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# The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Exchange in Precolonial and Colonial Roviana

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## Gifts, Commodities, and Inalienable Possessions<sup>1</sup>

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by Shankar Aswani and Peter Sheppard

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Using ethnohistorical, ethnographical, historical, and archaeological evidence, this article reconstructs the development of exchange systems in Roviana, Solomon Islands, and explores their long-term transformation. It suggests that a Roviana system of multiple coexisting standards of valuation of goods and services gained preeminence in precolonial times in the context of a regional exchange system and political expansion and explores this system's subsequent articulation with European economic forms. It traces the dynamics of this system and shows its importance in the consolidation of political stratification and socio-political differentiation. In this system, objects moved between spheres of exchange as "gifts," "commodities," and "inalienable possessions" depending on the social, economic, and political context in which they were exchanged and/or transferred, with each sphere specifying not only the objects exchanged but also the appropriate modes of exchange and a set of attendant social relationships. Explanatory priority is given to the development of multiple modes of exchange from an autochthonous entanglement of diverse regional polities long before significant contact with Europeans.

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ties: The Ethnohistory of Roviana Predatory Head-hunting" (*Journal of the Polynesian Society* 109:39-70), and "Assessing the Effect of Changing Demographic and Consumption Patterns on Sea Tenure Regimes in the Roviana Lagoon, Solomon Islands" (*Ambio* 31:272-84).

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During the 19th and early 20th centuries, colonial administrators, missionaries, traders, adventurers, and anthropologists documented a vast exchange network extending throughout the western and parts of the central Solomon Islands. Within it, islanders bartered a diversity of indigenous and European objects including foodstuffs, shell valuables, ornaments, weapons, and iron tools and other European items (e.g., Cheyne 1852, Somerville 1897). These European accounts placed the two main hubs of this network at Roviana, in southwestern New Georgia, and Simbo, farther west. Other ethnographers have recorded comparable exchange networks in many parts of western Melanesia, including the Massim *kula* (e.g., Malinowski 1922), the Papua *hiri* (Oram 1982), the Vitiav Straits network (Harding 1967), the *tee* and *moka* of the New Guinea highlands (e.g., Strathern 1971), and the Santa Cruz network in the eastern outer Solomon Islands (e.g., Davenport 1962).

Studies of trade and exchange in Melanesia have been central to a deepening anthropological concern with the differences between gift and commodity exchange (e.g., Appadurai 1986, Gregory 1982, Thomas 1991) and the links between political power, exchange, and exchange objects (e.g., Brunton 1975, Weiner 1992) and between particular kind of exchanges and conceptions of identity, morality, gender, personhood, and political agency (e.g., Battaglia 1990, Munn 1986, Strathern 1988). Current analyses of exchange have focused on colonial transformations and the differences between Europeans and Melanesians in their understandings of social and economic realities (e.g., Akin and Robbins 1999, Foster 1995). The historical aspects of these accounts (promulgated as indispensable to a reflexive and antiessentialist anthropology) have largely focused on the impact of colonialism on Oceanic forms of exchange. Less attention has been

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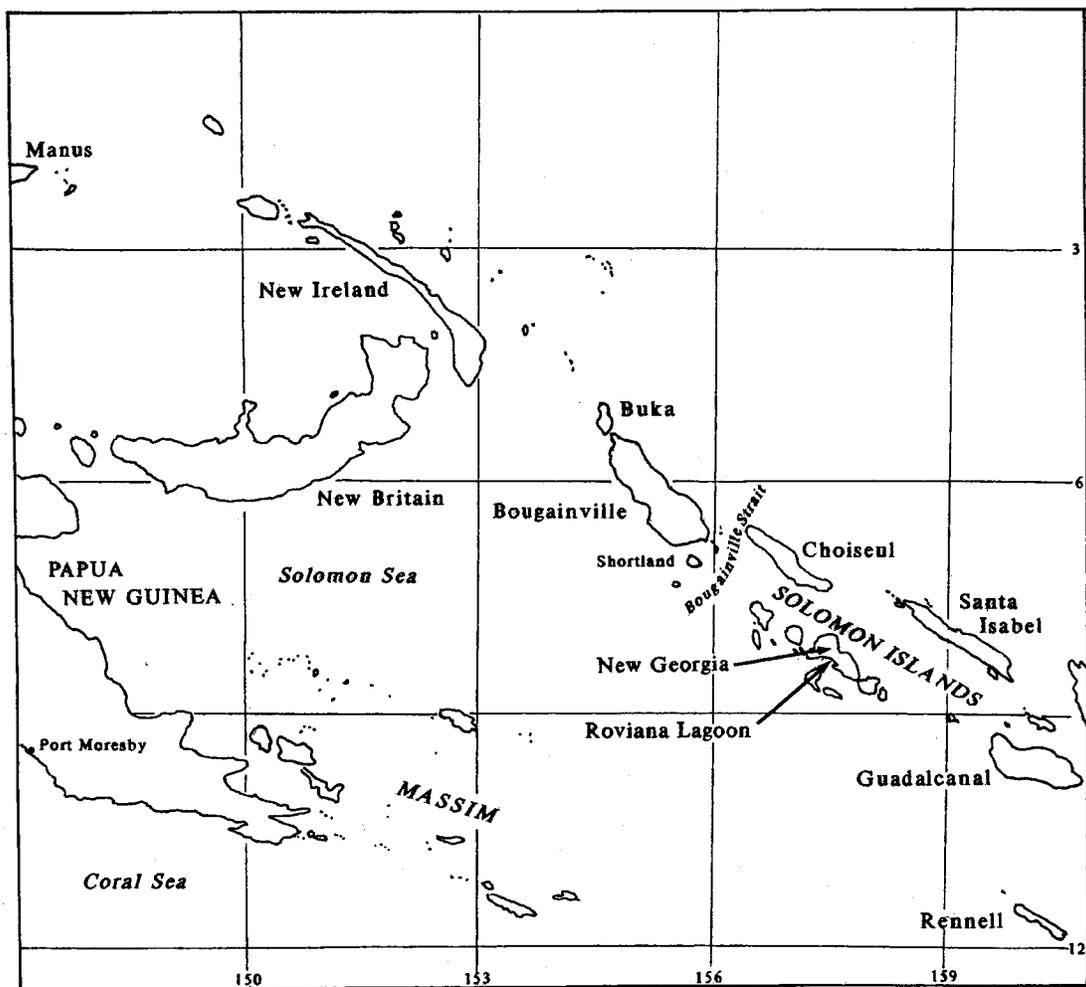


FIG. 1. Melanesia, showing the locations of the Solomon Islands, New Georgia, and the Roviana Lagoon.

paid to precolonial processes and sources of change. Archaeologists, in contrast, have studied the spatio-temporal dimensions of prehistoric exchange systems and their transformation at regional and long-distance scales (e.g., Kirch 1988), but they have been less successful in identifying sociological causes of permutations in the archaeological record. Their fields of study, as detailed by Kirch (1991), include the analysis of sources of exotic materials found in archaeological assemblages (e.g., obsidian; see Green 1996), the identification of regions of product specialization (e.g., pottery; see Dickinson and Shutler 2000), and the analysis of spatial and temporal relationships between islands and island groups (e.g., Green and Kirch 1997). In short, ethnography and archaeology have contributed differently to our knowledge of Melanesian trade and exchange. A number of Oceanic scholars have argued that if we combine ethnography and archaeology with ethnohistory we will advance our understanding of the origin and development of Oceanic trade networks and exchange and their correlation with

political stratification, particularly during the past 500 years (e.g., Kirch and Green 2001).

The question of the dynamic relationship between exchange and political authority is a critical one in Oceanic anthropology. In this historical ethnography we will focus on the time-depth and conceptualization of exchange amongst the Roviana people of New Georgia, Solomon Islands (fig. 1). We reconstruct the development of the Roviana exchange system through an integration of archaeological, historical, ethnohistorical, and ethnographic evidence and explore the long-term transformation of this system. We suggest that a system of multiple coexisting standards of valuation of goods and services gained preeminence in precolonial times in the context of a regional exchange system and political expansion and explore the historical articulation of this system with European economic forms in the 19th century. The system we describe involved various modes and social relationships of exchange operating simultaneously and interchangeably in assigning nonconverti-

ble, convertible, and nonexchangeable values to the things exchanged. We trace the changes in this system over time and show its significance in consolidating political stratification and sociopolitical differentiation. We go on to suggest that the gradual transformation of Roviana shell valuables and their ceremonial, barter, and politico-religious uses followed a significant shift in regional settlement patterns and political power that resulted in political centralization around large coastal settlements beginning at least around the 16th century A.D. This proposition raises two fundamental questions: What is the relative importance of the precolonial and colonial periods as times of transformation of exchange? And what is the relationship between the development of multimodal exchange networks and political centralization and expansion during these same periods?

We emphasize endogenous transformations and suggest that permutations of exchange and exchange networks occurred in New Georgia before any contact with Europeans (ca. 1800). In Roviana, the development of multiple modes of exchange and associated standards of valuation resulted from a dialectical interaction between growing political complexity and the needs of a changing social economy—processes triggered by a shift in regional settlement patterns and the nucleation of inland populations in the coastal fringes of New Georgia. Shell valuables, designated by the culturally constructed Roviana genus *poata*, emerged, among other items, as objects that could be presented in marital exchanges, used as commodities in barter, or employed to embody ancestral efficacy. The latter was of central importance in legitimizing political power. Key to this discussion is the understanding that these objects had substitutable and transcontextual value and could move between spheres of exchange as “gifts,” “commodities,” or “inalienable possessions” depending on the social, economic, and political milieu in which they were exchanged and/or transferred. This mutability, however, was not restricted to objects but, as Robbins and Akin have recently suggested, extended to the modalities and social relationships of exchange associated with each object and transaction (1999; see also Piot 1991). Roviana social reproduction—the totalizing processes of production, circulation, and consumption that forged and strengthened social relationships, particularly hierarchical ones—was sustained through the development of heterogeneous modes of exchange whereby polysemic objects, persons, and representations of persons flowed through an economy not exclusively centered on commodity production.

This argument challenges the general notion that 19th-century Roviana exchange was fundamentally transformed by the introduction of Western goods and the commoditization of the indigenous social and political economy. Western Solomons scholars have recognized that there were significant pre-European political hierarchies and exchange networks. However, drawing on limited historical data and inference from other areas, they have overemphasized the impact of European agency on exchange and political hierarchies, in particular its stimulation of an intensification of headhunting

and the power of coastal chiefdoms (Bennett 1987, McKinnon 1975, Miller 1978, Zelenietz 1979). Whereas constructing a historical ethnography that underestimated the engagement of Melanesians in general with exogenous structures of domination would, as Foster (1995:13) suggests, be “politically and intellectually irresponsible,” it is equally problematic to ignore earlier historical entanglements of distinct indigenous groups and the resulting transformations of their social and political economies. We do not seek to rehabilitate islander agency by simply stripping European colonizers of their impact on the Roviana political economy as revisionist historiography has done elsewhere in the Pacific, but neither do we present islanders as passive recipients or victims of Western economic and political structures (Chappell 1995). Our method is empirical, relying heavily on oral histories of cultural meaning and practice but integrating them with historical and archaeological data, each body of evidence informing the other and yielding further analytical insights. This approach allows us to consider the indigenous social and political roles of objects and persons within a broader temporal framework. The weighing of internal/indigenous versus external/colonial-postcolonial factors to explain shifts in Roviana exchange has theoretical relevance beyond the Solomons and suggests a basic proposition: Given their capacity for calculation, it is likely that humans historically and cross-culturally have operated simultaneously in different spheres of exchange, each constituted by specific objects, modes, and social relationships. Accepting this proposition will require us to reassess the processes of economic and sociopolitical transformation that followed Western contact in many regions of the world. As Gassón (2000:583) suggests for the Amerindians of the Orinoco Basin, we must examine the bargaining, negotiation, and continuities that followed the encounters of distinct social economies rather than simply assuming the subordination and destruction of indigenous socioeconomic modes (Wolf 1982).

Polysemic exchange objects and the social relations generated by their circulation have been the centerpiece of theoretical debates in Melanesian anthropology for several decades. Analyses such as Nicholas Thomas’s *Entangled Objects* (1991) attempt to shed light on the indigenous and exogenous historical processes that have patterned systems of exchange in Oceania. Drawing from various historical and ethnographic sources, Thomas rejects the commodity/gift dichotomy as a theoretical template for distinguishing between Western and Pacific Island exchange systems and societies and argues that multiple exchange modes coexisted in Pacific Island societies before sustained contact with Europeans. He argues that this variation afforded objects mobility between spheres of exchange as either commodities or gifts, depending on the social contexts in which they were exchanged or transferred. Numerous writers have reiterated the antiessentialist notion that various exchange modes encompassing different transactions and social relationships coexist in individual societies (e.g., Carrier 1995, Gell 1992, Godelier 1999), echoing a

long-standing anthropological tradition (e.g., Bohannan 1955, Malinowski 1922). Current formulations, however, affirm the coexistence of various standards of value, the contextual mutability of an object's exchange value, and the interdependence of modes of exchange. They depart from the earlier notion that an object's exchangeability was established within specific spheres of exchange, with its transferability between spheres being constrained. In the old view, the objects themselves defined each sphere, whereas current formulations synthesize Bohannan's emphasis on objects with Sahlins's (1965) stress on social relations (Piot 1991) and modes of exchange. As recently conceptualized by Robbins and Akin (1999), spheres are three-dimensional, constituted by the objects exchanged, a specific mode or modes of exchange, and the social relationships of the transactors.

