

**NOTES AND QUERIES, SCIENCE, AND ‘CURIOS’:  
LIEUTENANT BOYLE SOMERVILLE’S ETHNOGRAPHIC  
COLLECTING IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, 1893–1895**

DEBORAH WAITE

*Introduction*

AN Anglo-Irish family, hydrographic surveying, and the manual *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* provided interlocking discursive frameworks for the activities of the British naval officer Lieutenant H. B. T. Somerville in the Solomon Islands, where he served as a member of a naval hydrographic surveying expedition from 1893 to 1895 (Fig. 1). The activities with which I am particularly concerned here are those relating to the process of collecting—through photography, sketching,

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FIG. 1. Lieutenant Boyle Somerville, with surveying instruments. From a print of a photograph taken by an unknown photographer, New Georgia, Solomon Islands, c. 1922–1924 (PPM 1922.266.29). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Uxbridge.

and the acquisition of artefacts produced by Solomon Islanders. While each discursive framework may be seen as relating to narratives of British imperialism and colonialism (Said 1993: 73–4), I am also interested in considering Somerville as an individual actor, whom I attempt to understand through an analysis of the particular artefacts he chose to acquire and an examination of his published and unpublished writings, photographs, and sketches. Taken together, these reveal a great deal about the particular, colonially enframed experiences of Somerville the collector; or so this article contends.

### *Background*

Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, known generally as Boyle, was born at Castletownshend, County Cork, Ireland on 7 September 1863 to an Anglo-Irish family, the second eldest son in a family of seven children. Life for Boyle Somerville and his siblings centred on Drishane, the family home at Castletownshend. Typically for Anglo-Irish families in the mid-nineteenth century, money was tight, but the family occupied a large house, owned horses, and enjoyed other aspects of an upper-middle class existence distinguished from the lives of the Irish people around them. Though the Somervilles interacted with their Irish servants and neighbours, whom they knew well and liked, taken generally, the Irish constituted an 'other'. Indeed, the Irish people, their manners of speech and customs, were the subject of numerous books and articles by Boyle Somerville's eldest sister, the writer Edith Enone Somerville.<sup>1</sup> Even after going their separate ways as young adults, the Somerville siblings returned to Drishane whenever they could; even when apart they maintained contact through frequent letter writing. More than 3000 letters survive in the family archives at Drishane, approximately eighty of them from Boyle to Edith.<sup>2</sup> In the context of this essay, it is also important to note that photography and sketching were everyday activities for the Somerville children. Thus Boyle acquired initial expertise in photography and sketching at home, before receiving formal instruction during training at the Royal Naval Academy. Moreover, these seemed to have been for him more than mere practical achievements, for he had something of an artistic bent. Writing to her collaborator Martin Ross from Drishane on 24 August 1888, Edith Somerville describes Boyle on his return from the East as being 'full of art fads, and theories' (see Lewis 1989: 113) and goes on to explain his keenness for nice books in general and Rossetti's

<sup>1</sup> Many of Edith Enone Somerville's books were co-written with (Violet Florence) Martin Ross, the most famous being *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (Somerville and Ross 1899).

<sup>2</sup> For Boyle's letters to Edith, see Rauchbauer 1995: 70–71, 140, 162–4.

poems in particular as due to his being 'built that way' (ibid.). Among the other interests he pursued during his lifetime were writing plays, family history research, and prehistoric British archaeology (see Collis 1968: 89–90, Lewis 1989: 112).

Somerville's career in the Royal Navy took him far from Castletownshend. Before his expedition to the Solomon Islands, he saw action during the Chilean–Peruvian war (1880), the first Egyptian war (1882), and in China (1884–88). Duty with the British Hydrographic Surveying Service in Australia and the Western Pacific occupied him from 1888 to 1896. Somerville explained his choice of the surveying branch of naval service in a letter to Edith dated 18 December 1890. A major practical consideration was the greater likelihood of promotion for lieutenants in the hydrographic surveying department, in contrast to other departments in the Royal Navy. Seemingly also of major importance for Somerville was the escape that surveying offered from the uniformity of drills and other dull features of naval life, as well as the opportunity for 'new interests daily, a truly free, artistic, useful occupation in these days of alarums and explosions and intolerable uniformity' (ECS Archive: L.B.389a–f).

Somerville sailed to the Solomon Islands aboard the surveying ship *HMS Penguin*. From July 1893 to February 1895, the crew of the *Penguin* surveyed the waters of the western Solomon Islands around New Georgia Island, particularly the Marovo Lagoon along the island's east coast. The *Penguin* also made five voyages to Uki (or Ugi) island, the site of a naval coaling depot in the south-eastern Solomons (now Makira Province), for refuelling and provisioning. Each stop along the coasts of the many islands in the lagoon provided Somerville and his colleagues with opportunities for collecting.

The expedition of the *Penguin* took place during the final years of British colonization in this part of the Pacific. Britain had maintained 'loose control' over the area from 1877 to 1893 under the jurisdiction of the British High Commissioner in Fiji, but political interest in the region had grown because of its economic significance. In particular, the eastern Solomon Islands had become major sources of labour for British colonial plantations in Fiji and Queensland, Australia. This was never the case for eastern New Georgia Island, however, and, in particular, not for Marovo Island where the surveying activities took place; intense headhunting and the active presence of traders had led labour recruiters to avoid the region. Authority over British subjects living in the Solomons was maintained by the British High Commissioner in Fiji and was reinforced by annual patrols by navy ships through the archipelago. By 1892, the British government had realized that a permanent protectorate in the Solomons would better enable them to protect their labour resources and the resident British citizens; and to keep out other European colonial powers, notably Germany and France. The official establishment of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and the arrival of the first resident commissioner, C. M. Woodford, took place in 1896 (see Bennett 1987: 103–5, Hviding 1996: 106).



*FIG. 1. Lieutenant Boyle Somerville, with surveying instruments. From a print of a photograph taken by an unknown photographer, New Georgia, Solomon Islands, in 1893 or 1894 (PRM 1998.266.29). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.*

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Throughout this time, hydrographic surveying had been deemed instrumental for adequate surveillance in colonial waters (Ritchie 1995: 208). Coastal surveying involved such invasive manoeuvres as the setting up of semi-permanent camps, which often entailed the partial clearing of bush and timber. As for the surveying process, to quote Somerville (1928b: 13): 'starting points...are usually established on island-tops and cliff-tops...points chosen must be clearly discernible through a theodolite telescope, sometimes from fifteen, or even twenty miles distance, so that it is necessary to build on these summits great cairns of stone'. Alternative strategies included 'painting large patches of whitewash' on rocks and setting up 'large wooden tripods, surmounted by bamboo flagstaffs, thirty feet high, with bright-coloured flags' (ibid.; see also Somerville 1897: 360, 1928a: 34).<sup>3</sup> Such surveying operations created contact zones for communication between naval officers and islanders, especially as camps were often set up near villages. Islanders were paid for all manner of assistance, including guidance to the tops of peaks or remote offshore islets (which were of varying degrees of sacredness). Also, these spaces/places frequently harboured artefacts for the acquisition of which the local guide(s) became the indigenous agency, enabling Somerville and his colleagues to collect more easily than they could otherwise have done.<sup>4</sup>

### *The 'Notes and Queries' of a Collector*

In the opening paragraphs of Somerville's only published article about his encounters in the Solomons, 'Ethnographical Notes in New Georgia, Solomon Islands', written for the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* (and, thus, for an audience of late nineteenth-century British anthropologists), he states that the headings in the article are taken 'in the order given in "Notes and Queries on Anthropology"' (Somerville 1897: 357). *Notes and Queries* was a compendium, published in a number of editions, of short articles and topically organized lists of questions compiled by such leading anthropologists as E. B. Tylor and A. C. Haddon.<sup>5</sup> It is quite clear that in planning and writing his article, Somerville used the second

<sup>3</sup> Despite the seemingly intrusive nature of these acts, the arrival of the *Penguin* was viewed by Marovo Islanders as a sign of peace to come; that is, as an end to the ceaseless head-hunting raids by people from the Roviana Lagoon on the south coast of New Georgia Island (Hviding 1996: 110–11).

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting discussion of comparative Melanesian material, see the section on 'issues of agency' in Michael O'Hanlon's introduction to *Hunting the Gatherers* (O'Hanlon 2000: 15–18).

