

10

The Pacific archaeology and ethnography of Hjalmar Stolpe and the *Vanadis* Expedition, 1883–85

Aoife O'Brien

Cultural safety advice: Readers are advised that this chapter includes images of human remains.

Introduction

(Knut) Hjalmar Stolpe (1841–1905) has often been referred to as the founder of Swedish ethnography (Culin 1906:155; Larsson 2013:305). However, his contribution to ethnography, anthropology and archaeology in a Pacific context is not as widely known as perhaps it should be. Focusing on Stolpe's role as ethnographer during the *Vanadis* expedition, specifically the Pacific portion of this voyage between May and August 1884, this chapter considers how the combination of these disciplines shaped Stolpe's work and the types of objects he acquired.

The *Vanadis* expedition was a Swedish–Norwegian government-funded scientific and trade mission that circumnavigated the globe between 1883 and 1885. The voyage was to promote Swedish–Norwegian commerce by developing global economic trade connections with the countries the expedition visited, which would in turn strengthen diplomatic and

commercial ties. Furthermore, the journey was used as an educational and training exercise for the Swedish navy that crewed the ship. A final remit was that the expedition be used as an opportunity to make scientific observations and collections for the Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien/The Royal Academy of Sciences. For this purpose, Stolpe, then an employee of the Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet/National Museum of Natural History, was hired as ethnographer while Oscar Birger Ekholm (1861–90) was employed as professional photographer.

Apparently, Stolpe did not keep journals during the *Vanadis* journey. However, included in the Hjalmar Stolpe archive held at Etnografiska Museet/The Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, is a series of *dagböcker*/*notebooks* written by him during the expedition (Museum of Ethnography, Professor Hjalmar Stolpes efterlämnade handlingar 1883–1885, Ö1: 10, *Dagböcker*).¹ One notebook, Volume 3, documents Stolpe's time in Nuku Hiva, Fakarava and Tahiti, while Volume 4 refers to Hawai'i and Jaluit. This chapter uses these notebooks as a primary source of information, offering as they do personal insights into the themes that Stolpe was interested in at the time, such as tattoo patterns, the way in which he worked and how he acquired objects. At each place the ship stopped, Stolpe quickly recorded different types of information in the notebooks – places visited, lists of objects purchased and from whom, local words and their translations, sketches of objects, sketches and information of tattoo patterns and ornamentation, and the names, gender, age and height of people photographed. Although by no means complete or detailed, it is plausible that Stolpe later referred to information and observations made in the notebooks when drafting publications.

Archaeology and object collecting

The Royal Academy's primary instruction to Stolpe was to undertake ethnographic and anthropological research and to collect ethnographic objects for the creation of a new Ethnography Museum in Stockholm.² As

1 In total there are nine notebooks from Stolpe's *Vanadis* voyage: Volumes 1 and 3–9, as well as an unnumbered/untitled notebook. Volume 2, which should refer to time spent in South America, is currently unaccounted for.

2 Stolpe received 10,000 Swedish kronor from Pontus Fürstenberg, a Gothenburg-based art dealer and merchant, £100 from the Royal Geographical Society and several stipends from The Swedish Society of Anthropology and Geography to purchase objects and put towards photography costs during the expedition (Ljungström 2004:81–83). However, while in the Pacific he ran short of cash and was aided by King Oscar II who donated 6,000 Swedish kronor to assist (Erikson 2015:310).

part of his work, Stolpe was required to take anthropometric measurements from Indigenous peoples, to collect skulls and, where possible, entire skeletons for scientific analysis (Erikson 2015:265). Bo G. Erikson has pointed out that the main reason ethnography and physical anthropology were given priority over archaeology was that two of the three professors responsible for drafting Stolpe's instructions were Gustaf von Düben and Gustaf Retzius, two of the leading physical anthropologists of the day in Sweden (Bo G. Erikson pers. comm. 2018; Erikson 2015:225).

With these mandates, opportunities for archaeological work were rather limited. A qualifier in Stolpe's instructions stated that, if possible, he was to undertake archaeological excavation, with Peru and Japan being singled out by the Royal Academy as potential sites. However, this proved difficult to achieve as the amount of time spent in most locations did not allow for archaeological excavations to take place, nor indeed did it allow Stolpe adequate time to engage in research and collecting. The shortness of time spent ashore caused considerable friction between Stolpe and Otto Lagerberg, the captain of the *Vanadis*. Lagerberg apparently viewed ethnographic collecting to be of secondary importance to *Vanadis*' economic, diplomatic and naval education mission (Erikson 2015:265–266).