This current line of thinking contrasts with the older "gift exchange" emphasis in Melanesian anthropology or, more precisely, questions the essentialization of exchange in Melanesia. In particular, it problematizes the notion that before contact with Europeans Melanesian exchange forms were structured more around "gift exchange" relations than around "commodity exchange" relations within and between social groups (e.g., Gregory 1982, M. Strathern 1988). Godelier (1999), among others, has argued that in the Papua New Guinea Highlands—an ethnographic region commonly characterized as having gift economies—Baruya tribesmen circulated salt both as gifts and as commodities before the European incursion. Thomas (1991) similarly treats New Georgia shell-valuable exchange as a case in which commodity exchanges and their associated social contexts existed and even dominated the social economy prior to Western penetration. Gregory (1997:1–70), responding to misreadings of his 1982 distinction between gift and commodity economies as describing a simple either/or situation in colonial Melanesia, discusses the "commonplace contradictions" that transpire from the simultaneous operation of gift and commodity exchange (p. 8). However, he is concerned primarily with the situation in colonial Melanesia and does not explore forms of exchange in "old" Melanesia or their possible origins (p. 47). Examination of the question of the coexistence of different forms in pre-European Melanesia will require the use of archaeology and the critical evaluation of oral tradition, historical sources, and early ethnography. Interest in such an approach has been growing as part of an emerging historical anthropology (e.g., Douglas 1998).

For heuristic purposes we shall retain here the distinction between gift and commodity exchange as qualitatively different exchange modalities, forms of valuation, and social contexts of exchange. These match cultural constructions that Melanesians themselves distinguish as "giving/sharing" and "buying" or as *kastom* (custom) and *bisnis* (business) (see Foster 1995). However, we reject, as have a number of anthropologists (e.g., Appadurai 1986, Thomas 1991), their identification as societal types. In our view, various historically and culturally determined standards of value have always coexisted in human societies. Simply put, social actors are

able to switch between different exchange modalities and standards of valuation depending on the social and exchange contexts in which they are situated. This proposition will come as no surprise to archaeologists, who have been arguing for quite some time now that, as early as the Lapita time horizon, exchange systems have been multimodal and highly dynamic and that this dynamism has underpinned the social and political evolution of societies across Near and Remote Oceania (e.g., Kirch 1991). We briefly turn now to the integration of ethnohistorical, historical, ethnographic, and archaeological materials as a research methodology before examining the Roviana exchange system in the precolonial and colonial periods.

### Integrating Evidence from Different Sources

We draw from written history, archaeological evidence, ethnographic research, and particularly oral history to elaborate our case. By "oral history" we mean verbally transmitted information that addresses past events and processes and assigns duration and sequence to events over a recognized period. Oral history contrasts with folktales and myths in that the latter are not generally structured in sequence and duration (Henige 1974:2). Indeed, the boundaries between myth and oral history are often unidentifiable, and any sharp distinction between them is artificial. Roviana informants, nonetheless, do sharply distinguish between significant historical events and more mythlike episodes and more closely relate the temporal and spatial manifestations of oral histories to particular genealogies and archaeological remains. Contemporary Roviana oral accounts of the past are, of course, full of historical artifacts that have been created in the course of 150 years of European social, economic, and political influence. Remembered oral histories, even those that are highly consistent across informants, can be erroneous, as Neumann's (1992) work on the Tolai of New Britain and France's (1966) classic work on the genesis of tradition in colonial Fiji have shown. The shortcomings of oral and written histories have encouraged some writers (e.g., Neumann 1992) to question attempts at constructing an anthropologically useful past and to emphasize the importance for islanders of contemporary narratives in creating shared social identities and supporting their claims to political legitimacy and autonomy from colonial and postcolonial orders.

Narratives of great warrior chiefs and their wealth, for instance, are central in legitimating contemporary Roviana chieftainships, and such stories are common in other Oceanic societies in which it is precisely the historicity of ruling elites that endures through time (Sahlins 1985). Indeed, since the early 20th century and particularly since the end of World War II, many Melanesians have seemingly exaggerated the nature of precolonial hierarchical and leadership systems in order to bolster their political claims (e.g., Burt 1994). In the Western Solomons, however, early historical accounts of European visitors (e.g., Cheyne 1852, Somerville 1897)

strongly suggest the existence of powerful precontact polities in which power was vested in individuals designated as *bangara*, or “chiefs,” who claimed authority based ultimately on descent from significant lineages and reinforced by success in competitions with co-descendants.<sup>2</sup> These competitions were based in part on the manipulation of trade and exchange networks and the creation of defensive alliances. The presence of powerful precolonial coastal chiefdoms in Island Melanesia, although clouded by overly simplistic early models of Melanesian political organization, is seen by many Melanesianists as a historical reality too long overlooked (e.g., Hviding 1996).

Oral histories throughout Melanesia, including certain land-tenure values, “paramount chiefs,” modern *kastom*, and contemporary “councils of elders,” are often modern cultural creations that result from people’s competing socioeconomic and political interests. The oral histories summarized in this paper have been obtained from informants who are involved in overlapping political and territorial claims and, as a result, have vested interests in providing their own versions of Roviana history. Yet, their representations are consistent enough to present us with a corpus of oral history that is open to historical and archaeological analysis. We argue that reflective images of precolonial life—even those embedded in essentialized and inverted narratives of the past (Thomas 1992) and those that portray customs derided by islanders themselves (Kulick and Willson 1992)—continue to permeate contemporary historical representations of the past. While these historical records are difficult to interpret and must be used cautiously, they can reveal or at least provide valuable clues to past historical processes and structurally significant axioms of society and culture (Braudel 1980[1958]). We are of course not alone in using oral history to investigate the deep history of particular Oceanic societies. Kirch and Yen (1982) have shown the value of oral history in uncovering Polynesian cultural practices that date back to the pre-European-contact period, and Spriggs (1997) has pointed to the utility of oral history in interpreting archaeological finds in Vanuatu and elsewhere in Island Melanesia.

The value of oral traditions as historical texts amenable to analysis is more apparent when they are shown to be congruent with regional historical and archaeological records. Scholars of African societies (e.g., Henige 1974, Vansina 1985) have proposed that oral narratives be treated as hypotheses to be systematically matched against other forms of evidence, including historical and archaeological data. We have not only matched Roviana’s oral history and archaeological data as separate forms of evidence but integrated them with historical records. Nineteenth- and 20th-century historical ac-

counts of missionaries, colonial officials, and adventurers are questionable sources of evidence when they stand alone, but by combining these accounts with oral history and archaeological findings Roviana’s ancient political, social, and economic life can be usefully reconstructed. This approach is possible because Roviana archaeological landscapes and the oral traditions associated with them are exceptionally rich. For Roviana people today, these landscapes are extremely important because they encapsulate their genealogical, tenurial, and cosmological ties to the land and the sea (Aswani 2002, Sheppard et al. 2002).

Archaeologists, ethnographers, and paleo-environmental specialists from the Universities of Auckland, Otago, and Western Australia participated in the New Georgia Archaeological Survey, a five-year study of the prehistoric agricultural landscapes, pre- and post-European-contact settlement patterns, and forms of sociopolitical organization of New Georgia populations. The archaeological data presented in this paper were collected during seven field seasons between 1996 and 2000 (e.g., Walter and Sheppard 2000, Sheppard et al. 2002). The ethnographic data and oral histories were collected in the Roviana vernacular for a period of 35 months (1992–2002) in the Roviana and Vonavona Lagoons (e.g., Aswani 2000, 2002). Fieldwork was also conducted in Rendova, Simbo, Kolobangara, and Ranongga Islands (1998–2000). Field informants included people from throughout Roviana (the chiefly districts of Kalikoqu, Saikile, and various others in Munda and Vonavona) and represent a broad sociocultural constituency. Western accounts of Roviana have generally privileged narratives of informants from around Munda, a European trading base and the region’s most accessible area, but the traditional origins of Roviana people include tribal groups that extended from Koqu Kalena in southeastern New Georgia to the northwestern tip of Parara Island (fig. 2). Overall, as we have said, Roviana narratives obtained through comparative ethnohistorical and ethnographic research conducted across the New Georgia region are consistent enough to produce a set of observations that can be matched against archaeological and historical accounts.

On the basis of this multifaceted research, we suggest that various modes of exchange and standards of valuation acquired importance around the 16th century to constitute and sustain a process of political centralization and an intensification of political and social stratification. Radiocarbon dating of a religious shrine sequence in Roviana indicates a major change in their form from faced stone platforms to unfaced coral cobble mounds and associated artifacts beginning between the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. The dating of associated ovens (*oputu*) suggests that it is at this time that we see the first construction of shrines similar in form to those used historically (unfaced coral cobble mounds) and large deposits of shell valuables, skulls, and other artifacts that are missing in the older faced shrines. The appearance of these new sets of cultural artifacts, particularly shell valuables of various kinds and uses, corresponds remarkably with the socioeconomic and political changes

2. Roviana political organization before European contact is defined here as a chiefly system approximating a loosely stratified society. The hereditary character of Roviana chieftainship and the existence of internal chiefly hierarchies (see Aswani 2000) contrast with various models of Melanesian leadership. The Roviana kinship system is cognatic with a matrilineal bias, but the main chiefly line of Nusa Roviana has been almost exclusively patrilineal.



FIG. 2. Ethnic groups of the Roviana and Vonavona Lagoons.

described by oral tradition and archaeologically indicated by the construction of massive coastal fortifications and the existence of very large, densely occupied coastal settlements (Walter and Sheppard 2000, Sheppard et al. 2002). Of course, the mere presence of new or imported exchange objects in the archaeological record does not indicate the mode of exchange in which they were transacted, but when archaeological evidence is coupled with oral histories and ethnographic and historical data, exchange modes can be inferred and more rounded accounts can be shaped. Given a genealogical chronology of between 13 and 15 generations and given that human generations oscillate between 25 and 45 years, or about three generations per century (Vansina 1985:182–85), the processes of intensification hypothesized in this paper occurred around the mid-16th to the early 17th century, perhaps earlier if Roviana genealogies are compressed. This time frame approximates the radiocarbon dates (table 1) associated with the change in shrine form and the presumed change in associated ritual (Sheppard, Walter, and Nagaoka 2000). We now turn to what we know about Roviana trade and exchange in the precolonial period (before 1800) and then analyze the relative importance of the postcontact/colonial era as a period of transformation in exchange practices, patterns, and meanings.

### Trade and Exchange in the Precolonial Period

The New Georgia exchange network extended throughout the western and parts of the central Solomon Islands (fig. 3). Ethnohistorical accounts indicate that prior to European intrusion this exchange network had several trading nodes, including sites in Simbo, Roviana, and Marovo. In Roviana, groups maintained trade and military alliances that extended across to Simbo—Roviana's major headhunting ally—and to some Kolobangara groups, Ughele in Rendova, Kuboro in Choiseul, and Kia in northern Isabel. Roviana and Simbo war parties raided other populations in the latter two islands. Roviana trading parties also bartered with groups in Vella Lavella, Ranongga, Kolobangara, Kusaghe (northern New Georgia), Marovo, Vangunu, and Gatokae and possibly with Russell Islanders via Marovo trading partners. During trading expeditions (*qalo*), people exchanged many types of objects with partners (known as *baere* if on friendly terms). These objects included *Canarium* nuts and other foodstuffs, weapons, light torches, shell valuables and ornaments, and slaves. Some islands were known for specialized production of specific items: Ranongga for head ornaments (*dala*), Kusaghe for wicker shields (*lave*), and Roviana and Marovo for various types of shell rings (*poata*). Observers noted product specialization during

