, they no doubt made even better deals with their own people or with the people in the interior who had limited access to the European wage system. *Sukuba* is still used as the general name for tobacco or cigarettes among the coastal Kiwai.

The tobacco pipes (*waduru*) used throughout the region consisted of a length of stout bamboo containing two or more nodes. In the node at one end a hole was bored, and near the other end on the side, a hole was cut in the surface. A thin wooden tube, with a slightly curved-in base, was filled with tobacco which was lit and inserted into the hole on the side. Smoke was either sucked into the bamboo pipe or blown into the pipe through the small tobacco bowl and the pipe passed to another who inhaled the smoke. The exterior of the pipe, but not the small bowl, was most often heavily decorated with pecked or incised designs representing animals, or geometric and stylised patterns.

Considerable variety exists in decoration on tobacco pipes held in museum collections. Tobacco pipes in the Queensland Museum (E 13/257 and QE 4288) were collected on to Mer and a similar pipe in the National Museum of Finland (VK 4902: 658/662 and 665) was collected from the Fly estuary. This type of pipe was to be found throughout the whole Kiwai district and neighbouring districts, and both Haddon (1912, IV: 141) and Landtman (1933: 66) referred to them as ‘Papuan pipes.’

![Illustration 21. Bamboo tobacco pipes (VK 4902: 658 and 662)](Image)

A sketch made in 1845 shows men from Masig Island in the central Torres Strait near a village on Nagi with a bamboo tobacco pipe as well as bows and arrows.
McNiven and Quinnell 2004: cover illustration) and another particularly fine pipe now in the Queensland Museum collection (formerly James Cook University collection 80.4.1.) was obtained by Captain V. Lovett-Cameron, in or before 1876, from the western islands of the Torres Strait. Documentation associated with the pipe states that it belonged to a member of the Baidam [Baizam: shark] clan that was represented on Mabuiag, Moa [Mua], Muralag, Nagi, Tudu, Yam and Saibai as well as among the Kiwai of Mawatta and Tureture (Haddon 1904, V: 151–57). Among the Miriam-speaking eastern Islanders the *batzam boai* [shark men] were among the most important members of the Malo/Bomai cult (Haddon 1908, VI: 285–86). However many tobacco pipes are decorated with shark designs and this may have led to a belief that they only belonged to members of the Baidam clans.

The fact that Papuan tobacco pipes were also common among the Australian Aboriginal people of Cape York was noted by Moore (1979: 27–28, 98-99, 222, 281–82), Haddon (1947: 79) and Thomson (1939: 82). Tobacco pipes were observed in use among the Aboriginals on Cape York by Moseley (1892: 356) who stated that they were obtained by the Gudang people of Cape York from the Murray Islanders through ‘barter’. Landtman collected tobacco pipes and photographed men and women smoking and preparing pipes (VKK 310).

**Warfare**

Artefacts of warfare used included bows, arrows, bamboo knives, cassowary bone daggers, human skulls and heads, cane loops for holding human heads, spears and stone-headed clubs. Some objects may belong to more than one category: bows and arrows were used both as weapons of war and as hunting implements for killing fish and wild animals and cassowary bone daggers were also used as coconut huskers.

Inter- and intra-ethnic warfare was endemic prior to the consolidation of European administration and mission control. Warfare consisted of sporadic surprise raids on isolated groups or villages and the history of these raids is still told in story, song and dance. The memory of specific raids, particularly those of the ‘Tugeri’ from the Dutch territory to the west, is still keen among the coastal Papuans near Buji and the Pahoturi River as well as among the nearby Saibai and Boigu Islanders. These raids were usually made by groups of armed men in canoes accompanied by their women carrying digging sticks or cassowary bone knives (Landtman 1933: 31). The object of these quick sporadic attacks was to kill as many people as possible and obtain a number of human heads before retreating in their fast war canoes.
Cassowary bone daggers

The Landtman collection contains examples of fine cassowary bone daggers (*wagi* or *soke*) (VK 4902: 493 and 494). These have been decorated with crabseye seeds (*Abrus precatorius*) although cassowary bone daggers were used by both men and women to disable prisoners taken during raids. More generally they were used as coconut huskers (Landtman 1933: 57). One example in the Haddon collection (Moore 1984: 64 and Plate 20) is recorded as ‘imported from New Guinea’ and having been used as a coconut husker on Mer.