Their journey through the Pacific lasted from May to August 1884. Stopping first at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands (8–12 May), the ship travelled on to Fakarava Atoll in the Tuamotu Islands (15–17 May), Tahiti in the Society Islands (19 May – 2 June), O'ahu in the Hawaiian Islands (20 June – 10 July) and Jaluit Atoll in the Marshall Islands (26 July – 2 August). As the stays on the islands were generally very short, apart from Tahiti and O'ahu where they stopped for several weeks, Stolpe was largely reliant upon local guides and resident Westerners for objects. Several of the resident traders he purchased from had previously supplied objects to museums in Europe. Of the over 7,500 objects from the *Vanadis* expedition that entered the Museum of Ethnography collection, around 1,000 were collected in the Pacific.³ The collection is a mix of object types and materials, with a strong emphasis on creating a representative catalogue of the material culture that defined the lives of the people Stolpe collected from. This included examples of tools and utensils, weapons, ornaments and dress. Archaeological objects were acquired where possible, but ethnographic objects dominate.

3 Evidence suggests that Stolpe collected around 10,000 objects during the voyage but that not all entered the museum (Erikson 2015:347, 382). It is likely he made a private ethnographic collection outside of his official collecting.

During his time in the Pacific, Stolpe was developing his theories on ornamentation and the evolution of art styles among Indigenous races, which he would publish several years after the voyage (Stolpe 1890, 1896, 1927; Steinberg and Prost 2007:111). In this work, he was building upon the comparative object and ornament research he had initiated during his 1880–81 tour through Europe, during which he undertook extensive research on ethnographic collections held in museum collections. At many museums, Stolpe made drawings or rubbings of decorative patterns or specific object styles, which helped him formulate and develop his ideas.⁴

If we examine the archaeology or stone-related objects Stolpe purchased or acquired during the *Vanadis* expedition, we can see a similar concern with acquiring sets of the same ‘types’ of object in each location. Utilitarian objects such as stone adze heads, pounders and mortars were acquired in each location visited in the Pacific, presumably for comparative purposes. An estimated 28 pounders, 33 adze heads and four mortars were acquired by Stolpe and other crew members in the Marquesas Islands, Hawai‘i and Tahiti. Stolpe appeared interested in collecting objects in various states of finish and of differing quality. Adze heads range from those that feature finely worked and polished surfaces and bear little evidence of use to others that are coarser and show signs of significant use (Figure 10.1).



Figure 10.1. A large stone adze head (unhafted) with a roughly worked surface, collected in the Hawaiian Islands.

There is considerable damage to the blade edge.

Source: National Museums of World Culture – Museum of Ethnography, Sweden (Adze head, Inventory No. 1887.08.1723): collections.snmvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1599403. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence.

⁴ Rubbings and drawings from his 1880–81 tour are now part of the Stolpe archive at the Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm.

Stolpe acquired a range of pounders – important objects used in the preparation of food. The variances and similarities in the shape of the pounders, as well as the different types of stone used to create them, seemed to interest him. While most pounders were made from basalt, one said to have come from Mangaia in the Cook Islands, which Stolpe purchased in Tahiti, was carved from a distinct yellow-coloured stone (Museum of Ethnography, Object ID 1887.08.1587). Another pounder, also purchased in Tahiti, was fashioned from coral, indicating a flexibility in the choices Indigenous craftspeople had when it came to creating such objects (Museum of Ethnography, Object ID 1887.08.1463) (Figure 10.2). A fine-grained basalt pounder (*popoi*) Stolpe purchased in Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands features a carved tiki head in Janus form (Museum of Ethnography, Object ID 1887.08.1314) (Figure 10.3). The finely carved features of each face and the decorative motifs depicted between them would surely have appealed to Stolpe's interest in ornamentation and tattoo patterns.



Figure 10.2. A pounder (*penu*) carved from coral, collected at Paea, Tahiti.

Source: National Museums of World Culture – Museum of Ethnography, Sweden (Pounder, Inventory No. 1887.08.1463): collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1599222. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence.



Figure 10.3. A finely carved tiki-headed pounder (*popoi*) in Janus form, collected in the Marquesas Islands.

The stone is very fine grained with minor damage to the surface.

Source: National Museums of World Culture – Museum of Ethnography, Sweden (Pounder, Inventory No. 1887.08.1314): collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1204514. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence.