TABLE 1  
Radiocarbon Dates Associated with Change in Shrine Form

Site Number	Context	Date ID	Shrine Type	Uncalibrated Conventional Radiocarbon Age (B.P.)	Material <sup>a</sup>	Calibrated Years A.D. ± sigma range OxCal <sup>b</sup>
145	Layer 2	NZA-10855	Faced	830 ± 60	Charcoal, <i>Canarium</i>	1160 (2.3%) 1170; 1180 (65.9%) 1290
145	Layer 2	NZA-10856	Faced	789 ± 70	Charcoal, <i>Canarium</i>	1160 (68.2%) 1280
25	Ceramic layer	NZA-6235	Faced	468 ± 62	Charcoal, <i>Canarium</i>	1330 (1.3%) 1340; 1400 (66.9%) 1490
150	Layer 2	WK-7917	Faced	610 ± 50	Charcoal, broadleaf and <i>Canarium</i>	1300 (27%) 1335; 1340 (26.4%) 1375; 1380 (14%) 1400
79	Layer 2/3	NZA-9457	Faced	556 ± 57	Charcoal, <i>Canarium</i>	1310 (30.6%) 1360; 1380 (37.6%) 1430
1143	Layer 3	WK-6155	Faced	1,060 ± 45	Fresh marine shell, <i>Anadara</i> sp.	1290 (66.7%) 1365; 1375 (1.5%) 1380
94	Shrine wall	WK-7914	Faced	1,010 ± 50	Fresh marine shell, <i>Anadara</i> sp.	1320 (68.2%) 1405
94	Platform surface	WK-6759	Unfaced	540 ± 50	Fresh marine shell, <i>Anadara</i> sp.	1690 (68.2%) 1840
1091 Ex-R	Layer 3, under rock 1	WK-7916	Hill fort terrace	710 ± 50	Fresh marine shell, 3 species	1540 (68.2%) 1650
1091 Ex-R	Layer 3, under rock 1	NZA-10854	Hill fort terrace	325 ± 60	Charcoal, short-life	1490 (68.2%) 1640
1174 Ex-B1	Oven	WK-6761	Unfaced	> Modern	Charcoal and nut shell	100.5% modern
1361 Ex-M2	Layer 2 oven	WK-6760	Unfaced	810 ± 50	Fresh marine shell, <i>Anadara</i> sp.	1450 (68.2%) 1540
1361 Ex-M2	Layer 2 oven	WK-6758	Unfaced	250 ± 50	Charcoal, <i>Canarium</i>	1520 (18.7%) 1570, 1620 (31.2%) 1680, 1770 (14.7%) 1810, 1930 (3.6%) 1950
773.2 Buni-3	Layer 1 oven	WK-6756	Unfaced	680 ± 50	Fresh marine shell, <i>Anadara</i> sp.	1560 (68.2%) 1680
1058 Ex-I3	Layer 2 top, wall fill	WK-6757	Hill fort wall	720 ± 50	Fresh marine shell, <i>Anadara</i> sp.	1530 (68.2%) 1650
117.2 Ex-I2	Layer 3 oven	WK-6156	Unfaced	300 ± 50	Charcoal, <i>Canarium</i>	1510 (49.9%) 1600, 1620 (18.3%) 1670

SOURCE: Sheppard, Walter, and Nagaoka (2000).

<sup>a</sup>Marine calibration Delta R has been set at 0, since paired samples suggest that minimal correction is required for this type of sample.

<sup>b</sup>Figures in parentheses represent probabilities associated with the different intercepts.

the historic period. Captain Somerville, for instance, wrote in 1897, "The New Georgia natives are keen and close bargainers. . . . Among themselves, no doubt, there are exact standards of value, one village producing taro, while another makes shields, and so interchange is affected. Shell rings (*hókata*) are a great medium of exchange" (1897:405). Interisland travel was facilitated by specialized trading vessels (*gopu*) that lacked the raised prows and intricate embellishments of the war canoes (*tomoko*) used in interisland raiding.

In 1568, Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra observed "chiefs" commanding warring and trading expeditions in western Isabel (Landín Carrasco 1992). These men were probably Kia area leaders closely allied with Roviana chiefs through kin, war, and trade alliances. Both Roviana and Kia oral histories and genealogies assert such connections (Aswani 2000). During the historic period, Roviana and Kia groups commonly attacked Bughotu in southern Isabel to capture trophy heads, slaves, and shell valuables, suggesting a long-term relationship between New

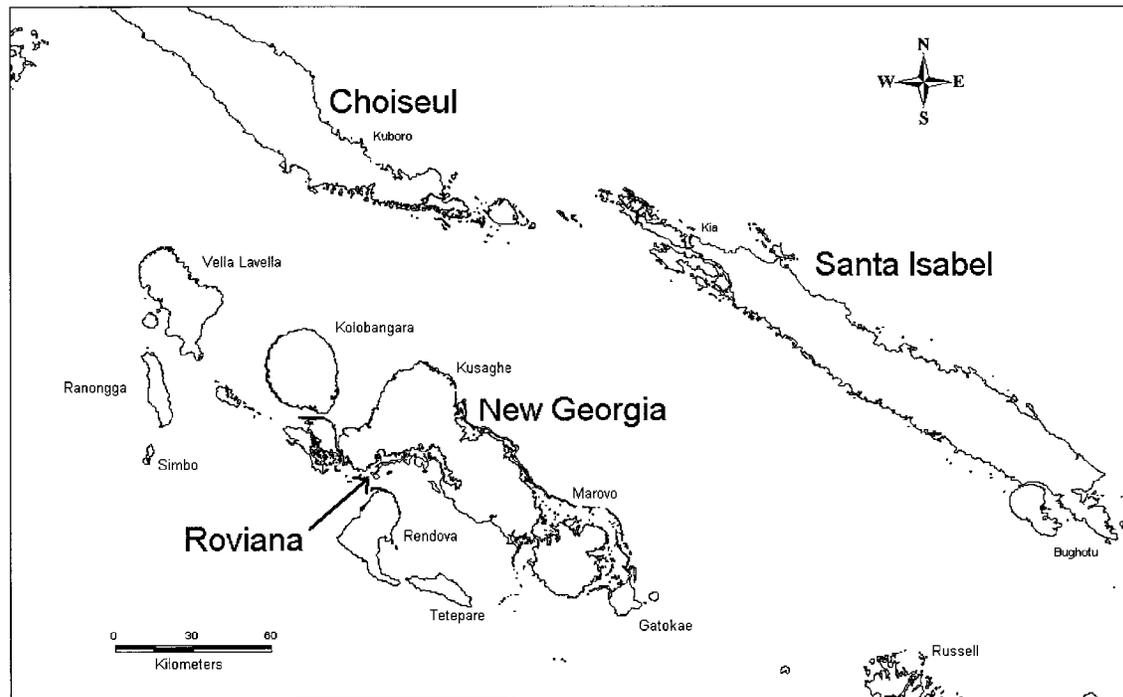


FIG. 3. The western and central Solomon Islands, showing trading nodes of the precolonial exchange network.

Georgia and western Isabel populations. Members of the New Georgia Archaeological Survey excavating and mapping shrine complexes on Nusa Roviana have often recovered chert and small quantities of plain ceramics. Although sourcing studies have yet to be completed, it is likely that the chert is from Isabel or Malaita, and since the Roviana have no tradition of pottery manufacture, the ceramics may be from Choiseul, where pottery was made until recently. The accounts of the Spaniards, who identified New Georgia but never set foot there, suggest that islanders in the central and western Solomons were engaging in barter and interisland trade expeditions as early as the 16th century (Amherst and Thomson 1901). Whether these networks had existed continuously or intermittently since the Austronesian colonization of the region or even before remains an unanswered question.

The Roviana culture area covers a large section of southwestern New Georgia, extending to Parara and Kohinggo (fig. 2). In Roviana, a few thousand people live scattered across the barrier islands and on the heavily forested New Georgia mainland coast and constitute several chiefly districts. From east to west, these are the larger Saikile and Kalikoqu districts and the smaller Nusa Roviana–Kokorapa and Munda-area groups. In Vonavona, the major hamlets are dispersed across the islands of Parara and Kohinggo. Today no one lives in the mountainous interior of New Georgia, although Roviana oral traditions indicate that it was inhabited by various groups in the distant past. These groups included the

purportedly Austronesian-speaking Taghosaghe, Lio Zuzulongo, Hoava, Hoeze, and Kalena Bay tribes, which occupied the eastern half, and the Kazukuru non-Austronesian-speakers and Roviana Austronesian-speakers, who lived in the western end. The scale of interaction between these groups before any major population dispersal is uncertain, but oral accounts suggest that intermarriage among Taghosaghe (Vinakiki and Vinarori), Roviana, and Kazukuru led to the formation of the Kazukuru-Roviana polity and the eventual replacement of the Kazukuru language with the Roviana. At the turn of the 20th century some Kazukuru-speakers lived in the Munda area, but their language is now extinct.

Around the 16th century or perhaps earlier, interior groups began a progressive radiation to the coast to settle the barrier islands enclosing the Roviana and Vonavona Lagoons.<sup>3</sup> The New Georgia Archaeological Survey has mapped numerous shrines on interior coastal ridges and some settlements identified as culturally significant by informants, and these make clear that considerable numbers of people once occupied the interior. Notable is the inland Bao settlement complex, located on a high ridge a half-day's walk into the center of western New Georgia, behind the coastal settlement of Munda. Bao is recognized locally as the cradle of Roviana culture (Shep-

3. Some writers have argued that Solomon Islands oral narratives of inland groups moving to the coast, such as these Roviana accounts or others on Malaita, could be more symbolic statements than historical accounts of actual events (e.g., Miller 1980).

pard, Walter, and Nagaoka 2000).<sup>4</sup> Radiocarbon dates have been taken from the largest shrine at the eastern end of this complex, which, as an origin point, is considered by the Roviana to be very old. An age of ca. 1200 A.D., based on two different charcoal samples (NZA-10855, NZA-10856), makes this the oldest shrine complex dated from Roviana, a finding congruent with oral tradition. What is significant here is that oral history appears to mark a shift in power within the Roviana tradition from the interior to the coast at the same time that archaeological evidence reveals a major change in coastal shrines. We know that populations continued to live in the interior of New Georgia up to the historic period. It is likely that the flow of Roviana populations from the coast back into the interior to avoid coastal raiding was less important than in Isabel (White 1991) or Marovo (Hviding 1996), since Roviana polities held a regional military edge and may therefore have been less vulnerable to raiding from other groups.

Foremost among these population shifts was the Kazukuru-Roviana settlement of Nusa Roviana Island. The reasons for this relocation are uncertain, but oral traditions suggest that Kazukuru-Roviana groups, galvanized by conflict with neighboring Kusaghe and by epidemics, abandoned their inland settlements. It is also likely that population pressures led to shifting settlement patterns. There is no concrete evidence for this hypothesis, although taro terracing in the New Georgia interior suggests higher inland population densities in the precontact period than those recorded during the historic period (Reeve 1989). Thus population pressure may have lessened after European contact. It is estimated that between 1788 and 1931 the population of the New Georgia group declined by as much as 50% because of a combination of introduced European diseases and endogenous warfare (McCracken 2000).

The following quotation from the past chief of Kalikoqu suggests an additional explanation for the Kazukuru-Roviana resettlement:

Luturu-Bangara, the chief of Bao, married and had a child named Ididu-Bangara. Ididu-Bangara grew up at Bao and became the chief when his father died. Although Ididu-Bangara lived at Bao, he often descended to the coast and crossed over to Dokulu in the barrier islands to search for *hio* clamshells [fossilized *Tridacna gigas*] and to fish. Ididu-Bangara grew tired of traveling to the coast, so he decided to move to the barrier islands (*toba*). He spoke to his tribe and told them that he wanted to move to the coast. He said, "I want to go down to the *toba* to find *hio* shells so that I can make myself *bakiha* [a type of shell valuable]. There are not too many shells at Bao, so we cannot make *bakiha*. That is the reason I want to move to the coast." The tribe [*butubutu*] gave its approval and got ready to move.

4. Many significant inland and coastal sites not identified by informants were also surveyed and mapped, thus avoiding bias in site selection.

Then Ididu-Bangara set the day that they were going to leave Bao, and then they left. After settling various areas in the interior they finally crossed the lagoon in a bamboo raft to settle the island of Nusa Roviana.

This story suggests that some inland populations may have relocated to be closer to raw materials for manufacturing shell valuables and to the rich marine resources of the lagoon. Oral traditions suggest that several generations before the regional power shift, Kazukuru inland dwellers used a single type of shell valuable known (in the now-extinct Kazukuru vernacular) as *ukeana* in their ceremonial and religious exchanges. The early faced shrines that we have dated to a period prior to A.D. 1600 characteristically contain no shell valuables and never contain human skulls, but 3 examples (of 32) contain a few very roughly made shell rings now called *bareke*. Oral accounts of the ensuing amalgamation of inland non-Austronesian- and Austronesian-speaking groups specifically identify the concurrent emergence of a new set of shell valuables. It is conceivable that the amalgamation of Kazukuru non-Austronesian-speakers with inland Austronesian groups sparked a transformation of rudimentary exchange modes and value systems just prior to coastal resettlement. Archaeological evidence supports the general timing of the movement of Ididu-Bangara—an early-style (faced) shrine complex on Nusa Roviana (site 79) is traditionally associated with Ididu-Bangara (Nagaoka 1999), and radiocarbon dating provides a date (NZA-9457 on charcoal) for its construction of ca. A.D. 1300–1400. Although this is earlier than the date calculated by genealogy, we find Ididu-Bangara's association with this early shrine rather than one of the many more recent shrines on Nusa Roviana consistent with the genealogical association (table 1).