Illustration 22. Cassowary bone dagger (VK 4902: 494)

Bows and arrows

Split bamboo bows (*gagare*), often up to two metres in length, were in common use as weapons prior to pacification (Haddon 1912, IV: 174). Bows are today used only as dance accessories in the Torres Strait but are still used for hunting wallaby, cassowary and wild pigs in coastal Papua. The principal manufacturers of high quality bows were, and still are, the Agob, Gizra and Bine people of Papua although some bows are now obtained from the Morehead River area to the west. The best bamboo in its green pliable state comes from the swampy wetlands behind the Papuan coast. The bowstring is made from a thin (approx. 125mm wide) strip of green bamboo, knotted into two loops at either end and
pulled over the points of the bow stave. Contrary to Haddon's (1912, IV: 174) poor opinion these bows are very accurate and powerful. At close range they can drive a steel tipped arrow completely through a small wallaby.

A number of bamboo bows in the Landtman collected are provenanced to Kiwai Island (VK 4902: 759). These bows are of a form common throughout the coastal Papuan region west of the Fly estuary. The bows and arrows observed by Cook in 1770 at Possession Island near Cape York (Haddon 1935, I: 4, and Flinders 1814, I: xv) were most likely in the hands of western Islanders rather than Cape York Aboriginals.

Illustration 23. Bamboo bow (VK 4902: 759)

All arrows (tene) used by Torres Strait Islanders came from Papua (Haddon 1912, IV: 175). There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the thin reed used for making arrow shafts grows in the riverine swamps and marshes of coastal Papua, not on the islands of Torres Strait and, secondly, arrow-heads were made from cassowary or wallaby leg bones, animals that can only be hunted in the bush lands of coastal Papua. Arrows of this region were all constructed from a reed shaft and a separate arrow-head. The variety of arrow was very wide for the type of arrow-head was directly related to its function. Among the inland and
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riverine dwelling people, this functional classification of arrows still applies and this classification was documented by Haddon (1912, IV: 175–90) and Landtman (1933: 50–55).

The most attractive and highly prized arrows came through Buji and were made by the Agob-speaking people who lived between the Mai Kussa and the Pahoturi River. The Agob continue to make these fine arrows and they are still used by neighbouring groups who refer to them as ‘Buji arrows’. These arrows are decorated with an infinite variety of designs using the three colours: red, black and white. The red dye is made from mangrove root, black from charcoal mixed with juice and white from lime made by baking and crushing shells.

‘Man-arrows’

The most distinctive arrow of the region has been called the ‘man-arrow’ (otame) (Haddon 1912, IV: 184–86 and Landtman 1933: 50). The man-arrow, like other arrows, is constructed from two different materials, forming the shaft and the head, but the lower portion of the arrow-head is finely carved to represent the culture hero Muiam who was heavily tattooed. Man-arrows belong to specific clan groups. Contrary to the statement in Moore (1984: 103) they were never used in warfare or hunting. However, they retain the ceremonial role of a weapon for they were used in ritual wounding and killings particularly in cases of adultery. Their full practice and use is still guarded. Man-arrows are specifically objects of ritual and ceremony for the Gizra and the neighbouring Bine peoples. They originate among the clan groups of Waidoro and Kulalae (Togo) area and as Dirimu and Masingara villages have kinship ties with the Gizra, clan arrows were distributed through these groups.

Haddon (1912, IV: 184–86) described the general characteristics of man-arrows in considerable detail but made no comment on their origins, meanings or uses. One example in the Haddon collection (Moore 1984: 103 and plate 79), attributed to the Torres Strait in general, was collected in 1888 and Haddon in an early paper (Haddon 1894: 51) remarked that man-arrows were known in both the western and the eastern islands of the Torres Strait as parulaig (Kala Lagaw Ya) or opop (Meriam) meaning that ‘it had a face’. The Landtman collection contains numerous examples of man-arrows (VK 4902: 929) that are often included in bundles of other arrows.

Stone-headed clubs

The most common weapon of the Kiwai in former times was the stone-headed club (gabagaba). Stone heads were usually flat or biconvex stones with a hole in the centre through which a stout rattan stick was inserted. Clubs were often
carried in the hand, or over the shoulder by means of a cord loop. Stone-headed clubs were used as a weapon by Torres Strait Islanders and their use was noted by Jukes (1847, II: 19). The most common form used (Haddon 1912, IV: 191–92) was biconvex and disc-shaped with a central hole. This common form was collected by Haddon from Muralag (Moore 1984: 52 and Plate 13) and Yam in 1888 (Moore 1984: 57 and Plate 20), and from Mer in 1898 (Moore 1984: 96 and Plate 75).