<sup>5</sup> The first edition had been published in 1874 (BAAS 1874). For a useful account of the history of the various editions of *Notes and Queries*, see Coote 1987: 258 ff; see also Urry 1972.

edition of 1892 (Garson and Read 1892) and it seems likely that he had a copy of it with him in the Solomons.<sup>6</sup>

In the second edition, the topics for investigation were grouped under the rubric of 'Anthropography' (Part I, comprising 'Anatomical Observations' and 'Physiological Observations') and 'Ethnography' (Part II). The principal intended users of *Notes and Queries* were people travelling and living in far-flung parts of the British Empire among vanishing 'races', as such people were described by Tylor and other British scholars of the late nineteenth century. These scholars believed that only by studying and recording the customs of those peoples whom they placed at the opposite end of the evolutionary scale from civilization (as defined ethnocentrically in British terms) would they be able to 'reconstruct the course of man's development' (Stocking 1987:156-64, esp. 163). While designed for the use of laymen, however, *Notes and Queries* was never used exclusively by them; numerous anthropologists, including A. C. Haddon, E. H. Man, and Bronislaw Malinowski, also employed it (Coote 1987: 256).

The 'Prefatory Note' to the 'Ethnography' section of the second edition of *Notes and Queries*, which was devoted to general advice about how to pursue investigations in the field, contained a set of instructions that clearly manifests how the 'evidential value' of photography was stressed in late-nineteenth-century British anthropology (see Poignant 1992: 42, 62):

The best plan seems to be to devote as much time as possible to the photographic camera or to making careful drawings, for by these means the traveller is dealing with facts about which there can be no question, and the record thus obtained may be elucidated by subsequent inquirers on the same spot, while the timid answers of natives to questions propounded through the medium of a native interpreter can but rarely be relied upon... (Read 1892: 87)

<sup>6</sup> The structure of Somerville's 1897 article on the Solomons may be usefully compared with that of his two-part article about Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides) published a few years earlier, also in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* (Somerville 1894a, 1894b). The structure of the first part of this earlier article is straightforward enough, but owes nothing to *Notes and Queries*, arguably to its benefit. After an untitled geographical introduction, there are sections on 'Social Customs', 'Chiefs', 'Religion', 'Sacred Men', 'Dances', 'Rainmaking', and 'Narak' (a form of 'witchcraft'). The second part, however, has a series of sections that follow closely, both in order and in title, the sections of the 1892 edition of *Notes and Queries*. Three introductory sections are followed by sections on 'Clothing, Ornaments, &c.', 'Painting and Tattooing', 'Dwellings', etc. It thus appears that between February 1893 and January 1894 (when the respective papers on which the two parts of the article were based were read at the Anthropological Institute) Somerville had adopted *Notes and Queries* as a guide to his ethnological research and writing. This was presumably a result of whatever contact he had had with anthropologists at the Institute and elsewhere in the previous months.



In the Solomons, then, Somerville's written work and collecting appear to have taken place within the framework inscribed by the essays and instructions in the manual. Part one of *Notes and Queries* concerned the body physical, that is to say, 'Anatomical Observations' and 'Physiological Observations'. Somerville's response to this part is evident enough, though not as directly as his response to Part II. In his 'Ethnographical Notes in New Georgia', Somerville does not, for example, deal directly with the numerous questions posed under section XVIII, 'Attitudes and Movements' in *Notes and Queries* (Beddoe 1892). Moreover, while he took anthropometric measurements of men from New Georgia Island he does not seem to have taken supporting photographs or to have made anthropometric charts, and he never expanded upon this data in his published or unpublished works (Poignant 1992: 62). He did, however, speak of the practice of measuring individual Solomon Islanders (a process he termed 'anthropologizing') in at least two letters written to his sister Edith (ECES Archive: L.B.397a-f, 398a-b) and his photographs appear to provide evidence of his perusal of this part.

The second part of *Notes and Queries*, that devoted to 'Ethnography', provided Somerville with his principal investigatory parameters. This part of *Notes and Queries* reflected the belief then current among British anthropologists that objects produced by 'native' peoples should be viewed as scientific specimens containing valuable information about the stages of technological development, spiritual belief, and related practices within their early phase of culture. The impact of Darwinian evolutionary theory was clearly evident, above all in Tylor's definition of culture, which differed considerably from what we now understand by the term. Tylor's definition, as Stocking (1987: 302) puts it, 'lacked a number of the features commonly associated with the modern anthropological concept: historicity, integration, behavioral determinism, relativity, and...plurality' and was, by contrast, 'singular and hierarchical—as his frequent references to "uncultured" savages suggest' (ibid.).

The series of articles in Part II of the 1892 edition of *Notes and Queries* begins with the topic of 'Clothing', followed by 'Personal Ornaments', 'Painting and Tattooing', 'Habitations', etc. Somerville explored all the categories that were relevant to what he discovered in the Solomon Islands, considering them in the same order, and mirroring in his writings many of the same attitudes; though from time to time the experiences he had that did not fit the paradigm intrude into the otherwise predictable text. The articles in *Notes and Queries* refer to the prospective subjects of investigation as 'savage and barbarous', 'uncivilized', and 'lower tribes' (Tylor 1892a: 147, 1892b: 130, 1892c: 149). Somerville concurred. The superiority of their canoe construction was, he remarked (Somerville 1897: 369), 'a most astonishing revelation of scientific art in a people little removed from complete savagery'. As for 'Morals and Customs': 'there is, I suppose, some sense of morality, as we understand it, in these savages, though what there is must be inherent in each individual, as there appears to be no generally recognised standard

of what should be considered "right" or "wrong"; nor any law but revenge' (ibid: 393).

On the other hand, Somerville noted that whereas 'their general demeanour is by most white people said to be "ferocious", and certainly they are inveterate head hunters' (ibid.: 358), it was true to say that 'our officers never experienced anything but civility, good temper, and occasionally kindness at their hands' (ibid.). Moreover, he found Bera, a leader of Marovo Island, to be 'a decent old chap' who 'behaved like a friend to us' (Somerville 1928a: 35; see also Hviding 1996: 98). Kimbo, who cured Somerville after an excruciatingly painful centipede bite, was spoken of with considerable admiration in a lecture Somerville gave to the Cork Literary and Scientific Society (Somerville 1928a: 40–42). There are a number of other clues indicating that Somerville was at least partly aware that his experience of positive personal encounters in the Solomons did not altogether fit with his characteristic British cultural predisposition toward alterity.

In Somerville's article, customs ranging from fire-making to canoe building received a thoroughness of treatment corresponding to the exhaustiveness of the questions raised in *Notes and Queries*. Like so many visitors to 'other' regions of the British Empire, Somerville was particularly struck by those customs most foreign to his sense of morality; that is, 'cannibalism', headhunting, and associated practices. A world filled with spirits, or *hope*, and their practical interaction with people also fascinated him,<sup>7</sup> as did the material images allegedly manifesting/containing spirit presence. Although he was not to have first-hand observation of many of the practices that intrigued and/or repelled him, Somerville seems to have obtained good second-hand information from local people, especially from those who served as guides.

### *Photography*

Somerville photographed sites, villages, canoes, and people; indeed the majority of his photographs feature people. His published writings provide no insights into his photographic work, but fortunately he does make a few remarks in his letters to Edith. It was, of course, a more or less 'natural' pursuit for him, as photography had long been a family preoccupation. The first mention of photography, in a letter to Edith dated 18 December 1890 (prior to his going to the Solomons), reveals that he did not know how to 'print or tone at all', but was forced to rely on others (EES Archive: L.B.389a–f). On 13 August 1893, only a few months after his arrival in the Solomons, he reported to Edith his intention of setting up a dark room.

<sup>7</sup> Somerville's interest in the spirit world of the Somerville Islanders may perhaps be related to the interest that members of his family, particularly an Uncle Kendal, had in spiritualism (see, for example, Collis 1968: 95).