The New Georgia inland integration of Kazukuru with Roviana and Taghosaghe Austronesian-speakers (Lanyon-Orgill 1953) marks the initial transformation in social and material culture. This process intensified when the inland center of chiefly power shifted to Nusa Roviana Island. When Kazukuru-Roviana tribes occupied Nusa Roviana, the island was apparently sparsely populated. The Koloï tribe claimed the eastern half of the island and the Vuragare coastal peoples the western half.<sup>5</sup> Roviana-Kazukuru dwellers rapidly took control of the island and formed or solidified alliances with coastal groups through intermarriage. It is of course likely that inland populations had interacted with coastal groups all along, but oral history and the archaeological record suggest that this transformative period contrasts significantly with what came before. Roviana narratives characterize this period as one of sociocultural integration and replacement, and, along with the archaeological record, they suggest that this period saw a flourishing of ritual, economic, and political activities, including in-

5. Some prominent informants maintain that there were some Taghosaghe settlements in Nusa Roviana at the time, and still others say that there were also Hoeze groups there.

stitutionalized warfare, interisland trade, and, most significant, the intensification of chiefly power at Nusa Roviana. By the time of regular contact with Europeans in the early-to-mid-19th century, the Roviana chieftainship had become a major regional military power. The archaeological manifestations of these processes are large contiguous settlement complexes on the coastal flats of Nusa Roviana surrounding a 600-m-long stone hill fort in which there are 13 named shrines containing human skulls, shell valuables, and numerous other artifacts. The hill fort's construction is detailed elsewhere (Sheppard, Walter, and Nagaoka 2000, Sheppard et al. 2002); of particular importance to us here is the coordinated labor investment represented by the construction of a series of four massive transverse walls up to 3 m high and the excavation into the coral rock of more than 20 living terraces in the central and most protected part of the fortification. Radiocarbon dating of one of the major walls (WK-6757) in the central section indicates that at least some of the construction of this fortification occurred ca. A.D. 1600.

Fox (1995) has observed that Austronesian social differentiation follows from two parallel social processes—lateral expansion and apical demotion—that rely on different narratives for constructing a people's origin. His model is useful for analyzing the ideational and material transformation of inland groups following their progressive amalgamation with coastal populations. Lateral expansion is a process whereby, assuming land availability, antagonistic factions within a group divide and establish their own settlements. For example, Keesing (1982) shows that Kwaio descent groups segment by laterally expanding to occupy new territories and establishing their own secondary shrines, while maintaining their links to the original shrine and its ancestors (although in the Kwaio case such segmentation is not typically antagonistic [D. Akin, personal communication, 2002]). Even though genealogies are important in these cultures, origin is generally reckoned in terms of association with particular places; a group traces its origins by remembering paths and places of earlier occupation. Social differentiation via apical demotion occurs when a ruling class seizes political power by genealogically demoting subordinate groups. Class differentiation and status are rigidly traced to genealogy, particularly filiation to central apical founders. Again, these two processes are not monolithic and tend to coexist.

Roviana oral history suggests that prior to their coastal radiation, inland New Georgia populations followed a pattern of lateral expansion; new shrines were built as groups split and established new settlements. After the general coastal relocation, however, a powerful political line consolidated its regional power at Nusa Roviana Island, and at this point social differentiation by apical demotion made its appearance. Roviana genealogies mark this period as one in which a chiefly line began to claim descent from divine ancestral beings called *mateana* (today translated as “angels”), thereby demoting the inland lines and places of earlier occupation and elevating their own newly consecrated coastal one through

association with the supernatural (Sheppard et al. 2002). The use of *mateana* as a special class of supernatural beings occupying an ambiguous position between gods (*tamasa*) and ancestors (*tomate*) (Hocart 1922:268) is found elsewhere in the Western Solomons. In Marovo, Hviding (1996:253) reports the use of the association of a focal ancestress with a *mateana* in a way that empowered descendent lineages, while W. H. R. Rivers (Hocart manuscripts and field notes on Eddystone and New Georgia, Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand [hereafter Hocart MSS]) suggested in 1908 that on Simbo the *mateana* category was a comparatively recent introduction, possibly little more than 100 years old. Although this does not directly validate the Roviana oral tradition, it does independently suggest that the development and use of the *mateana* concept as a bridge between gods and ancestors is a relatively recent event.

Not incidentally, this period in Roviana is also distinguished by the inception of distinct social hierarchies. Roviana genealogies suggest that during this time the categories of *bangara* (chief) and *hiama* (ritual priest) became socially recognized (Aswani 2000). Oral traditions further suggest that only *bangara* were associated with *mateana* ancestors and that these chiefs took control of Nusa Roviana and ultimately founded the Saikile and Munda areas' chiefly dynasties to form a greater-Roviana political alliance in the late 18th century. Apical demotion of inland ancestors and promotion of coastal chiefs gained prominence in the ensuing coastal dispersal. Today Roviana inhabitants reckon their genealogical ties to inland groups by association with place-names and their genealogical ties to coastal polities by filiation with central chiefly lines.

We postulate that genealogical association with *mateana* ancestors became a prerequisite for the attainment of chiefly power sometime after A.D. 1600, but it was direct chiefly association with sacred objects that consecrated that association. For instance, two unfaced shrines located in the center of the large hill fort that dominates Nusa Roviana are associated with chiefly lines identified by oral history with *mateana* (Sheppard, Walter, and Nagaoka 2000). We also postulate that during this period the social axioms governing the value of exchangeable possessions became embedded in a system of ranked exchange, although the ranking did not establish absolute boundaries between objects, modes, and social relations of exchange. At this time, shell valuables and other objects came to signify a new set of social relations characteristic of more stratified societies. Again, this hypothesis is supported by the archaeological record, which suggests that in the early, predispersal sequence inland and coastal populations did not participate in a regional exchange network involving the intensive production of shell valuables—shell valuables have not been found associated with these sites. Radiocarbon dates are also supportive. It is only in the unfaced shrines that we find great quantities of human skulls, shell valuables, stone ovens, and associated food debris. Although in three of the early, faced shrines we do find single rough shell valuables of an apparently old form, these shrines

are remarkable for the absence of artifacts and food debris and of ovens such as those upon which offerings are prepared in the more recent ones. Shrines of the early form were clearly associated with a different set of ritual practices.

On the basis of oral historical and archaeological evidence, we hypothesize that the class of individual shell rings called *bakiha* emerged as divine signifiers and visible manifestations of political power. This has parallels in other areas of Melanesia, such as the Trobriands, where the rise of early precontact chieftainships has been linked with a monopolization of *kula* valuables (Brunton 1975). The sacredness of Roviana valuables derived from their symbolic embodiment of the efficacy bestowed by the *mateana* and made them a physical vehicle for the chiefs' cosmological authentication (Weiner 1992). The power of these valuables afforded chiefs a monopoly over ritual activities and the cultural media, including genealogical knowledge, and the pivotal ancestral shrines and associated ritual artifacts. Their power was, however, constrained by human practice, because validation of ancestral efficacy demanded human action. Legitimation of political control required, among other things, that chiefs command their subordinates in successful head-hunting expeditions (see Aswani 2000).

Military alliances with close neighbors were essential to this success, and coalitions were presumably realized through greater flows of women and shells in ceremonial and barter exchanges. For example, payments of shell valuables had to be made to hired chiefs and warriors for their assistance in war.<sup>6</sup> The flow of valuables to forge alliances in Roviana was contingent upon voyaging technology, itself an "excludable resource" (Aswani and Graves 1998:140) that had been monopolized by ruling elites to extend their control over trading and raiding networks. Hocart (MSS) suggested that in Roviana only chiefs owned war canoes, although this may simply have been a matter of having the means to have one constructed. Historical documents attest to the presence of chiefs and war canoes in the central Solomons when the Spaniards visited Isabel in the 16th century. Spanish accounts are consistent with the Roviana genealogical chronology and the radiocarbon dates, all pointing to this as having been a transformative period.

The changing relationship of coastal chiefs to land-sea estates after the rise of *mateana* chieftainships also indicates their increasing power. Prior to the aggregation of regional groups at Nusa Roviana, inland chiefs appear to have had less power over land matters. The transformation of kin-reckoning after the coastal radiation required chiefs not only to seize focal shrines but also to take the land beneath them and the adjacent waters. Shrines began to appear along the passages inside the lagoon barrier islands, which are commonly recognized as separating chiefly districts. Oral accounts support the notion that during this time shrines were constructed to

mark boundaries and to show neighboring groups that *mateana* chiefs ruled over the land and the sea. Further, a number of *bakiha* shell valuables (some of which are still retained today) emerged during this time to signify ownership of tribal estates. The widening of chiefly control over land matters resulted in a centralization of tenure rights and novel ways of distributing those rights. For instance, hired warriors who were successful in killing enemies and capturing slaves or children intended for sacrifice were often compensated by chiefs with plots of land, regardless of whether they were Roviana. Thus, land became an important asset that could be given away to allies to forge alliances for interisland warfare.

Success in war validated previous transactions carried out to conduct efficacy from the ancestors and deities to the chiefs. Roviana chiefs ensured their ritual, social, and political hegemony by constructing a "currency of rank" out of human body parts—a currency that they monopolized even when mercenaries had actually collected the trophy heads (Aswani 2000). A chief could also demand payment from neighboring groups for access to his fishing grounds for communal fishing drives. Land and sea, the most inalienable of all possessions, could therefore be transferred or lent to others to meet the political exigencies of Roviana elites. These new relationships to land and sea estates and modes of exchanging them continue to play a pivotal role in structuring Roviana socioeconomic relations, particularly under present circumstances of rising population and consumption (e.g., Aswani 2002).

The ascribed authority that chiefs possessed by virtue of their genealogical ties to apical chiefly ancestors was validated by the possession of sacred shell rings, which ultimately afforded chiefs control over ceremonial and commodity exchange networks. Somerville (1897:363) observed that "Ingova, the king of Rubiana, wore an ornament round his neck, the sign of chieftom, and a great 'hope' ['sacred' in this context]."<sup>7</sup> Political elites, then, could control the venues for commercial and politico-military alliances with other regional polities, the means to mediate with disadvantaged segments of their own societies (Earle 1997), and the power to propitiate supernatural forces. Labor could be mustered for manufacturing the various types of shell valuables transferred in trade and ceremonial exchanges and ultimately made sacred by being kept as heirlooms or offered to the gods and ancestors. These valuables embodied a wealth produced from land held under the power of chiefs, itself the truly inalienable possession. Roviana elites gained ancestral efficacy and concomitant political legitimacy by making generous offerings to the ancestors and deities, and this gave them broader control over the means of production. This is the social, economic, and political context that Europeans encountered in the late 18th century—a milieu in which multimodal networks and associated standards of valuation had intensified with the

6. Although separated by cultural, spatial, and temporal differences, other regional ethnographic examples show similar patterns (e.g., Keesing 1982, Lemonnier 1991).

7. Somerville did not overstate the power of the *bakiha*, but his identification of Inqava (Hingava) as "king" of Roviana was certainly an exaggeration.

entanglement of distinct indigenous groups and the transformation of their social and political economies that this produced.

## Trade and Exchange in the Colonial Period

The impact of European incursion on New Georgia societies was undoubtedly significant (Bennett 1987, McKinnon 1975, Zelenietz 1979), but if we hope to understand the interactions of these two distinct social economies we must set aside the idea that the European economic and political system was simply superimposed upon the indigenous one. We propose instead that a process of bargaining, negotiation, and historical continuity (Gassón 2000) followed their entanglement.

Early historical records, particularly those concerning contacts between Simbo and Europeans (Dureau 2001), provide a glimpse of the nature of exchange in early-contact New Georgia. The first recorded contact episode between Simbo and Europeans dates to 1787, when the American merchant ship *Alliance* sailed by Ranongga and called at Simbo (Jackson 1978). Visiting ships gradually became more frequent in these waters, and when American whalers turned their attention to the Pacific and its untapped stocks of sperm whale in the 1820s Simbo developed into the most prominent port of call in the Solomon Islands. The Simboese and their close Roviana trade partners quickly understood the value of iron and soon acquired skills in haggling with Europeans (Cheyne 1852). The captain of the *Patterson*, which called at Simbo in 1803, observed that the Simboese are “quite sharp in trading, not suffering anything (for a considerable time at first) to go out of their hands until you handed something in payment for it” (Bennett 1987:26). Early European accounts such as this one and Cheyne’s reveal a preexisting cultural disposition to exchange with others, familiar or strange.

The preeminence of Simbo as a European port of call ensured its trading monopoly over Western goods. Simbo, however, lacked significant amount of the raw materials—fossilized and live *Tridacna*—required to manufacture the principal shell valuables (Hocart MSS). New Georgians undoubtedly esteemed European iron tools, but it was through local currencies that the indigenous sociopolitical economy was articulated. The centrality of indigenous currencies also ensured a chiefly monopoly over their production and circulation. The districts of Buni, Kalikoqu, and Saikile in Roviana and Bili (Somerville 1897:364) and Marovo Island (Hviding 1996:93) in the Marovo Lagoon were among the region’s most important centers for the manufacture of shell valuables. Both Roviana and Marovo became even more important during the second half of the 19th century, when European tools had revolutionized the manufacture of shell valuables (Bennett 1987:35). Abundant debris from shell working and the associated grindstones are commonly found adjacent to shrines in the historically occupied regions of Nusa Roviana and in the Saikile fortification

in eastern Roviana, which, according to oral tradition, was first occupied in the mid-to-late 18th century.