By the time of the *Vanadis* expedition, many of the islands visited had been under colonial rule for many years and the Indigenous inhabitants Christianised. In Tahiti, objects associated with former beliefs were, in some cases, discarded or commodified and Stolpe was able to purchase five stone *ti'i*, god images, at Paea (for example, Museum of Ethnography, Object ID 1887.08.1479) (Figure 10.4). Stolpe recorded some object purchases in his notebooks, occasionally including sketches of the object and the amount paid, but he did not always identify the person(s) from whom he acquired them. As such, it is possible that he paid Indigenous guides for objects acquired or taken from shrines he visited.



Figure 10.4. Tahitian god image (*ti'i*) purchased by Stolpe between May and June 1884.

Source: National Museums of World Culture–Museum of Ethnography, Sweden (God image, Inventory No. 1887.08.1479): collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1599238. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence.

As he was interested in understanding the evolution of ornament through comparative typology, by collecting the same types of object in different geographic locations within the Pacific, Stolpe could potentially chart similarities or differences across the region. In doing so, he could potentially understand how seemingly isolated communities developed object form and decoration within their material culture, or how ideas spread from one community to another.

Archaeological survey and human remains

As noted above, Stolpe did not have time to engage in archaeological excavations during his often-fleeting visits to these islands. However, in the notebooks Stolpe referenced a few occasions when he and Ekholm had opportunities to venture inland, to visit archaeological and burial sites, to survey and to photograph. Photography was an important

aspect of the documentation and information collecting Stolpe engaged in. It was used to document people, objects, canoes, villages, scenes of daily life, landscapes and sacred sites or shrines, with Stolpe frequently recording information of photos taken in his notebooks. As expedition photographer, Ekholm appears to have been somewhat under Stolpe's direction in terms of the subjects selected for photography. During the voyage, he took an estimated 700 photographs, roughly 200 of which were taken in the Pacific. Glass plates and prints of these images form part of the *Vanadis* collection held at the Museum of Ethnography.

Alongside ethnography collecting and photography, Stolpe was active in collecting other items. In his notebook, Stolpe recorded paying someone identified as a 'Kanak' on Nuku Hiva \$14 for five crania and a child's coffin (Museum of Ethnography, Object IDs 1887.08.1291–1296). The notebook does not clarify if these were remains Stolpe found during his excursion inland and the payment offered by way of compensation to the guides/locals, or if the remains were offered to him by a local. As Stolpe had instructions to collect human remains during the expedition, excursions inland and to archaeological sites such as graveyards became opportunities to locate burials and remove bones, particularly skulls. At Paea, Tahiti, in May 1884 Stolpe surveyed a burial cave together with a Tahiti guide, identified in Stolpe's notebook as Kanakea. Ekholm took two photographs of the cave entrance, one showing a human skull in situ and a second featuring Kanakea and Stolpe inside the cave with Stolpe holding the skull (Museum of Ethnography, Photograph ID 2-163 and 0237.0009) (Figure 10.5).⁵ He entered the cave to examine the burial and noted the dimensions of the cave, including the width and height of the main and side chambers, an outline of which he sketched in his notebook. Although given Museum of Ethnography accession numbers, the Nuku Hiva ancestral remains did not physically enter the museum collections. They ultimately became part of the Karolinska Institutet collections and were repatriated in 2015. Similarly, no human remains from Tahiti entered the Museum of Ethnography's collection, but Bo G. Erikson suggests that Stolpe did indeed remove this skull (Bo G. Erikson pers. comm. 2018).

5 We were initially concerned about potential community sensitivities regarding depictions of human remains in this photograph and are grateful to the Department of Culture and Heritage (Direction de la Culture et de Patrimoine, DCP) in Tahiti for recommending that the best way to balance historical objectivity and potential community concerns would be to publish this photograph in its entirety, without obscuring the human remains, and to include cultural safety advice at the beginning of the chapter (Anatauarii Leal-Tamarii pers. comm. 2021).



Figure 10.5. Hjalmar Stolpe alongside Kanakea, a local guide, photographed removing a skull from a burial cave at Paea, Tahiti.

Source: Photo by Oscar Ekholm, 1884. National Museums of World Culture Museum of Ethnography, Sweden (Image No. 0237.0009, PD): collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1461519.