He had apparently tried his hand at photographing orchids, but the attempt was unsuccessful (ECES Archive: LB.396a-b). In a letter dated 15 August 1894 he states that he had sent a group of glass-plate negatives to Sydney for printing (ECES Archive: L.B.399a-b).<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, Somerville took his photographs several years before they were published in 1897 and there appears to be no information available as to his motives—for example, as to whether at the time he intended them for publication. Many were not published, of course, but it is likely that their reproduction in some form or another was at the back of his mind while he was in the Solomons. Most of the photographs, both published and unpublished, may be seen as constituting direct responses to questions posed in *Notes and Queries*, and a number of them were used to illustrate the sections dealing with material culture in Somerville's published article about New Georgia (see also Poignant 1992: 55). For example, the image captioned 'Native Wearing Sunshade' illustrates the discussion of 'Clothing' (Somerville 1897: 361); 'Two Natives of New Georgia' illustrates 'Ornaments' (ibid.: 364); 'Native with Canoe, Showing "Totuishu"' illustrates 'Navigation' (ibid.: 372); 'Boy Playing Flute' illustrates 'Music' (ibid.: 395); 'Man Poising Spear' illustrates 'War and Weapons' (ibid.: 400), and '"Kumiti" Making Fire' illustrates 'Fire' (ibid.: pl. XXXV).<sup>9</sup>

Examination of the photographs themselves reveals a great deal. The subjects were obviously posed, a fact that Somerville acknowledged in his lecture to the Cork Literary and Scientific Society when he discussed a photograph showing a man with a shield and spear. As if to emphasize the fact, Somerville (1928a: 38) assured his audience that he had not himself participated in, nor witnessed, any battles. Most of his photographs were taken out of doors and standard outdoor 'props' were used. A tree against which men (and, in one case, children) leaned was a favourite prop that provided an effective organizing compositional element.

The photograph published as '"Kumiti" Making Fire' (Fig. 2) exemplifies all these features. Kumiti sits in front of the entrance to a surveyor's tent, going through the motions of fire-making. Physical evidence of the surveyor's camp is not usually evident in Somerville's photographs; however, he mentioned in his lecture (Somerville 1928a: 42) that on Sundays the surveyors were always 'at home to the natives in the afternoon' and that many of them 'often came'. In this photograph, the folds of the tent opening provide a visually specific backdrop for

<sup>8</sup> In the same letter he recounts the unfortunate experience of one of his colleagues, Lieutenant (later Admiral) Munro, who had apparently run out of developer and left his negatives lying about, as a result of which they had faded to near invisibility.

<sup>9</sup> The original negatives for each of these survive in the Somerville collection at the Royal Anthropological Institute, respectively: RAI 13582, 13569, 13573, 13578, 13572, 13581. Prints of some or all of these may also be found in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum and elsewhere, as it was common practice at the time to make duplicates for other collections.

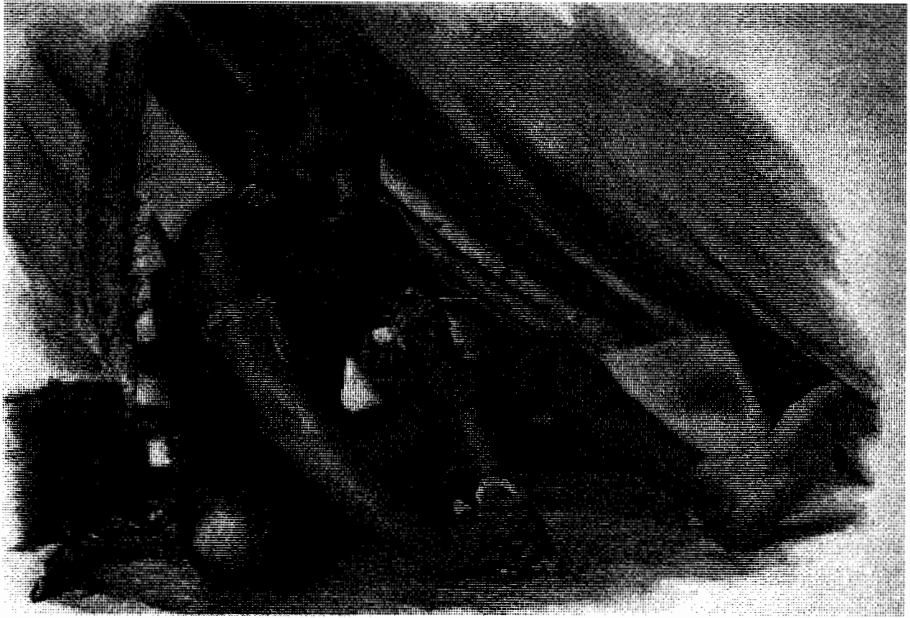


FIG. 2. "'Kumiti" Making Fire'. From a photograph taken by Boyle Somerville in New Georgia, Solomon Islands in 1893 or 1894. Reproduced from the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* for 1897, plate XXXI, where it illustrates the section on 'Fire' in Somerville's article 'Ethnographical Notes in New Georgia, Solomon Islands' (Somerville 1897).

the portrayal of fire-making. Kumiti sits with one leg extended, the other bent; he reaches down, clasping his hands over (and, ironically, concealing) the fire-making materials. His downward gaze avoids the camera. The manner in which Kumiti is posed shifts the viewer's attention away from the process that gives the published photograph its title (i.e. firemaking) and towards Kumiti himself—his face, bodily proportions, and ear and arm ornaments. Would it be fair to say that Somerville's interest in measuring people and observing their ornaments transcends the intended topic of this photograph?

The photograph published as 'Native with Canoe, Showing "Totoishu"' can be seen as emblematic of this artefactual interest (Fig. 3). The photograph shows a young man standing alongside the upraised prow of a war canoe; 'totoishu' (more properly, *toto isu*) being the local name for the carved wooden canoe figurehead visible against the young man's thigh. The upraised prow, heavily ornamented with shells, overshadows the man, whose 'native' appellation serves also to categorize the canoe. The placement of the ornamented prow in the absolute centre of the composition indicates visually that it, rather than the man, is the chief focus of

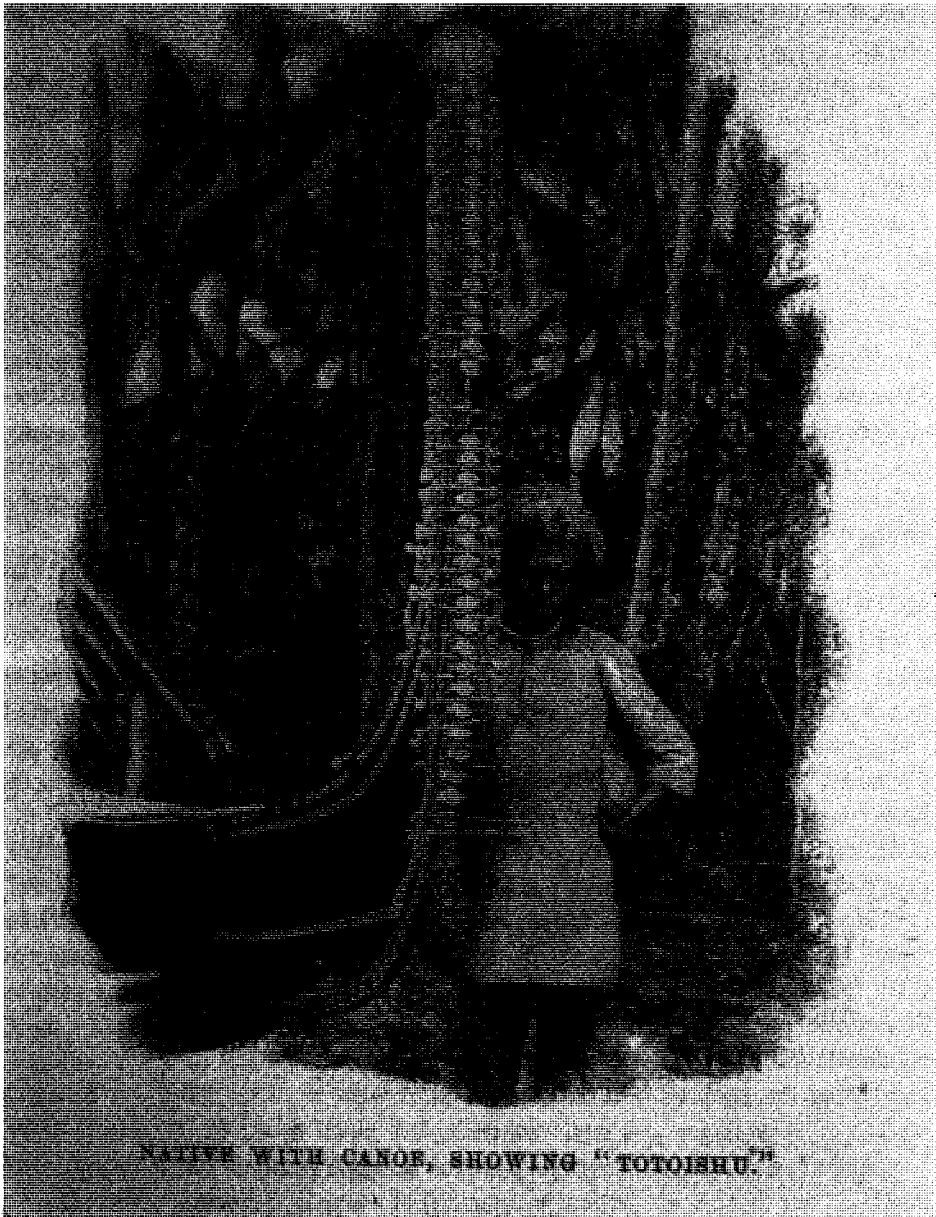


FIG. 3. 'Native with Canoe, Showing "Totoishu"'. From a photograph taken by Boyle Somerville in New Georgia, Solomon Islands in 1893 or 1894. Reproduced from the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* for 1897, page 372, where it illustrates the section on 'Navigation' in Somerville's article 'Ethnographical Notes in New Georgia, Solomon Islands' (Somerville 1897).