Contact between New Georgia and European populations intensified in the 1850s, and foreign artifacts, particularly metal axes, iron adzes, and guns, came to be coveted by local inhabitants, who traded for them with tortoiseshell and *bêche-de-mer*. After 1860, European traders began to settle various regions of the western Solomons, showing particular interest in Roviana, which was recognized as a regional “mint” for the production of shell valuables. Roviana inhabitants traded for Western goods with shell rings of various sizes and textures, which traders then used to obtain copra and tortoiseshell from villages around the western and central Solomons, where the valuables were highly prized. By the 1880s, Roviana people were trading a number of items for Western goods, including shell valuables, copra, tortoiseshell, and *bêche-de-mer*. The importance of shell rings to Western traders extended well beyond Roviana (Bennett 1987). At the turn of the century, however, the use of shell rings in commerce was losing its preeminence, and by the second decade of the 20th century shell valuables had been fully replaced by European money. Particulars of the mid-to-late-19th-century interactions between Europeans and New Georgia inhabitants were well documented by 19th-century observers (e.g., Cheyne 1852, Somerville 1897) and have been analyzed by contemporary scholars (e.g., Bennett 1987, Jackson 1978).

Central to this discussion is the idea espoused by a number of writers that 19th-century European intervention resulted in the intensification of both head-hunting and exchange and heightened the power of New Georgia coastal chiefdoms (e.g., McKinnon 1975, Zelenietz 1979). Bennett argues that “excessive head-hunting was an attempt to control the new forces unleashed in the western Solomons by the advent of iron” and that the “shell valuables of Roviana and Marovo . . . , rather than remaining simply items that acknowledged socially significant events such as marriage and death, became more and more like money with a set value range” (1987:36). Zelenietz (1979:102) similarly contends that “contacts between villages were limited to occasional trading and frequent hostilities. The situation changed by the late 1800s. By that time a feature unusual in island Melanesia had developed: large-scale organizations and alliances for headhunting under the control of a single powerful figure.” The essence of these arguments is that the introduction of iron revolutionized the subsistence economy, affording certain groups enough leisure time to engage in the manufacture of shell valuables and other ritual and technological artifacts and to collect more *bêche-de-mer* and tortoiseshell for trade with Europeans. Emerging leaders monopolized the means of production to conduct these activities and used shell valuables to hire more warriors and, along with marine products, to trade for tomahawks and guns. This process resulted in a spiraling rise of regional trade and predatory head-hunting and, most significant, in the commoditization of the Roviana social economy.

Roviana, Simbo, Kolobangara, and Rendova oral his-

tories, however, challenge this chronology and suggest that the economic and political zenith of the Roviana polity was achieved during the rule of Chief Tae-Bangara and his son Qutu in the 1700s and early 1800s. Local narratives going back 13 generations specify that raids resulted in the near-extermination of entire villages or tribal groups both within and beyond New Georgia Island and that large-scale trading expeditions were common. For instance, Koloi coastal groups in Roviana were almost obliterated by Kazukuru warriors, and the island of Tetepare was depopulated by epidemic disease, internal strife, and Roviana and Marovo war parties (Aswani 2000). Further, numerous oral accounts tell of sustained trading relations between Roviana and various tribal groups in the western Solomons. The existence of large-scale raiding and trading is also supported by early historical records such as Mendaña's account and Bougainville's 1768 encounter with a sizable raiding party in Choiseul.

Relying exclusively on Western anecdotal accounts or Roviana oral histories to establish the intensity and frequency of pre-European contact trading and raiding activities is a problematic approach, but when matched against archaeological data such accounts can shed light on precontact intensification processes. The appearance of new sets of cultural artifacts, particularly shell valuables of various kinds and uses, the construction of massive coastal fortifications and very large, densely occupied coastal settlements (Sheppard, Walter, and Nagaoka 2000), and the existence of widespread taro terracing in the interior of New Georgia (Reeve 1989, Sheppard et al. 2002) correspond remarkably with the socioeconomic and political changes described by oral traditions and suggested by historical records. This correspondence supports the hypothesis that the intensification of exchange and ritual preceded European contact.

Tae-Bangara, in particular, is known for his ruthlessness, for amassing large numbers of shell valuables, and for ultimately monopolizing the redistribution of objects and persons through most social activities and regional feasting cycles. Tae-Bangara and chiefs in general also regulated the large-scale circulation of foodstuffs, particularly *Colocasia* taro, in the context of feasts. They controlled the complex stone-terraced taro pondfields found throughout southeastern and northern New Georgia, which have been mapped archaeologically and identified ethnohistorically (Hviding 1996, Reeve 1989, Sheppard et al. 2002). Extensive taro terracing suggests not only higher inland population densities in the precontact period but also the production of food surpluses to sustain the large-scale feasting, trading, and redistribution activities of chiefs. These activities of appropriation and redistribution are akin to the political and economic axioms that Polanyi (1957) maintained were characteristic of precapitalist chiefdoms.

The Roviana concept of *nibaka* epitomizes the chiefly monopolization of objects and persons. *Nibaka* (small raft)—allegorically connoting Ididu-Bangara's use of a raft to settle Nusa Roviana Island in quest of fossilized clamshell for *bakiha* production—was the term used for

the shell valuables accumulated in large receptacles for use in barter and ceremonial exchanges. These valuables, unlike others that served as chiefly insignia, were not displayed during feasting or used in competitive exchange ceremonies and were hidden in secret locations without most people's knowing of their existence.<sup>8</sup> Hoarding was not just for the sake of accumulation in a capitalist sense, but neither was it for ostentatious gift giving to transform the material quality of objects into social value (cf. Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat 2002). Hoarding allowed chiefs to maintain the sizable quantities of shell valuables needed for the warfare and trading that gave them, as pointed out by Marx (Graeber 2001:100), the opportunity for action and the maintenance of power. Chiefs such as Tae-Bangara collected valuables from various sources, including the management of unmarried young women for their sexual services. Particular women (*bibibolo*) were available to men who paid shell rings obtained in barter for sexual intercourse at specified times and places (e.g., during a feast after a head-hunting raid). To make a girl an interim "prostitute," certain shell valuables had to be paid to her kin.<sup>9</sup> Chiefs used this "capital" in a number of contexts and transactions and kept most of the valuables transferred to the girls. Foremost among their uses was the financing of trading expeditions and the compensation of other chiefs and their warrior "mercenaries" for killings and captive-taking during raids. A Kalikoqu informant provides insight into ritual prostitution and its pecuniary relationship with head-hunting:

Head-hunting raids were conducted to "make the chief great" (*va lavatia sa bangara*). Warriors kept the chief and followed his will. They had to go on raids, or else some would die from either his magic or murder. The chief would hire assassins to kill those who did not follow his will. When people followed the chief it was his greatness that was increased. If the raid was successful, the chief became greater. They kept his canoe house (*paele*) and war canoes (*tomoko*). The chief was able to pay for some of his raids by receiving *poata* and *hokata* rings from the *bibibolo* under his care. The chief kept the shell valuables paid for the services of the *bibibolo* to pay for his warriors and the assistance of neighboring tribes.

Compensatory payments fulfilled several social and economic roles, including validating the chief's efficacy and providing the hired party with a currency that could move across other spheres of exchange such as bride-wealth payments and the funding of further trading and raiding expeditions. Through head-hunting, a man could

8. Informants on Nusa Roviana report having found at least one large hoard, estimated to contain over 50 complete *bakiha*, buried in a modern garden area. We have not been able to see this hoard, since it has been reburied.

9. Compensatory payments were not always made, since women taken in head-hunting raids were often used in prostitution (see Hocart 1931:305–6 for Simbo). In this case they were referred to as *maqota*.

accumulate wealth and slaves and gain access to suitable wives. Most important, success in war authenticated a chief's attainment of ancestral efficacy and political legitimacy.

The shell valuables acquired through control of ceremonial exchanges and feasting cycles facilitated a chief's warring enterprises. Success in war, in turn, led to the accretion of political capital, furthering chiefly control over exchange networks. From raiding, chiefs gained more slaves who could manufacture shell valuables to finance further trading and raiding and to intensify their ceremonial and religious offerings. Hviding (1996:412) notes for Marovo: "Many aspects of precolonial political relationships were firmly based on the alienability of objects, even persons. This applied, among other things, to the trade in clamshell 'currency,' and to various forms of 'slavery.'" A Simbo informant noted in the early 20th century that "'a chief who has plenty money makes big feasts; if heads are caught he pays his men.' Without wealth he cannot wage war" (Hocart MSS). Thus it was through the control of ceremonial and barter exchange networks that chiefs maintained their power, and as this control weakened in the face of the uncontrolled trade in copra with Europeans, so did chiefly power. Control of inalienable possessions not only legitimated their control but also made it possible for them to substitute wealth for other wealth and wealth for life (see Lemonnier 1991). This indigenous conceptual framework was antecedent to any significant economic articulation with Europeans. Proof of this, as argued, is the hoarding of shell valuables to finance trade and raids from Ididu-Bangara's time to that of Tae-Bangara in the mid-to-late 18th century. Ethnohistorical accounts not only reveal the relationships of domination and subjection that existed in many areas of precontact Melanesia but also substantiate the need for a more critical examination of the highly hierarchical political structures of some Island Melanesian coastal communities.

The interaction between New Georgians and Europeans accelerated the process of shell-valuable commoditization and established internal fixed-exchange values (although these values were altered yearly and different regions had different value scales) to facilitate articulation between distinct social economies. It is probable that no set exchange ratios existed prior to Western incursion, but "commodities" can be constituted in the act of exchange for a counterpart, "indicating that the counterpart has, in the immediate context, an equivalent value" (Kopytoff 1986:68), or when like things are converted into unlike things (Gregory 1982). The mere fact that transactors exchange things constitutes recognition of perceived equivalence—exchange partners are satisfied with their deal (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992). Roviana shell valuables used in barter exchanges were, as Godelier (1999) suggests for salt among the Baruya and their trade partners, a kind of commodity because they measured the exchange value of all other commodities exchanged, thus functioning as a currency. The commoditization process is not limited to objects but can be applied to social relations. As commodity trans-

actions intensify, commodity relations become incorporated into cycles of social reproduction (Foster 1995: 26) that, in turn, generate or amplify social differentiation within and between societies. In Roviana, intensification of trade and commoditization of objects, persons, and social relations in particular contexts was likely shaped by the exigencies of political centralization and warfare, which were constituted in the late-prehistoric sequence and intensified after European contact and the introduction of iron in the 19th century.

The suggestion that Roviana indigenous currency and modes of exchange were "preadapted" to money and commodity exchanges is perhaps "overly simplistic" (Robbins and Akin 1999:20). Shell valuables did, however, rapidly become money-like with European penetration, and when they ceased to be useful in exchange in the early 20th century they were swiftly replaced by state money without serious resistance. Nor does it appear that state money had to be "domesticated" by incorporation into ceremonial and gift exchanges as it did in some Melanesian societies. Certain shell rings continued to be used as signifiers of chiefly power and were transferred in marriage and mortuary exchanges, but indigenous currencies did not become enclaved. Shell valuables took on the character of money, and state money itself became absorbed into an expanding multimodal exchange and political system. Shell-valuable commoditization simply could not have happened as expeditiously and could not have been as readily accepted by New Georgians without a preexisting template for assigning nonconvertible, convertible, and nonexchangeable value (see also Thomas 1991). This template was manifested not only through ideas about exchange but also through a broader regional structure of sociopolitical control of multimodal exchange (D. Akin, personal communication, 2002). To illustrate this proposition further, we turn first to the classification of Roviana shell valuables as exchange objects and then to the modes and social relations of exchange associated with each sphere and their relation to political stratification.

## Taxonomy of Roviana Shell Valuables

Contemporary informants recognize two generic Roviana categories of objects that existed in precolonial times—*vinasari* and *poata*. These appear as objects of trade and exchange in historical records (e.g., Somerville 1897) and are common in archaeological sites. *Vinasari* were intricately patterned decorative shell ornaments used in ritual and occasionally in barter, principally to embellish native objects. Of more interest to us are *poata*, which, as a culturally constructed Roviana genus, included an array of clamshell and shell rings of different diameters, textures, and colors and sperm whale teeth. But *poata* as a species was a particular shell valuable chiefly employed in barter. *Poata* as a genus was not simply money, since it could be used in ceremonial exchanges and to transfer ancestral efficacy, but the term *poata* was also used for the particular shell valuables

chiefly employed in barter. The existence of the *poata* species nonetheless reveals a precolonial template for commodity transaction or at least a context of social exchange in which things were commoditized. Strathern and Stewart (1999:171) call this, for the Mount Hagen case in Papua New Guinea, “precursion”—the existence of types of exchange and ideas that pave the way for the subsequent reception of commoditization or commodity exchange.

*Poata* and *vinasari* were manufactured by craft specialists known as *matazonga* and, particularly if they were destined for use in barter, also by commoners (*tie kumakumana*), servants (*nabulu*), and slaves/captives (*pinausu*). The role of the latter in the manufacture of valuables increased during the late 19th century. The *matazonga*'s task was to locate buried fossilized *Tridacna* shells in the uplifted coral limestone of the Roviana barrier islands and to visualize, through dreams and divination, the structures and designs of war canoes, ritual and ceremonial houses, shell valuables, carvings, and other artifacts before and during their manufacture. *Vinasari* included *porobatuna*, *barava*, *pagusia*, and *dala*. *Poata* included *bakiha*, *poata*, *bareke*, *hokata*, *hinuili*, and *kalo* (sperm whale teeth) (figs. 4 and 5).