While on O‘ahu, Stolpe surveyed several burial caves in the Nu‘uanu Valley which he documented and sketched in his notebook (*Dagböcker/Notebook Volume 4*). The first cave was located at a height of 650 ft and contained the remains of several individuals including a coffin that had been painted red. Grave offerings, including a tobacco pipe and some glass beads, were present. In a second cave lower down, at about 100 ft, Stolpe observed a more recent burial, with the body still in a state of decomposition but clothed. Kukui nuts had been placed close to the body. While he entered the cave and documented the remains and grave goods, Stolpe appears to have left both sites intact. However, during a visit to Waimanalo a few days later, he found what he described as a common graveyard located in relatively sandy soil (*Dagböcker/Notebook Volume 4*; Erikson 2015:299). From this site he removed several skeletons and crania that were sent to Sweden and entered the collections of the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, the former Department of Anatomy at Uppsala University, and the Historiska museet in Stockholm. These remains were repatriated to Hawai‘i in 2009 (Erikson 2015:299–300).

Stolpe had expressed dissatisfaction with the anthropometric data he was required to collect by the Royal Academy and quickly ceased that aspect of his work, believing that the time required to prepare casts and busts took too much time away from ethnographic collecting (Erikson 2015:288). However, he still actively acquired, indeed sought out, human remains for collection and scientific analysis. The scientific data believed to be attainable from such remains perhaps outweighed any moral compulsions Stolpe may have felt in engaging in acts that were tantamount to grave robbing.

Conclusion

Stolpe was clearly a gifted ethnographer and was genuinely interested in accurately recording information on the Indigenous peoples he encountered, yet his attitude towards the collection of human remains is problematic and difficult to reconcile. As an archaeologist and ethnographer, Stolpe's collecting instructions from the Royal Academy clearly stated that human remains were to be acquired, and these were instructions he adhered to. While his instructions regarding acquiring anthropometric data were quickly sidelined to allow him to concentrate on ethnographic collecting, the same could not be said when it came to collecting human remains.

The realities of the *Vanadis* voyage and the limited opportunities presented to engage in in-depth ethnographic research on the peoples he encountered and their material culture did frustrate Stolpe. However, he made the most of the time he had in each location, furiously scribbling in his notebooks, recording objects purchased and their Indigenous names, sketching sites visited and the layout of graves, illustrating tattoo motifs and recording the names, age and gender of people photographed. Additionally, Ekholm's photographs of sites of archaeological and ethnographic interest were valuable visual documentation of the islands visited and the lives of Pacific Islanders. Stolpe's notebooks offer an overview and some insights into themes that occupied him during his time in the Pacific. The material culture he collected, particularly the multiple examples of object 'types', indicate the confluence of ethnographic, anthropological and archaeological thought that influenced and directed his collecting.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Elisabet Lind for her assistance translating Stolpe's almost illegible handwritten notes from his *dagböcker*/notebooks. It was no easy task. My thanks also to Bo G. Erikson and Håkan Wahlquist for their comments and assistance.

Objects highlighted in this chapter were on display at the Etnografiska Museet/Museum of Ethnography, National Museums of World Culture, Stockholm from March 2020 to September 2021.

References

- Culin, S. 1906 Hjalmar Stolpe. *American Anthropologist* 8(1):150–156. doi.org/10.1525/aa.1906.8.1.02a00160.
- Erikson, B.G. 2015 *Kungen av Birka: Hjalmar Stolpe arkeolog och etnograf*. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Etnografiska Museet/Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, Archives. Professor Hjalmar Stolpes efterlämnade handlingar 1883–1885, Ö1: 10, Dagböcker.
- Larsson, Å.B. 2013 Staging the white colonial explorer – visual representations of science and the scientist on the Vanadis expedition 1883–1885. *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 82(4):304–321. doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2013.851114.
- Ljungström, O. 2004 *Oscariansk Antropologi: etnografi, förhistoria och raskorskning under sen 1800-tal*. Hedemora; Uppsala: Gidlund.
- Steinberg, E. and J.H. Prost 2007 Bringing ethnography home: Knut Hjalmar Stolpe's works in Peru (1884). *Andean Past* 8:109–143.
- Stolpe, H. 1890 Utvecklingsföreteelser i Naturfolkens Ornamentik. *Ymer*: 193–250.
- Stolpe, H. 1896 *Studier i amerikansk ornamentik. Ett bidrag till ornamentens biologi*. Stockholm: Tryckeri i Central-Tryckeriet.
- Stolpe, H. 1927 *Collected essays in ornamental art*. Foreword by H. Balfour, translated by Mrs H.C. March. Stockholm: Aftonbladets Tryckeri.

This text is taken from *Uncovering Pacific Pasts: Histories of Archaeology in Oceania*, edited by Hilary Howes, Tristen Jones and Matthew Spriggs, published 2022 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/UPP.2021.10