FIG. 3. 'Native with Canoe, Showing "Totoishu"'. From a photograph taken by Boyle Somerville in New Georgia, Solomon Islands in 1893 or 1894. Reproduced from the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* for 1897, page 372, where it illustrates the section on 'Navigation' in Somerville's article 'Ethnographical Notes in New Georgia, Solomon Islands' (Somerville 1897).

interest in the photograph, which is inserted at the end of the section devoted to canoes.

A particular operative strategy characteristic of the period consistently reveals itself in Somerville's photographs. Whether distant views or close detailed visual examinations of islanders (that is, regardless of degree of focal length), the photographs re-present or re-create a reality set up as a picture. This search for pictorial certainty in a world of alterity, be it the Far East or the Pacific, resulted in innumerable photographs taken in these places by European visitors in a manner that both distanced the photographer and created a visual or pictorial order according to Western rules of composition (Mitchell 1998). In the two published photographs reproduced here, the edges have been irregularly whitened out. This process, common in book illustration of the period (in fiction as well as non-fiction), creates an effect of distancing—an illusion of increased focal length between the subject and the photographer/viewer. This device does not appear to have been used in other articles published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* during the same period. Somerville's intent in using it here remains a mystery.

In addition to publication, Somerville's photographs had a second artefactual life as lantern slides illustrating lectures, such as one that he gave in 1928 to the Cork Literary and Scientific Society. For Somerville, like other visitors to the Pacific, photographs in the form of lantern slides presented at public lectures functioned as 'sites of social interaction' and as the 'focus for the constant repetition of visual re-enactments' (Edwards 1998: 125–7). A notebook containing captions for the slides Somerville used in his Cork lecture indicates that each of the slides shown was accompanied by a brief description of the practice illustrated in the slide.<sup>10</sup> For example, a close-up of the heads and shoulders of two men was taken in order to 'show the effect of an ear without and an ear with an earring inserted' (1928a: 36–7).<sup>11</sup> Four young men smiling at the camera were described as 'four young bloods of Munggeri, a village near one of our camps, all great friends of ours, four happy young cannibals' (ibid.: 37). Within the context of the lecture, Somerville communicated his scholarly interests along with numerous 'light' comments in order to signify difference, clearly setting himself (and the audience) apart from the people/subjects studied. His viewers were, as Elizabeth Edwards writes of the audience at a lantern-slide lecture given by A. C. Haddon in 1899, 'suspended and displaced in present past, the defining ambiguity of the photograph itself, yet one that allows "virtual witnessing" of the past' (Edwards 1998: 128).

<sup>10</sup> The notebook (Somerville 1893–5) survives in the Somerville papers at the Royal Anthropological Institute.

<sup>11</sup> The negative of the photograph survives in the Somerville collection at the Royal Anthropological Institute, negative number 1782.

### Sketching

In 1893 Somerville's party camped for three weeks near the village known to them as Bili (more properly Mbili), at the south-east entrance to the Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia. Formerly a centre for the manufacture of shell rings, or so Somerville was told, Mbili had been deserted after the death of its resident leader, Ngatu, about two months before Somerville's arrival (Somerville 1897: 329, 389–90; see also Hviding 1996: 93 and 394 n. 19).

At Mbili, Somerville made several detailed sketches. Why Somerville on occasion chose to record through sketching rather than photography is not known, though it is noteworthy, for example, that none of the surviving sketches includes people. What is clear is that sketching, like photography, enabled him, in a position of immediacy in relation to the objects that he chose to sketch, to distance himself and 'create something picturelike' (Mitchell 1998: 469). Edwards has noted that when doing field research in the Torres Strait in 1898, Haddon viewed photography and sketching as 'part of the tradition of scientific recording which, through its realism, could explain the real world' (1998: 118–19). The two activities, sketching and photography, were 'alternative routes to the revelation of truth' (ibid.: 119).

One of Somerville's sketches featured a *leba*, or skull house located just outside the village canoe house (Fig. 4). Verbally he described the structure as resembling:

[a] pigeon house with a carved and painted front. There was a shelf inside (for heads?) and in it the following articles—2 shell bangles, a netting reel, a mesh, a curious bamboo article used in fishing...a scoop and in it a bunch of hair which I was informed was the beard of Ngatu, the late chief...there were 2 or 3 more pipes and a part of a fishhook. (Somerville 1893–5)

Another sketch done at Mbili depicts one of the supporting posts of the canoe house. In Somerville's words: 'The supporting post had a figure carved on it (a god?). The tree from which it was made was selected so that two of the branches could be carved to represent arms. The hand of one held a revolver. An alligator was carved at the upper post just holding the head in its jaws' (ibid.; see also Somerville 1897: 366).<sup>12</sup>

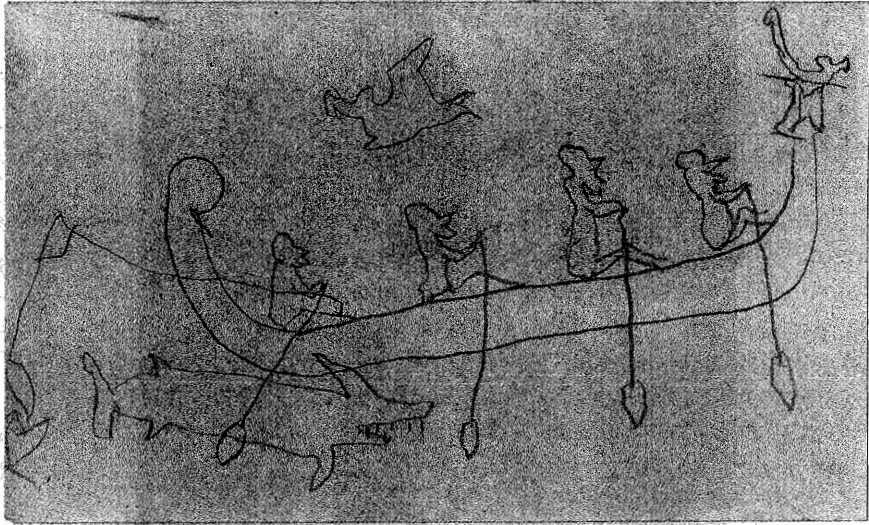
In addition to his own sketching, Somerville asked islanders to make sketches for him; one more form of collection as appropriation. Two very similar drawings depict a fishing party catching a shark with birds flying overhead (Fig. 5; see also Somerville 1897: 379). Others depict frigate-birds with fish in their beaks, a bird

<sup>12</sup> The sketch survives in the manuscript collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum: Coll. Misc. Ms. no. 19, f. 5.





FIG. 4. 'Leba or Skull-House at Bili (New Georgia)'; by Boyle Somerville (signed with the monogram 'BS'); undated (1894); Mbili Village, Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia; pencil, ink, and crayon (?) on cartridge (?) paper; 178 mm x 126 mm (cut from larger piece). Given by Somerville to the Pitt Rivers Museum in September 1895 (PRM Manuscript Collections, Miscellaneous Manuscripts no. 19, f. 7). Photograph courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



ROUGH DRAWING BY A NATIVE OF MUNGERI, NEW GEORGIA,  
SOLOMON I<sup>LES</sup>. SHEWING A BOAT WITH NATIVE FISHING  
WITH A KITE. PRES.<sup>d</sup> BY LIEUT. B. T. SOMERVILLE R.N. 1895.