*Bakiha* were the most valuable shell rings and were graded according to size, texture, and particularly the concentration and extent of yellowish to reddish coloring on their surface. They were made from the underpart of fossilized *Tridacna gigas* shells, and the adductor-muscle

area yielded the reddest and most highly valued rings. *Bakiha* were exchanged in a number of ceremonial contexts and also in barter.

Next in value were *poata*, also known as *poata keoro* or *bakiha keoro* (*keoro* meaning “white”). Made from the upper, whiter sections of fossilized *T. gigas* and *T. squamosa* shells, these shell rings circulated throughout the western Solomon Islands as a general-purpose currency. They were used in barter for material goods and for the purchase of magic and other ritual knowledge, including that associated with shrines, often from distant sources. To a lesser extent they were used in ceremonial exchanges including compensation for minor infractions, paid for temporary access to a neighboring group's fishing grounds for community fish or turtle drives, offered to the ancestors, and broken near shrines to mark the transfer of land rights or a movement of people (fig. 6). During the 19th century European traders also circulated them (e.g., Bennett 1987), and shell valuables appear to have been enclaved only in commodity transactions with Europeans.

*Bareke* (or *ukeana* in the Kazukuru vernacular), the oldest form of Roviana exchange medium, were rough-edged and unpolished rings of *T. squamosa* shell (both fossilized and live). They are archaeologically the only form known to the inland Kazukuru people. Informants report that *bareke* were bartered, but Barraud (1972) maintains that in Simbo they belonged to a higher spiritual order and never circulated in exchange. Similarly,

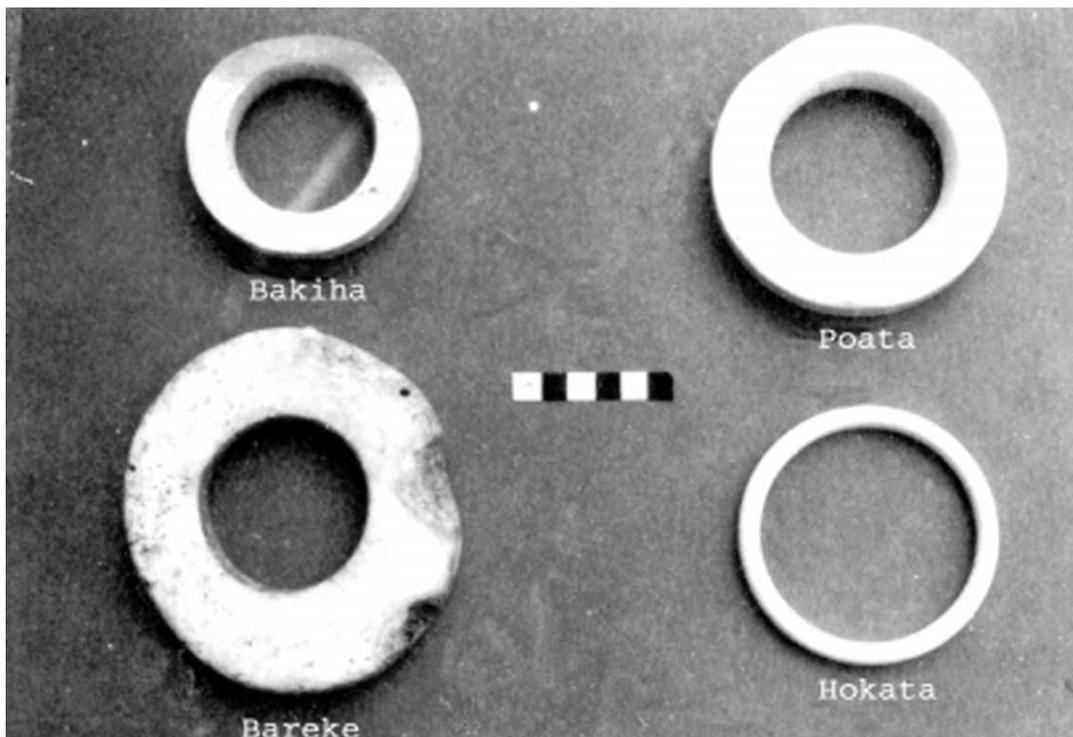


FIG. 4. Roviana shell valuables. (Photo courtesy of Solomon Islands National Museum.)



FIG. 5. Young Roviana man wearing hokata (arms), bakiha rapoto (chest), and hinuili (neck). (Photo W. A. Lucas, 1899, courtesy of Solomon Islands National Museum.)

Hocart (1922:273, 277) reports their close association on Simbo with shrines dedicated to gods but not those concerned with ancestors. In Roviana, *bareke* were principally used for land fertility rites and access and as priestly insignia.

*Conus*-shell *hokata* were smaller and slimmer than other shell valuables. They were less valuable and were exchanged in marital rituals, transferred as compensation for minor offenses, used in barter, and given to chiefs by men for sex with ritually designated women. *Hokata* were also worn as ornamental arm rings by married men and women and were offered to the dead in burial and to deities at garden and fishing shrines. Broken and whole *hokata* were common at archaeologically mapped shrines and included at least one example of a ceramic (Chinese?) arm ring of identical form.

Also common in archaeological shrine sites are still smaller *hinuili* rings made from *Conus*, *Strombus*, *Mitra*, and *Terebra* shells. These were worn as protective am-

ulets, exchanged within families as gifts, and presented to ancestors and fishing and gardening deities at sacred shrines.

*Kalo*, sperm whale teeth, have been observed archaeologically in only a few shrines on Nusa Roviana and are the least common of valuables. Oral histories suggests that *kalo* were mostly traded for parcels of ground *Canarium* nuts from Simbo, where they were perhaps more valued. *Kalo* were often kept as family heirlooms, particularly when identified with a special event, person, or covenant.

### Modes and Social Relationships of Exchange

Inalienable possessions such as the sacred *bakiha* were the foundations of chiefly authority and the catalyst for the expansion of diverse exchange modes across Roviana society. Inalienable possessions attested to social and hierarchical differences by embodying the power of imaginary beings, ancestors, gods, and superhumans. But why were these objects kept out of circulation? And where did this wealth come from? Elites in premodern chiefdoms “decommoditized” certain objects, taking them out of circulation to be “enclaved” in space and time (Appadurai 1986:23). Their proprietors’ monopoly made them a vehicle for attesting to differences rather than similarities and consecrating political independence and authority (Kopytoff 1986, Weiner 1992). More significant, sacred objects are the ideological foundation of both gift and commodity exchange—as Godelier (1999: 166–67) describes them, “stable points around which the rest—humans, goods, services—might revolve and circulate.” To become nonexchangeable wealth, however, objects must have mutable value. It is perhaps only after being initially transferred as an alienated commodity in barter and then bestowed as a gift in a chiefly presentation that an object can be truly decommoditized and



FIG. 6. Broken poata at Nusa Roviana Island. (Photo Peter Sheppard.)

removed from circulation. Once enclaved, however, inalienable possessions can be recirculated or physically effaced, removed from circulation by being offered to the ancestors and gods to secure ancestral efficacy.

Informants indicate that in Roviana the death of a chief was marked by the transfer of his skull and particular *bakiha* to an ancestral shrine. The “sacrificed” shell rings embodied the chiefly ancestors themselves (Aswani 2000).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, other named *bakiha* were transferred to the newly appointed chief and remained as a bond with the dead chief and the *mateana*, their presence reminding the living of the chiefs’ continuity and their divine origin. The chiefs’ innate spiritual qualities were vehicles for their political legitimation and bestowed upon them powerful rights over territorial estates. The story of Ididu-Bangara and his kin’s rise to power illustrates this linkage. After Ididu-Bangara’s coastal resettlement, his progeny Qorabele and Taua (or Tagua) were supposedly transformed into *mateana*. (Site 13 is associated with Taua, Site 14 with Qorabele; neither is yet dated.) Qorabele died and flew to the sky, while Taua sank into the earth near the Zare Ibibu shrine in the Nusa Roviana hill fort. Subsequent chiefs who were genealogically linked to Taua authenticated their control over the land and its crops by asserting that the *mangini*, or land-fertilizing power, was their own flesh and blood. This power was held by priests under the authority of chiefs and transmitted through garden shrines (*hope mangini*) and sacred objects such as the *upahae*, a large embellished shell worn by a senior priest. In sum, sacred objects were not ordinarily exchanged, but at some stage before their decommo-ditization they had moved through other spheres of exchange.

The power of chiefs was ultimately amplified through such removals, which afforded them control over the means of production, circulation, and consumption of gifts and commodities. If inalienable possessions embody the essence of chiefly power, gifts and commodities conveyed across ceremonial and barter exchange networks are the lifelines of political control over social institutions. By controlling the production, circulation, and consumption of objects, chiefs could “switch” (Gregory 1997:8) between different standards of value depending on the context. Gift and commodity exchanges were interchangeable for political leaders because value was constituted in the public arena through displays of power and authority. Because authority required a genealogical link to Roviana chiefly ancestors, shell rings could be constituted to embody the power of ancestors in a ceremonial exchange through their embellishment or simply evince the chiefly appropriation of a captive’s labor and the concomitant effacing of their own history for the sole purpose of acquiring commodities by means of commodities in interisland barter. This was accomplished by making them mutually indistinguishable from other values (see Graeber 2001).

10. Barraud (1972) notes that in Simbo *bakiha* were placed under the skulls of chiefs to represent their souls.

Chiefs held sway over most ceremonial exchanges, in which valuables were publicly transferred to fulfill social and political obligations and to strengthen, reinforce, or restore social and political relationships. It is in this sphere of exchange that modes of exchange, relationships, and objects could take on the contours of a “gift,” with polysemic objects, services, or persons, either physically or cognitively constituted, being exchanged for the primary purpose of social reproduction (Carrier 1995, Gell 1992). The significance of Roviana gift exchanges, of course, rested upon the social relationships established between transactors, but the point here is the political agency that chiefs received from them.

*Bakiha* shell rings were the favored media of exchange in ceremonial contexts. They were used in marital exchanges, as compensation for adultery or incest, to seek chiefly redemption, as a token of shared origin and friendship, to hire other chiefs and warriors for warfare and assassins for murder, to make peace, to transfer territories, and for presentations during chiefly installations, among other contexts. They were not alienated, since they were made by craftspeople whose names were often associated with them and their exchange generally created indebtedness. What made them “gifts” was the remembrance of a donor’s social identity and covenant following a ceremonial exchange, particularly when such a transfer represented a sacrifice or loss to the giver (Gell 1992:145). Forfeiture of high-ranking *bakiha* occurred in specific ceremonial contexts such as chiefly installations and peace covenants where objects were often exchanged like-for-like (Gregory 1982).

Gift objects and the contexts in which they were transferred were polysemic enough to allow for substitution, in which nonequivalent objects moved against each other if sanctioned by giving and receiving parties. At first glance, many *bakiha* exchanges may fit Gregory’s notion of *kitoum*, within which gifts have exchange order rather than exchange value. Indeed, Roviana oral traditions make numerous references to exchanges of this sort. A case in point is a celebrated peace covenant established between Roviana and Vella Lavella polities after several military confrontations in the early 19th century. Both parties offered high-ranking red shell rings (*bakiha zingara*), but the Vella Lavella chiefs rejected the ring offered by Roviana chiefs as not red enough. Only after the Roviana chiefs found a suitable ring did an exchange seal their peace settlement. This example indicates that here only shell valuables of equivalent rank could be exchanged.

In other ceremonial contexts, however, lower-ranking *poata* and *hokata* could substitute for *bakiha*. During marital exchanges, for instance, it was expected that the kin of an aspiring bridegroom would present a suitable *bakiha* as bridewealth. The bride’s kin would, in turn, attempt to match the value of the offered shell ring with an equivalent ring to ensure continued access to the girl’s and her future offspring’s labor. At the end, the groom’s kin had to surpass the bride’s kin’s offering with an additional ring to ensure paternal rights (although not absolute) over the couple’s future children. Often suitable

*bakiha* could not be mustered on either side and an agreed-upon number of *poata* rings was substituted to consummate the marital settlement. Thus *bakiha* had both exchange order and potential substitution values. Scheffler (1965:200–201) recorded a similar duality for *kesa* shell valuables in Choiseul. Roviana ceremonial exchanges were central to social transformation, especially for the production and strengthening of social hierarchies. Chiefs mediated between exchanging parties, either collecting tribute for their assistance and protection or aiding in the exchange itself by using their own valuables.