The second form collected by Haddon was the star-shaped stone-headed club (Moore 1984: 52 and Plate 13; 96 and Plate 75) may have been used in ceremonies, particularly the Malo/Bomai cult in the eastern islands, or in dances (Haddon 1912, IV: 192). The Landtman collection contains a number of plain bi-convex stone-headed clubs (VK 4902: 569) and one star-shaped stone-headed club (VK 4902: 573).

Haddon (1912, IV: 191) recorded information collected by his associate Wilkin in Mabuiag that stated that stone-headed clubs came from Dauan, Saibai and Mer. Haddon (1912, IV: 191) doubted this information but noted that a disc or star stone-headed club cost one dugong harpoon or one armshell. Recent archaeological evidence supports a Torres Strait origin for stone used in gabagaba (McNiven and Quinnell 2004).

Unusual examples of clubs were collected from the mouth of the Fly River by Landtman (1933: 55) (VK 4902: 574 and 575). These clubs incorporated metal heads in place of stone heads. One example (575), possibly a brass plate from a ship, had a metal head, attached by three iron nails, with three large screw and bolt holes and a small piece of angled metal attached by two screws to the plate.

Illustration 24. Gabagaba clubs (VK 4902: 574 and 575)

Bamboo headcarriers

A distinctive artefact of warfare found in museum collections and definitely Kiwai in origin is the bamboo headcarrier (gara oro) that consists of a loop of
rattan with the ends tightly lashed to a cross-piece sometimes made from the dart of an old dugong harpoon (Haddon 1912, IV: 199–200). Supplementary bindings made of coconut fibre held the rattan and cross-bracing together. This simple but distinctive object was used during former times to carry severed heads. The loop of rattan was passed either through the mouth of the severed head and the cut neck, or through the floor of the mouth, so that the cross-piece rested against the lower jaw (Landtman 1933: 57 and Haddon 1912, IV: 200).

Headcarriers were valued by families and clans as reminders of past glories of ancestors and were even included in ceremonies and dances. Three fine examples in the Landtman collection were collected from Kiwai Island (VK 4902: 581–83) all of which incorporate old dugong harpoon darts as cross-pieces.

Illustration 25. Bamboo headcarrier (VK 4902: 582)

Bamboo knives

A second distinctive artifact of warfare from coastal Papua, and associated with the bamboo headcarrier, was the bamboo ‘headhunting’ knife (uere). Haddon collected one example at Mabuiag in 1898 (Moore 1984: 52 and Plate 13), a ‘model’ of a beheading knife and headcarrier at Mer in 1889 (Moore 1984: 84 and Plate 55) and another bamboo knife at Tudu in 1888 (Haddon 1912, IV: 199).

The bamboo knife consisted of a split piece of stout bamboo about 30–50 cm. in length. Into one concave end a piece of wood or pith was placed and this was
bound patterned into a handle with fine cord or string. The edge of the knife was sharpened by cutting a notch near the handle and removing a sliver of bamboo (Haddon 1912, IV: 200). This left the blade with a sharp clean-cutting edge but had to be done regularly as the bamboo blade become blunt and dull quickly. Bamboo knives could be used for cutting other flesh, for example, dugong or fish, though Haddon (1912, IV: 199) reported that the number of notches in the handle indicated the number of heads cut. According to Landtman (1933: 55–56), the Kiwai of Iasa village previously employed shells as knives but learnt the art of making bamboo knives from the people of Kubira village who are said to have originated in Wabuda and Dibiri Islands near the intersection of the Fly and Bamu estuaries. Landtman (1933: 56) described with some colour the various methods used in severing heads.

The Landtman collection contains some fine examples of old bamboo knives, one of which (VK 4902: 580) has a finely plaited cord handle. This example, as with others in the collection (VK 4902: 576 and 578), was collected on Kiwai Island. Beheading knives, like headcarriers, were valued objects and were possibly objects of exchange between close kin for they were closely associated with respected ancestors among both Islanders and Papuans. Many of the items worn as dress in warfare, such as cassowary feather headdresses, boar’s tusk ornaments, fibre skirts and pubic shells have been discussed previously. Ceremonial dress and decoration were carefully made and were of high value, for a man’s renown and style was tested by his skill as a warrior and a warrior wore only his finest ceremonial dress and accoutrements into battle.
The Landtman collection is an important one and complements the more famous Torres Strait collections held at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Together with smaller collections in Australia, they comprise the most significant examples of Torres Strait and Kiwai material culture available for research today.