FIG. 5. 'Rough Drawing by a Native of Mungeri, New Georgia, Solomon Ids, Shewing a Boat with Native Fishing with a Kite'; anonymous; undated (1893 or 1894); Mungeri District, New Georgia, Solomon Islands; pencil on paper/card; 175 x 105 mm. Commissioned by Boyle Somerville in 1893 or 1894 and given by him to the Pitt Rivers Museum in September 1895 (PRM 1895.22.283). Photograph courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

with a human head, and a drawing of a canoe ornament comprising a seated anthropomorph with a bird instead of a head (ibid.: 380).<sup>13</sup>

As always, Somerville documented these commissioned drawings in response to *Notes and Queries*: 'There is not the slightest notion of perspective, and all objects are shown in profile.... I fancy there is no idea of drawing from nature...all are drawn more or less in the same manner' (1897: 377). Nevertheless, he noted that islanders recognized photographs of people and places and responded to European drawings. They 'took special amusement in a political cartoon I once showed some of them, in which the figures represented an eagle and a snake with human heads' (ibid.: 378).

<sup>13</sup> These drawings also survive in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM 1895.22.283–285, 1900.21.42–43).

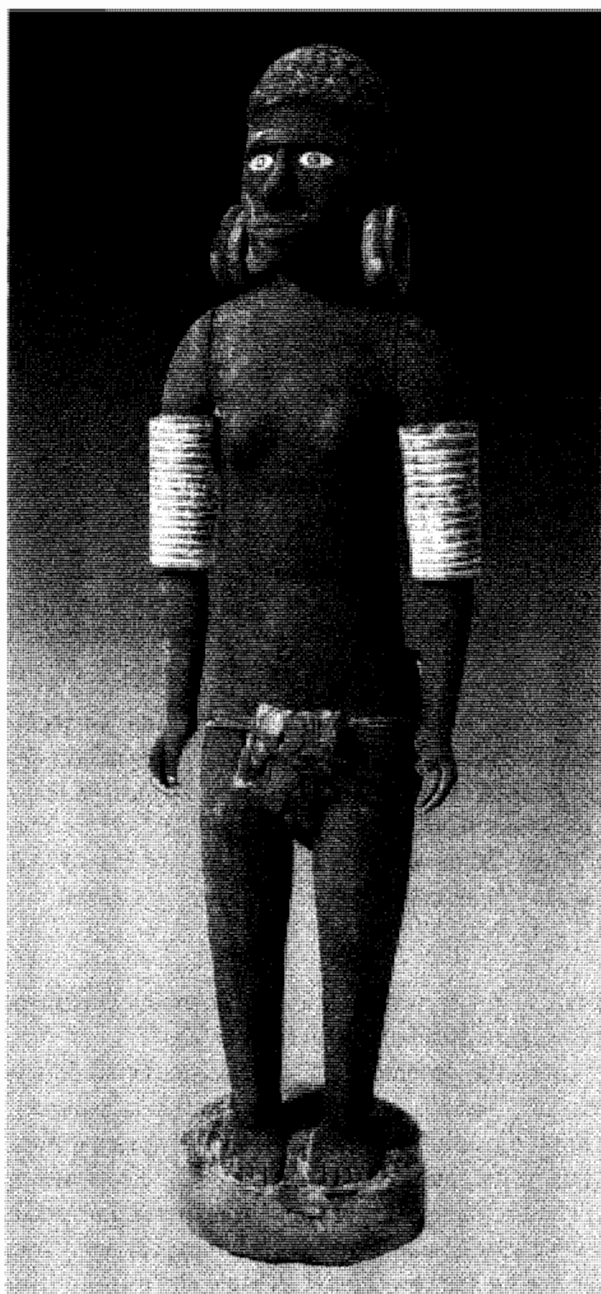


FIG. 6. Figure of a woman; wood, textile, hair (?), pigment, nails; 783 mm high. From Roviana, New Georgia, Solomon Islands. Acquired by Boyle Somerville in 1893 or 1894 and given by him to the Pitt Rivers Museum in September 1895 (PRM 1895.22.144). Photograph courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

*Acquisition of Artefacts made by Islanders*

Of course, for Solomon Islanders, drawing on paper was not the usual form of artistic expression, as Somerville noted: 'their usual appliances bring the resulting design more properly under the heading of "Ornamentation", as they are scratched with a sharp knife on a piece of bamboo or a lime gourd—and blackened with charcoal from a fire or whitened with lime from the *mbinu* pot' (ibid.: 377). He pronounced Solomon Island sculpture ('carvings') far more successful than drawings, especially those allegedly representing men, that is, people, in contrast to spirit images: these were 'not at all badly proportioned, and show a very fair amount of observation in anatomy' (ibid.: 378). The standing female image reproduced here (Fig. 6) may be used to illustrate his point. Ornamental patterns, especially those rendered in shell-inlay 'have reached a high degree among these savages, almost every article in daily use has some slight pattern on it' (ibid.: 379). Canoe ornamentation he pronounced 'exceedingly elegant' (ibid.).

Somerville acquired a large collection of artefacts made and used by Solomon Islanders. He rarely mentioned removing artefacts from particular places, but remove them he did from villages located near surveying camps and sites visited by the surveying parties. Not infrequently, he was impelled to acknowledge the sacredness of local sites. In his published article, Somerville describes an artificial islet called Olevatu, built of coral rocks off the coast of Munggeri. He climbed to the top of the islet and found 'several carved figures in coral stone representing human heads *manggota*, and *mbélema* (frigate birds), all about life size, but impossible to remove without discovery from the natives. There were also large numbers of both *éringi* and *hókata* [both types of shell rings]...with old tomahawk heads' (ibid.: 390). He had apparently intended to affix a surveying mark to the top of the islet but after being warned by the local chief that the islet was '*nusu hope ngeténa*, "a very sacred island"', he desisted: 'so I did not again so much as land on it' (ibid.). At a similar site located 'on the sea-side of the barrier chain of islands and islets surrounding this part of the coast' (ibid.), Somerville and colleagues were able 'without detection' to acquire 'about fifteen skulls...and several rings' (ibid.: 391).

The bulk of Somerville's collecting took place on New Georgia Island and, in particular, on islands in the Marovo Lagoon off the east coast of New Georgia (the principal locus of the surveying work). Artefacts were also obtained from Halavo, Nggela Island, and a small but significant number were obtained from Uki [Ugi] Island, where the *Penguin* made five stops between 1893 and 1895 for refuelling and reprovisioning, the earliest and longest being from 16 to 22 October 1893. He was later to describe Ugi as a place where the 'inhabitants [were] rather cleaner and more civilized than our friends of New Georgia' (Somerville 1928a: 45).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Somerville was not the only acquirer of objects aboard the *Penguin*. Lieutenant (later Admiral Munro) amassed a similar though less extensive collection. Along with other

Somerville documented his 'material' with varying degrees of emphasis on circumstances of procurement (rarely), use (commonly), and—where images were concerned—iconic meaning. He often wrote the information he had acquired directly on to the artefact. He also wrote labels for individual items, many of which survive attached to the objects or in related files,<sup>15</sup> and he recorded a few accounts in his small 'Anthropological Notebook' (Somerville 1893–5). One of the most graphic records of procurement concerns a small (167 mm high) coral sculpture of an anthropomorphic figure (PRM 1895.22.151; see Fig. 7). The story was recorded by Somerville, on a label preserved at the Pitt Rivers Museum:

I found this stuck into the rafters of an old house on an island where we camped for 5 weeks (Karu Nohu). There were no objections raised to my taking it, as we had bought the house to do duty as cook-house. Note the *eringi* [shell ring] round the figure's neck. (The island belonged to one NGAI, a TI-NONI HOPE or "Sacred Man".)