In addition to ceremonial exchanges, exerting control over trading networks was vital to chiefly hegemony in the western Solomons as elsewhere in Oceania (e.g., Brunton 1975). Chiefs frequently determined the times, places, and objects of exchange in barter and achieved great financial gains through these activities. In these contexts, objects, modes of exchange, and relationships of exchange could constitute a “commodity” sphere in which polysemic objects, services, or persons, constituted either physically or cognitively, had exchange value and were exchanged for other commodities (e.g., *poata* for wicker shields) (Gell 1992, Thomas 1991). Commodity exchanges did not require transactors to be or become economically or socially indebted, but transactors could be in a creditor-debtor relationship. Shell rings, specifically *poata* proper and *hokata*, were the economic nexus, distinctly convertible currencies that linked friends and foes alike (cf. Bennett 1987:11). *Poata* were a good medium of exchange because they were liquid, divisible, portable, and concealable, and they evinced pure exchangeability (Robbins and Akin 1999: 4–5). More significant is that slaves, who had suffered a vital form of alienation, their labor and its products having been displaced in space and time and almost erased from collective memory, produced many *poata* proper.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the social relations between exchange parties and between people and exchanged objects could be contextually estranged during exchanges, particularly those between potential enemies. Numerous oral accounts suggest antagonistic relations between Roviana and Vella Lavella and Lokuru (Rendova) trading parties. Later, the term *poata* was extended to include European money. Given our knowledge of Roviana commodity exchange and shell valuable convertibility, we must consider that this may have been not simply a European superimposition of alien economic principles but an extension of indigenous concepts to encompass European objects and trade (Thomas 1991).

*Poata* were a general-purpose currency for purchasing both tangible goods and intangible goods and services such as magic and other forms of ritual knowledge. According to Thomas (1991:50), “in New Georgia ritual knowledge seems always to have been acquired through

‘purchase,’ that is, through an arrangement whereby an individual who wished to become a practitioner paid an established specialist in shells for knowledge and magical treatment . . . which was presumably thought to ensure efficacy.” Ethnographic and ethnohistorical evidence suggests that control over magic could be bought on either a temporary or a permanent basis. To buy *pela* (evil eye), for instance, one paid *bakiha* or *poata* to the seller for a limited ability to deploy it (in a relatively “weak” form), but the magic could not be transferred to one’s progeny unless one had a clear genealogical association with the original seller’s lineage. The inalienable ability to transmit the magic was permanently monopolized by lineages with a genealogical connection to the original bearers. Bogesi (1948:330) notes that *pela* “cannot be prevented, cured or purchased . . . and therefore it is regarded as hereditary and restricted only to *pela* families.” However, other forms of magic, such as the *tokoro* (e.g., placing taboos on property), could be sold as a service that required no transfer between practitioner and receiver but affected a third party or could be bought by anyone in perpetuity. In the latter case, the magic could be transferred to future generations, regardless of links to the original seller’s lineage or any consideration of relationships whatsoever.

## Conclusion

The Roviana case addresses a fundamental topic in the anthropology of western Melanesia and, by extension, Oceania as a whole: continuing processes of transformation involving political authority and exchange in the precolonial and colonial periods. We have presented here a model supported by ethnohistorical, archaeological, ethnographic, and historical data that illustrates how the Roviana exchange system was transformed during the 16th century by the emergence of hierarchical leadership and social stratification in a context of regional integration. Specifically, we have documented archaeologically the development of the shell-valuable economy and its association with significant changes in religious shrines and presumably ritual practice. Both co-occur with the construction of massive fortifications and the development of large, densely occupied coastal settlements.

In Roviana, multifarious currencies, exchange modes, and venues for value conversion were the loci for social reproduction, particularly for forming and strengthening social hierarchies. These conditions are congruent with those of other Oceanic societies that were highly stratified politically and had extensive regional exchange networks. Fluid social relations, multiple modes of exchange, and objects with substitutable and transcontextual values were essential conditions for sustained, centralized chiefly polities. This flexibility allowed for the development of diversified and regionally extensive exchange networks and their chiefly monopolization—processes triggered by changing regional settlement patterns and the nucleation of inland populations on the

11. While captives often married into Roviana lines and were generally well treated, many were considered expendable and were subject to sale or ultimate alienation by clubbing or decapitation as part of sacrificial rituals (see Aswani 2000).

coast. Social differentiation was ultimately attained through chiefly manipulation of economic, military, and ideological power (Earle 1997). These historical and cultural processes did not begin with the encroachment of colonial and capitalist enterprises. Rather, social relations, modes of exchange, and standards of valuation intensified within a gradual entanglement of regional polities that occurred centuries before European penetration. The causes and dynamics of such precolonial transformations in exchange systems, as distinct from those triggered by colonial projects, have great theoretical relevance beyond Oceania. Our purpose has not been to strip the European colonizers of their social, economic, and political impacts. Rather, we have sought to show how, by integrating the evidence from diverse sources, we can begin to uncover more fully the complexity of pre-European, non-Western modes, relationships, and objects of exchange. Intercourse between New Georgians and Europeans certainly accelerated the development and transformation of local exchange. However, bearing in mind the evidence presented here, it seems unlikely that the social, economic, and political transformation of Roviana polities could have occurred as rapidly or been so readily accepted by New Georgians in the absence of a preexisting template for multiple standards of valuation within the indigenous social economy. This template gained preeminence in the 16th century following the amalgamation of diverse regional cultural and linguistic groups. It is quite possible that it extends back to the Lapita horizon and underpins the social and political evolution of societies across Near and Remote Oceania.

The evidence suggests the existence of precolonial forms of commodity exchange in Roviana, but we do not argue that Roviana barter was congruent with modern market exchange. This was a time of powerful chiefs and burgeoning ritual, economic, and political activities including predatory head-hunting and inter-island trade. It was a period when the social axioms governing the value of exchangeable possessions were part of a system of ranked exchange. New shell valuables and channels for their distribution emerged or perhaps were synergistically constituted to signify a new set of social relations characteristic of more stratified societies. Ranking allowed distinctions between different modes, relationships, and objects of exchange with regard to their cultural and social significance, but it did not establish absolute boundaries between spheres. Shell valuables were contextually mutable and capable of fulfilling multiple social exigencies.

The key to the success of Roviana elites throughout southwestern New Georgia and beyond was their ability to manipulate the production and distribution of shell valuables. Their success required tangible symbols of political legitimation. Named shell valuables emerged as symbols of efficacy bestowed by the chiefly deities. Cosmological authentication through the possession of sacralized shell rings afforded chiefs control over territorial estates and ceremonial and commodity exchange networks. Sacred objects, along with success in war, became

the foundation of chiefly authority and the catalyst for the expansion of diverse exchange modes across Roviana society.

## Comments

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An obvious value of this finely crafted paper is its dedicated resistance to what Feld and Basso (1996) refer to as an anthropology of contained people, places, and identities—its project of mapping a regional exchange system's transformational thing-life in which elements we tend to link with "modernity" are shown to have emerged from a particular convergence of sociopolitical contingencies before contact with European expansionism. The empirical research is meticulous and the argument complex and subtle—seductive, even—so that even as I find myself wanting to lift the veil of certain obfuscating terms of reference, it is from a position of relief that the old antagonism between thing-based and person-based models of exchange has been sidelined by the paper's productive methodology, in which ethnography, ethnohistory, and archaeology come together as mutually "supplemental" discourses, each exposing the insufficiencies and destabilizing the prior knowledge of the others (as I have figured this elsewhere [1999]).

One mystery, then, is why the authors still deem it necessary to position their argument, in its historicalness, as the logical opposite of an "essentialist" anthropology—as if microhistorical ethnographic knowledge of particular social sites or accounts that give weight to local values and practices of recursive (rather than chronological) time or acknowledge agency as residing, from local points of view, in nonhuman as well as in human agents (especially relevant in the case of human heads) should be banished from the ethnoscapes and not just separated out from the worthwhile objectives of this particular study. A paper as discursively flow-friendly and contingency-oriented as this one is if anything at odds with the kind of "corporeal fetishism" (to borrow a term from Donna Haraway) invoked by "isms," even essentialism, and their opposites. Moreover, it is at odds with earlier boundary-maintenance models of any "sphere" of exchange that could deny valuables their function as evidence of the *claims* persons make to potency by means of such objects (see, for example, Rutherford 2003:17).

Thus, the paper's stated intention of following "gifts," "commodities," and "inalienable possessions" as they move between spheres of exchange actually unfolds here as an exemplary rendering of interactional, "multimodal networks": formations that expose boundary permeability, resist closure of political identities, fixation, and essentializing predicaments, and emphasize social connec-

tions and tactical or strategic disconnections. Thus Aswani and Sheppard suggest an exchange phenomenon that is heterogeneous and more complex than its map. It is also relationally “holographic” in the sense of “every part containing information about the whole and information about the whole being enfolded into each part” (Strathern 1995; also Wagner 1986, 2001).

If there is a problem with the model, it resides for me at the level of oversimplified terms (in line with Robbins and Akin): taking a tired example, the term “commodity.” Is a “commodity” that functions as a commensurable unit of value in a market economy likewise a commodity in the endogenous system of practice and multilocalized meanings the paper considers? Or does such an object merely resemble a commodity at the face value of particular, scientifically validating “modern facts . . . ‘torn up by the roots’ ” not only from interpretive context (Bacon’s image in Poovey 1998:xvii) but from a socially networked ecology (e.g., Riles 2000)?

Again, the approach implicitly recognizes the problem of this kind of radical extraction, although it finds itself in some trouble at the point of extracting, if only for the sake of argument, the content of oral histories from their iterative social life of “entextualization” (Silverstein and Urban 1996), “contexture” (Daniel and Peck 1996), and performance—their dimension as social practices that allow us “to address the problem of how things mean, rather than what they mean” (Sykes 2003). I would be fascinated to learn what contemporary people of this region make of the project and its important findings and insights.

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This paper is a bold attempt to construct a history for Roviana over the past five centuries as well as to reconceptualize the Western Solomons exchange system. It represents a fruitful collaboration between archaeology and anthropology but would be more complete if some neglected sources of evidence had been incorporated into the argument. My comments will focus on what I think is missing, but they should not be read as significantly undermining an ambitious and stimulating attempt to rework the social prehistory of Island Melanesia.

The paper’s missing ingredient is any explicit consideration of the material basis for Roviana chieftainship. We are told that Tae Bangara and the chiefs in general regulated the large-scale circulation of foodstuffs, particularly taro from inland, in the context of chiefly feast enterprises. The control of surplus by coastal chiefs is described as “appropriation,” but it is not clear how they managed to exert this power in exchange relations, especially as the inland Kazukuru showed interest in only one type of shell valuable. In Marovo Lagoon, on the other side of New Georgia Island, most exchange was the barter of foodstuffs (e.g., inland taro, nuts, or meat

for coastal fish), and one might suggest that transfers of archaeologically invisible foods are one of the missing elements in the Roviana story.

To understand more fully the emergence of prominent chiefs, we need to see New Georgia in a wider context. Sahlins’s (1958) classic *Social Stratification in Polynesia* may need some revision (Friedman 1981), but his basic findings have been confirmed by later work (e.g., Kirch 1994). Sahlins showed that despite their common cultural origins, the degree of social stratification that developed on Polynesian islands was strongly correlated with their material base. Complex chiefdoms on high islands like Tonga, Tahiti, and Hawaii were associated with large populations and with food surpluses magnified by intensification, especially wetland taro. Small isolates like Tikopia, degraded dry islands like Rapa Nui, and especially the small and hazardous atolls sustained more egalitarian societies. Although not part of Sahlins’s analysis, one might suppose that malarial but otherwise favourable islands like New Georgia would lie somewhere between the two extremes. Yet Aswani and Shepard envisage a rise in social stratification in Roviana after ca. 1500 without considering its links to agricultural or demographic factors.

Taro terracing in inland New Georgia is mentioned, but surprisingly without reference to Tedder and Barrus’s (1976) study of the terrace systems (*ruta*) in Kusaghe, northern New Georgia, an area with as many links to Roviana as to Marovo. Tedder’s maps plus a further example from Gatokae provided one basis for our analysis of the taro systems of southeastern New Georgia (Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000:130–43). We estimated that the area under taro *ruta* and swiddens could have sustained up to 22,000 people at densities of 12 persons per km<sup>2</sup> in areas largely devoid of inland settlement since the early 20th century. This calculated density may seem excessive, but it was actually exceeded by the Siuai of southern Bougainville (1938 data) and by the Gwaiiau and Baegu of northern Malaita (Bayliss-Smith, Hviding, and Whitmore 2003). These inland populations and their surplus production constitute a formidable resource for social differentiation, but their likely role in Roviana history is largely ignored in this paper.

The archaeological evidence of taro terraces in New Georgia is matched by the indirect evidence of forest floristics, which again is a missing ingredient from the Roviana story. Substantial areas of disturbance forest were mapped by the colonial Land Resources Survey, using 1969 air photographs (Wall and Hansell 1975). From its maps of forest types, the indicator species *Camptosperma brevipetiolatum* can be used to locate forest stands that have grown up in areas disturbed in the mid-19th century by settlement, swiddens, and *ruta* cultivation. The LRS maps show substantial areas inland of the Roviana Lagoon with *Camptosperma* trees. On the other side of the island in Marovo Lagoon, we have used such evidence, alongside oral histories (Hviding 1995), to locate several “abodes of seven thousand.” These centres are located in precisely those areas with a concentration of archaeological evidence of former set-

tlements, shrines, and *ruta* (Bayliss-Smith, Hviding and Whitmore 2003).