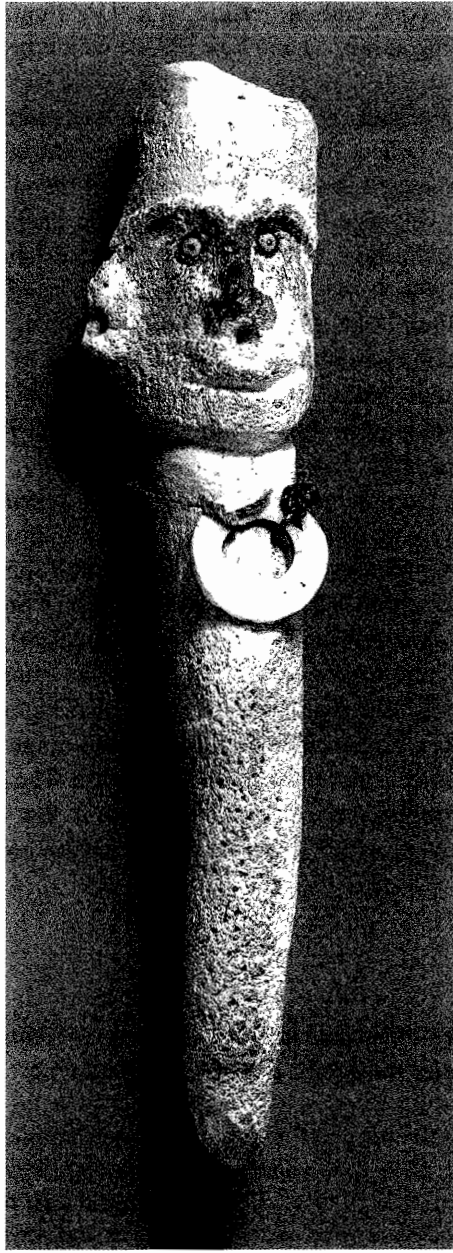
The University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum was the principal recipient of Somerville's collections, which amount in total to some 500 artefacts from the Solomon Islands, along with another 200 from elsewhere in the Pacific and further afield.<sup>16</sup> At the time that Somerville was in the Solomon Islands, the Pitt Rivers was the only museum in Britain with a collection that had been acquired and developed to demonstrate theories about the evolution and development of artefact types. This had been the aim of A. H. Lane Fox (later Pitt Rivers) in making his collection in the first place and, after it had been deeded to the University as the founding collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum, it continued to be the aim of the Museum's curators for some years, an aim that reflected the dominant interests of the period (see Stocking 1987: 264–6). Lane Fox had himself served as secretary of the committee appointed by the British Association for the Advancement of Science to prepare the first edition of *Notes and Queries* and wrote several sections for both the 1874 edition (which, indeed, he seems to have edited) and the 1892

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material collected by him, it is also preserved at the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM collections 1926.13 and 1927.40).

<sup>15</sup> Referring to the objects in the collection Somerville donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1896 (PRM 1896.33), the Museum's curator Henry Balfour (1896: 2) noted how 'all were carefully collected and labelled by him'. It seems likely that this had always been Somerville's practice.

<sup>16</sup> No documentary evidence has yet been found to throw light on how and why Somerville sent his material to the Pitt Rivers Museum rather than some other institution. It is not, of course, a surprise that he should have sent it to the Pitt Rivers, but that no correspondence between Somerville and the Museum seems to have survived is a disappointment. Although by far the major portion of Somerville's collection is located at the Pitt Rivers Museum, a few pieces collected by him are in the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago and the Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg.



*FIG. 7. Figure; coral, shell, fibre; 167 mm high. From Munggeri, New Georgia, Solomon Islands. Acquired by Boyle Somerville in 1894 and given by him to the Pitt Rivers Museum in September 1895 (PRM 1895.22.151). Photograph courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.*

edition. Those in the second edition dealing with 'Drawing and Sculpture' (Lane Fox 1892a) and 'Ornamentation' (Lane Fox 1892b) would prove particularly valuable for Somerville.

Although Somerville does not appear to have been formally enlisted by the Pitt Rivers Museum to collect for it, he supplied the Museum with material directly from the Solomons and indeed had already sent Vanuatuan material in late 1892 or early 1893 (it was received at the Museum on 25 January 1893 and later accessioned as PRM collection 1893.27). In an undated letter to his sister Edith (ECES Archive: L.B.398a-e), he specifically mentions sending several boxes of material to Henry Balfour, who after being hired initially to assist in cataloguing the Pitt Rivers Collection became the Museum's first curator. Moreover, at several points in his 'Ethnological Notes' Somerville referred to having sent artefacts and drawings to 'the Oxford University Museum', of which the Pitt Rivers was then a department (Somerville 1897: 364, 378).

Broadly speaking, the system then used at the Pitt Rivers Museum to classify artefacts corresponded to the investigatory categories set out in *Notes and Queries*, which had supplied the structure and subject headings for Somerville's own investigations and published report. The groups of artefacts in Somerville's collection also reveal his interest (shared then and now by the Museum) in obtaining not only the objects themselves but, wherever possible, tools and samples of materials utilized in their production. Moreover, the collection also includes some unfinished and incomplete artefacts. Somerville collected a broad range of artefacts from the smallest personal ornaments to architectural houseposts. The majority, not surprisingly, illustrate the islanders' relationship to the sea. A few examples of the artefacts Somerville collected, which illustrate aspects of his collecting, will now be discussed.

### Personal Ornaments

The section on personal ornaments in the 1892 edition of *Notes and Queries* asks a whole series of numbered questions, including, for example:

1. Are any ornaments worn as symbols of rank or station in society...? ...16. Are any ornaments worn in the nose? and of what are they made? ...19. Are any ornaments worn in the lips? ...23. Are any necklaces, collars, armlets, or bracelets in use? and upon what part of the arms or legs are they worn? 24. Of what materials are they composed? ...26. Are any pendants worn on the breast? (Franks 1892)

In his published article Somerville responded to these and other queries in some detail. He described with considerable thoroughness ornaments worn by both sexes and all ages, paying special attention to those that connoted rank; for example, the *eringi* shell pendant worn by Ingova, principal leader in the Roviana

Lagoon area, New Georgia Island (Somerville 1897: 363). However, Somerville seems to have been most intrigued by men's ear ornaments:

The most striking ornament in New Georgia is the large ear-ring. A piece is cut out of the lobes of the ear during early youth, and the ring of flesh thus formed is gradually increased in circumference by the insertion of a strip of banana-leaf which, wound like a watch spring, keeps the lobe perpetually distended. Eventually a circle of wood occupies the hole; or as I have seen, a disc of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl, sometimes even a circular trade looking glass. The largest that I measured was 4 inches in diameter. (*ibid.*: 362)

Shell ornaments—rings, armbands/armlets, breast pendants, and ear ornaments—make up a large part of the Somerville collection. The majority come from the New Georgia Island group, but examples were also obtained from the islands of Nggela (Florida) and Santa Isabel (PRM 1895.22.80, 1895.22.87–88, 1895.22.94–96). Somerville acquired armbands made for children as well as adults. Ornaments fashioned from materials other than shell include wooden ear-plugs (PRM 1895.22.83–84), plaited fibre armlets and wristlets (PRM 1894.26.27; 1895.22.48–49), anklets of trade beads (PRM 1895.22.34–35), and a necklet made from the teeth of the cuscus, a type of possum (PRM 1895.22.52). Somerville wrote that he had the opportunity to view the manufacturing process for shell armbands at Mbili and he carefully recorded the entire process (Somerville 1897: 364–5). His collection of shell armbands includes unfinished specimens (PRM 1894.26.11.3–5; 1895.22.76) as well as tools: including creeper and wire for abrading the centres of shell rings and armbands (PRM 1894.26.11.1, 1895.22.20), a grinding stone (PRM 1894.26.11.2), a small hammer made from a European file (PRM 1895.22.21), and two drills consisting of spindles and stone whorls (PRM 1895.22.23–24) (see Waite 2000: 128).

### Canoes

The assemblage of artefacts in the Somerville collection relating to canoes is remarkable for its inclusion of tools, samples, and some especially handsome carvings. Somerville did not acquire an entire canoe; no doubt practical restraints made this impossible, especially in the case of the large war canoe, or *tomako*. However, he did obtain on New Georgia Island a specimen of the nut used for caulking canoes (PRM 1894.26.48), a creeper used in canoe construction (PRM 1894.26.52), a canoe seat (PRM 1895.22.166), and three ribs from the interior of a canoe (PRM 1894.26.533–535). He also acquired twelve canoe paddles, including one unfinished specimen (PRM 1894.26.41), from New Georgia, Nggela, Santa Isabel, and Uki Islands (PRM 1894.26.41–42, 1894.26.186–192, 1902.21.38–44). Among canoe-associated artefacts, however, it is the twenty-five intricately carved canoe



ornaments that predominate (PRM 1894.26.40, 1894.26.47.1–2, 1895.22.146–.150, 1895.22.152, 1895.22.156–.165, 1895.22.205, 1895.22.304–.307).

The canoe carvings contain a rich array of images and constitute probably the largest single collection of canoe ornaments acquired by one individual from a particular region of the Solomon Islands. In this case, Somerville obtained the canoe carvings from the Munggeri District on the north coast of New Georgia Island, from Marovo Island, and from the small islands off the coast of New Georgia, including Ramada Island. Five categories are represented: canoe-prow figureheads; the seated profile figure known as Kesoko; the frontal, two-dimensionally represented anthropomorph termed Hope ta Ponda; a single three-dimensional standing figure holding a turtle; and spiral ornaments that incorporate avian or crocodile imagery. I have discussed several of these image types at some length elsewhere (e.g. Waite 1990: 51–4, 1999, 2000: 119–20), so will mention only the figureheads here.

Somerville acquired ten canoe-prow figureheads, or *toto isu*, from Marovo and other eastern New Georgia islands (PRM 1895.22.156–.165). The carvings were normally lashed to the bow of a *tomako*, or war-canoe, just above the water line (as can be seen in Fig. 3 above). In his 'Ethnographical Notes', Somerville briefly recorded the carvings' function (though without providing any data as to the source of his information—as was all too often the case in his writings). According to his account (1897: 371), they were used to keep off 'water fiends, which might otherwise cause the winds and waves to upset the canoe'. Edvard Hviding (1996:176–8) later wrote of the function as one of guaranteeing safe passage as well as success in warfare (see also Waite 1999).

The three *toto isu* illustrated here (Fig. 8) demonstrate clearly another aspect of the fascination these artefacts held for Somerville: different ways of modelling the head. He described them as having 'a more or less human face, of malevolent, and extremely prognathous countenance; the nose and chin being almost at a right angle to the curious pointed head, the chin resting on his two closed fists' (Somerville 1897: 371). The stylistic range of the *toto isu* carvings collected by him, along with the descriptions of them in his writings, may be seen as reflecting his awareness of questions about indigenous ('native') art production set out by Lane Fox/Pitt Rivers in his essay on 'Drawing and Sculpture' in *Notes and Queries* (Lane Fox 1892a): for example, question 3, 'Are the most conspicuous features, such as the head, nose, &c., generally exaggerated?' (ibid.: 120) and question 30, 'Are they naturalistic or purely conventional? or both? and if so, why is the distinction made?' (ibid.: 121). Somerville deals specifically with the latter question in his discussion of 'Drawing, Sculpture, and Ornamentation' (Somerville 1897: 377–9).



FIG. 8. Three canoe-prow figureheads; wood, shell inlay, pigment; 117 mm, 162 mm, 224 mm high. From Munggeri and Ngarisi Districts, New Georgia, Solomon Islands. Acquired by Boyle Somerville in 1893 or 1894 and given by him to the Pitt Rivers Museum in September 1895 (PRM 1895.22.147, 1895.22.148, 1895.22.149). Photograph courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (ref. 66.29.13).

### Fishing Implements

Unsurprisingly, given the maritime nature of the Solomon Islands, fishing is another major category of the artefacts in the Somerville collection. The bulk of this group is made up of fishhooks (PRM 1894.26.4.2–7, 1894.26.5.2, 1894.26.56, 1895.22.4–11, 1896.33.1–6), bamboo scoops for attracting fish with the sound made by dragging them through the water (PRM 1895.22.1–2), and fishing bows and arrows (PRM 1895.22.200–203, 1895.22.289–303). Also included are such items as a fisherman's palm-leaf pouch from Mbariki District, New Georgia Island (PRM 1894.26.4.1), a fishing rod with hook and line from Gatukai Island in the New Georgia group (PRM 1894.33.21), a basket for catching fish from Vaholi, New Georgia (PRM 1895.22.3), and a palm-leaf fish-hook holder containing five hooks (PRM 1895.22.1–6).

Somerville recorded seeing turtle nets and 'floats carved to represent gods' at Mbili, New Georgia Island (Somerville 1893–5: 14). Nine turtle-net fishing floats

from the New Georgia islands constitute a sub-category of utilitarian artefacts that are also three-dimensional figural sculptures (PRM 1895.22.155, 1895.22.167–.174). These artefacts, like canoe carvings, bamboo scoops embellished with two-dimensional imagery, and certain ornamented canoe paddles (e.g. PRM 1902.21.38–40), presumably appealed to Somerville because of their artistic qualities as well as for the insights their iconography offered into the spiritual beliefs of the islanders.

Somerville described turtle-net fishing-floats as consisting either of 'joints of bamboo, or lumps of wood with a "*debbleum*" kneeling or squatting on them. Occasionally they assume a conventional form, which is called *pepele* or "butterfly"' (Somerville 1897: 374). The floats constitute small three-dimensional images carved from a single piece of light-weight wood. Each image rests upon a ring through which lines were run to attach the float to a turtle net. All the examples in the Somerville collection were obtained in the New Georgia islands: one from Marovo Island (PRM 1895.22.172), seven from Munggeri (PRM 1895.22.155, 1895.22.167–.170, 1895.22.173–.174), and one labelled only as New Georgia (PRM 1895.22.171). The latter now consists of just the image, the supporting ring having been broken off before it arrived at the Museum.

It seems to have always been the case that a specific bird, animal, or anthropomorph was represented iconographically. The rings beneath the figures provided a handy surface for Somerville to inscribe the identity of the being depicted; accordingly, he wrote the name and provenance on each float. Four of the float carvings are said to reproduce *pepele*, or butterflies (PRM 1895.22.171–4; see Waite 1984: 44, 45 pl. I). Somerville recorded no especial significance for the butterfly within the context of net floats; however, the nature of butterflies—the fact that they metamorphose from a chrysalis—makes them prime candidates for a transformational symbology that would be appropriate to contexts of reproduction and regeneration (that is, through the consumption of food, in this case turtles).

Other float carvings depict anthropomorphs and mixed anthropomorphic/avian beings. They reproduce in smaller scale images represented on canoe carvings in the region. One float from the Munggeri District (PRM 1895.22.168) depicts paired anthropomorphic half-figures back-to-back (Fig. 9). The theme of back-to-back figures is standard for one type of canoe carving intended to adorn the peaks of canoe prows and sterns in the New Georgia Islands and Choiseul. As canoe carvings, they were given such names as *Beku* on New Georgia Island and *Gelana* on Vella La Vella Island (Waite 1990: 53–4, fig. 5.20). Somerville inscribed the name *Kopala* in pencil on the supporting ring. The black-painted heads and torsos of the figures, as well as their long faces and elaborate ear ornaments, give them a similar appearance to that of canoe-peak carvings as well as to single canoe-prow figureheads from the same area. This form of 'Janus' imagery, widespread in the art of the Pacific, has been interpreted by Alfred Gell as a signifier of political omnipotence and invulnerability (Gell 1993; cited in Thomas 1995: 108). The



*FIG. 9. Net-float with dual (back-to-back) figures; wood, shell inlay, pigment; 150 mm high. From Munggeri District, New Georgia, Solomon Islands. Acquired by Boyle Somerville in 1893 or 1894 and given by him to the Pitt Rivers Museum in September 1895 (PRM 1895.22.168). Photograph courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (ref. CD1.3).*

precise meaning of the imagery for New Georgia Islanders in the 1890s remains elusive.

Three float carvings from Munggeri depict hybrid creatures that combine anthropomorphic with avian traits. Two (PRM 1895.22.169–170) depict birds with anthropomorphic heads (see Waite 1990: 56, fig. 5.25, 1984: 48, pl. 5). The third (PRM 1895.22.167) represents a seated anthropomorphic figure with a frigate-bird head (Fig. 10). This small, compact figure (itself only 105 mm high) is carved in a seated position with updrawn knees and hands supporting a large (relatively speaking) frigate-bird head. The remains of black paint that presumably once covered the object can be seen on the head and, particularly, on the body of the figure as well as on the low-relief carved designs on the base. This net-float has a marked degree of carved ornamentation in comparison to others in the collection. The large radial eyes, rendered in low relief, are ringed by a band of triangular incised designs, while the open beak is reiterated by bands of low-relief triangles. The base upon which the little figure sits is ornamented with pairs of low relief carved shapes that resemble *barava*, the shell ornaments placed on canoes that are also rendered in similar low relief on carved canoe ornaments and worn individually as pendants in the New Georgia region (and elsewhere in the Solomons). The icon of an anthropomorph with frigate-bird head (or with the figure of a frigate-bird instead of a head) has been identified with a spirit known as Kesoko in the New Georgia region. Kesoko was identified with several birds in myth but, when represented visually, he bore the head of a frigate-bird, a predator associated with war and bonito fishing (both forms of consumption) that was a suitable choice, especially for carvings that adorned war canoes in the New Georgia region (Waite 1990: 51–2, 2000: 119).

Somerville wrote the name Kesoko on the ring of the float, while a label attached to it states (presumably in Somerville's words): "Késoko" is a bird-headed man living in the deep sea, given to devouring men wrecked (under his agency) from a canoe. Usually depicted with a collar and only *one* arm and leg, this is an unusual variation' (see computerized record for PRM 1895.22.167; original emphasis). Somerville compares the float image to canoe carvings but, as usual, provides no details as to the source of the information. The floats and canoe carvings bearing images of these hybrid avian anthropomorphs could well have had a fascination for Somerville as examples of variations on a common theme in post-Darwinian British evolutionary thinking. Somerville indirectly demonstrates this in his writings when he discusses what he sees as a correlation between iconic meaning and facial length of images (1897: 378–9).

Henry Balfour used the floats and other carvings obtained by Somerville to demonstrate his theories about the evolution of form. In 1905 he featured some of the net-floats and canoe carvings collected by Somerville (along with two similar net-floats in the British Museum) in an article entitled 'Bird and Human Designs



*FIG. 10. Net-float in the form of the bird-headed figure Kesoko; wood, pigment; 180 mm high. From Munggeri District, New Georgia, Solomon Islands. Acquired by Boyle Somerville in 1894 and given by him to the Pitt Rivers Museum in September 1895 (PRM 1895.22.167). Photograph courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (ref. CD1.11).*

from the Solomon Islands, *Illustrating the Influence of One Design Over Another*' (Balfour 1905). Balfour's stated intention in featuring images from the Solomon Islands was to demonstrate a development from the prognathism (extended jaws) of anthropomorphic images to the beaks of frigate-birds. He noted that designs such as bird beak and extended jaw 'have become entangled' for reasons that are (contextually) explicable in some instances but not in others. Balfour was able to suggest that carving styles could influence locally produced drawings of people through the use of one of the 'native' drawings obtained by Somerville (Balfour 1905: 83, and pl. F, fig. 13). Whether fortuitously, or as a result of the apparently ever-active influence of *Notes and Queries*, Somerville had selected examples of carvings that could be used by a leading museum-based anthropologist to illustrate evolutionary principles of design that were a particular focus of interest in contemporary British anthropological circles.<sup>17</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

In the years that followed his surveying work in the Solomons, Somerville served two periods of duty in the Persian Gulf (1902) and Ceylon (1904–7). He wrote numerous articles about his exploits for *Blackwood's Magazine* and subsequently gathered together his accounts of surveying in Australia (Queensland coast), the Pacific (excluding the Solomons), and the 'Persian Coast' into a book, *The Chartmakers*, published in 1928. Here he provides some graphic accounts of the surveying practices he pursued (see, for example, Somerville 1928b: 3). In contrast to the specialized anthropological readership for his 1897 article about the Solomon Islands, the expected readership for *The Chartmakers* encompassed a larger spectrum of the general public; accordingly, he abandoned the categorical (typological) framework adopted from *Notes and Queries*. This was also the case with the lecture he gave to the Cork Literary and Scientific Society (1928a) in the same year that his book was published. The expansion of his audience to include interested lay people permitted greater visibility (and openness of presentation) for Somerville the individual. His comments accompanying the presentation of each lantern slide reveal his paradoxical desire to elide or distance himself from the situations he described and yet to express his rich participatory experiences, a referential attitude characteristic of the time (Mitchell 1998: 470). This is particularly revealed in his comments about surveying and about collecting artefacts.

In *The Chartmakers*, he acknowledged his 'passion for "curios"', which he indulged in all of his travels (Somerville 1928b: 155), and made further comments on curio-collecting. He described the island of Tongariki in Vanuatu, for example,

<sup>17</sup> Balfour had published a book on *The Evolution of Decorative Art* in 1893, but it is not known whether Somerville had seen it before he went to the Solomon Islands.

as 'a very prolific hunting-ground' (ibid.). After the conversion of the people to Christianity had put an end to warfare 'hatchets were not buried, but were stowed away, together with spears, clubs, shell-axes, and other delights, in the thatch of the owner's house. After a little one knew exactly where to look for them, and how much "trade" should be paid for them' (ibid.).

Leaving aside questions about how it was obtained, Somerville's collection is impressive in scope and aesthetic quality. This is particularly true of the material taken from the Solomon Islands. He accumulated the earliest group of images (predominantly canoe ornaments and floats) that originate from the Marovo Lagoon—images that have come to define Marovo in the annals of art history and visual anthropology (Waite 1984). Discussing in particular what he had acquired in Vanuatu, he referred to his collections as 'ghosts of a dead savagery' that 'after a purgatorial interval, achieved their heaven in a museum...the true destiny of curios' (Somerville 1928b: 155–7). By 'purgatorial interval' he meant the period in which the collections were transported to the United Kingdom, where they became 'objects of horrified interest to his untravelled relations', a reaction resulting in the banishment of these 'objects of loathing and of terror' to 'lofts or cellars' (ibid.). In a museum, however, according to Somerville, the treasures 'properly labelled' of a young collector will be:

perennially appreciated and displayed; there they may be hideous, and it will be gladly endured. They may be poisoned, and the curator will cherish them the more. They may be indecent (as is frequently the case), and yet they will bring neither shock nor even ribald amusement to the cold mind of Science. (ibid.: 157)

Comments such as these reveal Somerville as he was: a young man from the West, intrigued yet sometimes horrified by objects and cultural practices in the world of alterity that confronted him in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and elsewhere. Collecting, namely, photographing, sketching, and acquiring objects for a museum, and *Notes and Queries*, his invaluable guide and framework for cultural encounter, provided him with the necessary strategies for communicating, experiencing, yet distancing himself so as not to break the ties with his own cultural framework. The salvage paradigm that played such an important role for several anthropologists (notably Haddon) during this era is also very evident here. The 'museum' for Somerville, as for so many Westerners undergoing similar experiences at the time, provided the ultimate spatial framework for simultaneously distancing while experiencing. Museum display provided a re-created world that exhibited the reality of 'other worlds' arranged behind glass for consumption as the commodities that these decontextualized objects had become (Mitchell 1998: 461–6).



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Leaving aside questions about how it was obtained, Somerville's collection is impressive in scope and aesthetic quality. This is particularly true of the material taken from the Solomon Islands. He accumulated the earliest group of images (predominantly canoe ornaments and floats) that originate from the Marovo Lagoon—images that have come to define Marovo in the annals of art history and visual anthropology (Waite 1984). Discussing in particular what he had acquired in Vanuatu, he referred to his collections as 'ghosts of a dead savagery' that 'after a purgatorial interval, achieved their heaven in a museum...the true destiny of curios' (Somerville 1928b: 155–7). By 'purgatorial interval' he meant the period in which the collections were transported to the United Kingdom, where they became 'objects of horrified interest to his untravelled relations', a reaction resulting in the banishment of these 'objects of loathing and of terror' to 'lofts or cellars' (ibid.). In a museum, however, according to Somerville, the treasures 'properly labelled' of a young collector will be:

perennially appreciated and displayed; there they may be hideous, and it will be gladly endured. They may be poisoned, and the curator will cherish them the more. They may be indecent (as is frequently the case), and yet they will bring neither shock nor even ribald amusement to the cold mind of Science. (ibid.: 157)

Comments such as these reveal Somerville as he was: a young man from the West, intrigued yet sometimes horrified by objects and cultural practices in the world of alterity that confronted him in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and elsewhere. Collecting, namely, photographing, sketching, and acquiring objects for a museum, and *Notes and Queries*, his invaluable guide and framework for cultural encounter, provided him with the necessary strategies for communicating, experiencing, yet distancing himself so as not to break the ties with his own cultural framework. The salvage paradigm that played such an important role for several anthropologists (notably Haddon) during this era is also very evident here. The 'museum' for Somerville, as for so many Westerners undergoing similar experiences at the time, provided the ultimate spatial framework for simultaneously distancing while experiencing. Museum display provided a re-created world that exhibited the reality of 'other worlds' arranged behind glass for consumption as the commodities that these decontextualized objects had become (Mitchell 1998: 461–6).

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