Therefore, rather than invoking “population pressure” (for which Aswani and Sheppard have no evidence) as the reason for “progressive radiation to the coast” after ca. 1500, we should perhaps see intensified taro production and growing exchange between the interior and the coast as the engines driving social change in Roviana, leading to expanding relationships overseas and growing stratification at home. In this alternative model coast and interior are explicitly linked, rather than there being an assumed historical process of migration from a bush “homeland” towards the supposed maritime riches of the Roviana Lagoon. An accurate picture of Roviana prehistory cannot be gained by assuming coastal dominance of both politics and exchange, even if today’s coastal communities are very likely to construct their histories from this “saltwater” perspective.

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Aswani and Sheppard’s argument consists in showing that in Roviana different forms of exchange (both gifts and commodities) coexisted and experienced transformations well before the arrival of Europeans and, more generally, in stressing the endogenous character of regimes of value change. I am not going to comment on the facts they present to defend this argument. I will take them at face value and look at one theoretical point: their concept of “coexistence.” They do not challenge the fact that exchange systems in this part of Melanesia were fundamentally disturbed by European commoditization. Instead, they hope to demonstrate that commodity exchange existed before contact. The argument thus critiques the paradigm of an essential Melanesian gift economy. The authors want to lay the foundations for an internal history by showing that the preexisting multiplicity of exchange forms was endowed with its own dynamics. In general terms, the idea is legitimate and commonsense. Thus the question must be asked what makes it necessary to advocate it so vigorously.

The theory of exogenous transformation does not rest on gift essentialism (rather, it defends the idea of the “entanglement” of diverging exchange systems). It may be explained in terms of an atomistic, individualistic conception of social facts. At the risk of oversimplification, I would suggest that external history reveals—in its antiessentialist posture—some difficulty in conceptualizing the endogenous dynamics of social forms because it relies entirely on the notion of the agent, that is, of the individual, to describe action. Thus an exogenous logic of power relations between agents that reckons only shocks and contacts (as any atomistic sociology or physics would do) is substituted for the logic of social reproduction. External history, whose historicism is akin

to the old diffusionism, is a theoretical consequence of the reluctance to think of exchange in terms of an instituted hierarchy of values.

No Melanesianist would challenge the fact that gift exchange coexists with forms of purchase and “commodity.” The question is what role these forms play in social reproduction and, particularly, in the division of social labor. If one wants to draw on Marx, one must reckon that being purchased against a currency does not transform a good into a commodity unless this exchange is articulated with an overall commodity division of labor. Is this the case here? Certainly not. Commodities, then, are not the vector of social reproduction but are subordinated in this regard to other forms. Antagonistic logics such as those of the gift and the commodity may coexist but not at the same level. They have different functions with regard to global reproduction. People do not just “switch” between standards of value; they hierarchize them and are aware of their diverging social consequences (as the contrast between “bisnis” and “kastom” clearly shows). The concept of “coexistence” (or “entanglement”) makes it impossible for Aswani and Sheppard to see the hierarchical articulation of gifts and commodities. They describe the different logics of value only at the locus of the transaction, never globally or in relation to the construction of the group or the person (although they are talking about agency), where their hierarchical articulation would have been observable. Marriage and homicide compensations, for instance, are not dealt with. The “context” of exchange that they constantly refer to is a reduction of the social domain to the circumscribed dimension of individual strategies. In this mutilated context, the taken-for-granted statement that “shells embody the power of the ancestors,” however familiar it is to Melanesianists, loses all intelligibility precisely because it requires a larger perspective to make sense.

Aswani and Sheppard must be praised for advocating an internal history, but they do not renounce the atomistic sociology that led to the theory of exogenous transformations. They see the agency of chiefs exercising control over resources as the cause of endogenous changes. According to this historicist perspective, it is now the internal rather than the external event that is the efficient cause; in other words, an atomistic logic has simply been internalized. Chiefs are regarded as the sole agents only because domination is viewed as agency in its right guise. Thus, the ideology of the overall system of exchange is described from the point of view of their interested action. It is as if value had been “invented” by the chiefs—but then, who “invented” the chiefs? “Cosmological authentication” is seen as an essentially individual strategy, and its social conditions of intelligibility are set aside as if they were pure fiction. A true internal history, however, must begin by defining the hierarchized articulation of value forms in the overall process of social reproduction. Thus, the presence of proto-commodities becomes analytically compatible

with a nonessentialized domination of the “gift economy.”

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Aswani and Sheppard deserve credit for accomplishing the sort of cross-disciplinary collaboration that anthropologists routinely advocate but rarely undertake. Their reconstruction of a dynamic regional exchange system dispels the image of static Melanesian societies awaiting the arrival of Europeans to begin history. Their account of the centralization and consolidation of political hierarchy, moreover, revises a persistent view of precolonial Melanesian polities as the limited creations of egalitarian big men. Aswani and Sheppard make possible a fuller comparative understanding of the entanglements between indigenous and exogenous agents and agendas during the colonial period. The Roviana case exemplifies how an “expansive” mode of social reproduction (Foster 1995) readily incorporated new media and relations of exchange—not enclaving valuables such as *poata* but instead multiplying their uses.

Aswani and Sheppard invoke Weiner’s (1992) notion of “cosmological authentication,” without her concern for the role of women, to demonstrate that Roviana chiefs legitimated their rule through possession of objects deemed inalienable. But the explanation appeals to practical more than cultural reason. Put simply, why shells? Aswani and Sheppard’s argument—like the origin myth of Ididu-Bangara’s relocation—risks taking demand for shells as given, passing lightly over the symbolic meaning of the currency. The invidious distinctions arising from control over shells overshadow the circulation of shells in a mode of social reproduction that put headhunting and raiding as well as marriage and ritual offerings in the service of regenerating life. Material in the article suggests that the efficacy of shells in a process of renewing and recycling “land-fertilization power” (*mangini*) warrants further exegesis. Ethnography can here supplement the view of shells as tokens of power by specifying the cultural sense in which shells (by contrast with any other medium of exchange) constituted personhood and cosmos (see Breton 2000, de Coppet 1982).

Aswani and Sheppard’s provocative argument about the existence of “coexisting standards of value” undoes the antinomy between an economy organized around “spheres of exchange” and one organized in terms of a unitary standard of value represented by money (cf. Bohannan 1955). The argument is also a critique of a position, now conventionally attributed to Strathern (1988), that “essentializes” exchange in Melanesian societies as gift exchange (or, at least, sees such exchange as mainly if not exclusively gift exchange). Precolonial Roviana transactions plainly varied with respect to the alienability of the objects exchanged and the morality of exchange relations. Aswani and Sheppard thus follow a

strategy pursued in recent critiques of another position associated with Strathern, namely, a position that identifies Melanesia with “relational personhood” or “dividuality” by contrast with Western individualism. These critiques maintain that both kinds of personhood can be found in Melanesia as well as the West, just as gifts can be found in so-called commodity societies and vice versa. Fair enough; but the dichotomies of gift/commodity and individual/dividual were offered as heuristic devices (and Aswani and Sheppard explicitly treat them as such) meant to articulate larger differences in sociality. To accept the dichotomy only to turn it back on itself risks losing sight of the original purpose for which it was created.

The claim that all human beings everywhere have always operated with coexisting standards of value, when coupled with the claim that commodity exchange existed (perhaps predominated) in Roviana before Europeans arrived, tends toward the conclusion that Roviana people were preadapted to capitalism. Aswani and Sheppard might not necessarily agree with this bald conclusion. I use the word “preadapted” to recall some of the arguments (see, e.g., Epstein 1968, Finney 1973) against which the heuristic device of gifts/commodities was formulated. Instead of “preadapted,” Melanesian exchange systems were to be understood ideally as elements of a mode of social reproduction that was not capitalist, that is, not predicated upon the market sale of labor power by “free individuals.” Accordingly, if commodity exchange signals no more than something like truck, barter, or trade—a transaction of unlike but nonetheless convertible things—then the recognition of such exchange in precolonial Melanesia is neither problematic nor contentious. But if commodity exchange signals the operation of a mode of social reproduction performed through market relations in which the objects and subjects of exchange both assume a peculiar commodity form, then the rhetorical emphasis on temporal continuity in Roviana exchange systems is misleading. At the extreme, this emphasis naturalizes capitalism in the spirit of Adam Smith—as the enlargement of a mode of exchange that was there from the start—rather than apprehending it in historically particular terms. What understanding is lost or gained by likening Tae Bagara’s hoard of shells to “capital,” even with the qualifying diacritics? Has essentialism been avoided only to commit assimilation? The gift/commodity dualism is intended to explicate, in the spirit of Mauss, a difference between whole modes of life, a difference that—perhaps only analytical today—ought not to be erased.

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Only a decade ago, the Western Solomon Islands remained largely neglected by anthropologists and archaeologists, although New Georgia loomed large in colonial writings on the Solomons as a locale of headhunting

chiefdoms rapidly transformed into a hugely successful mission field. Aswani and Sheppard's paper is a welcome contribution to an increasing corpus of published research on the ethnography, history, and archaeology of this part of Melanesia. Taking on a perhaps overly ambitious range of topics and debates—from the dating of archaeological materials through comparative debates on chiefdoms to recent anthropological work on commodities—the authors do succeed to a considerable degree in extending the time frame of documented New Georgian pasts. Results from the 1996–2000 New Georgia Archaeological Survey have general potential for the rethinking of comparative issues concerning Pacific exchange, ritual, and leadership and, as is exemplified by the present paper, set the stage for work that may further nuance and disturb the regional subdivisions of Oceania.

The National Sites Survey carried out by the government archaeologist Daniel Miller just before Solomon Islands independence (Miller 1979) indicated the richness of archaeological sites in the Western Solomons and the ways in which the sites related to living local histories of interisland exchange and warfare. Those of us fortunate enough to have done fieldwork in villages of New Georgia can attest to a richness of *kastom*—in the midst of Methodism, Seventh-Day Adventism, and the traditionalist-oriented, indigenous Christian Fellowship Church—through which the salience of “*tambu sites*” (*hope*) and old shell objects remains, even intensifies, especially in contestations over land. In New Georgian discourse on customary tenure of land and sea, genealogy conferring rights and rank is tied to histories of mobility, migration, exchange, and chiefly succession.

That New Georgian exchange is a complex topic is attested to not least by the documented scales of the networks involved. I here exploit the insider privilege of engaging in spatially close comparative issues. Finding the paper to generate many queries to be pursued from the alternative vantage point of southeastern New Georgia (Marovo, or “old Ulusaghe”), I can only follow up a few. Although oral traditions give information about the extent of past networks and the objects that flowed within and between them, the actual nature of those flows is a more difficult reconstructive challenge. Despite the authors' stated aim of integrating “spheres of exchange,” there is a sense in which the paper highlights strongly visible ceremonial exchange at the cost of less spectacular activities of barter, especially of foodstuffs. Also, the authors' vantage point of Roviana—unquestionably a hub of precolonial and early colonial regional systems—at times makes it appear as if the various transmutations of the “Roviana chiefdom” derived much of their power from within themselves, so to speak. In particular, the role of large-scale irrigated cultivation of taro in inland New Georgia remains underutilized in their efforts to reconstruct the foundations of the Roviana system.

As we have argued from materials on southeastern New Georgia (Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000), the flow of large quantities of wetland taro and processed *Ca-*

*narium* nuts from inland groups to coastal chiefly polities (speaking different languages)—through exchange, barter, and tribute—formed a key component of regionally important feasts. Although I accept Aswani and Sheppard's outline of fine distinctions within the New Georgia group, it would have been interesting to see more attention given to the historical role of large taro pondfield systems in the hinterlands of Roviana northwards into Kusaghe (Tedder and Barrus 1976). In a forthcoming paper (Bayliss-Smith, Hviding, and Whitmore 2003), analysis by Hviding and Bayliss-Smith (2000: 130–41) of past patterns of inland population and irrigated taro cultivation in southeastern, central, and northern New Georgia is developed with attention to how botanical evidence of human disturbance to rain forest, combined with archaeological evidence, oral traditions, and known productivities of Oceanic pondfield and swidden systems, may yield unexpected insights to historical demography. Tentative estimates reached for populations, largely inland, by around 1800 (soon after population decline set in) range (depending on variables) from 11,780 to 22,310 in an area that had 6,595 inhabitants in 1986.

Although Roviana is not covered by this analysis, several districts are contiguous and so defined by New Georgian oral traditions. Thus the Roviana situation may well have been more complex than what is implied by the authors' assessment that “[Roviana] chiefs controlled the . . . irrigated taro . . . pondfields.” The challenging task of addressing the relationships between large inland populations, high taro productivity, and political power is hinted at but not followed up by the authors. By singling out this question my intention has been to applaud a fine paper by suggesting ways in which it may inspire further comparative analysis in dialogue with rapidly accumulating documentation of the long-term history of a truly important Melanesian archipelago about which too little has been known.

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Drawing upon my fieldwork in Munda, Roviana (Schneider 1996), I support Aswani and Sheppard's reconstruction of the historical establishment of the Roviana politico-economic system, but I do not agree with the premises they put forward for explaining the intensification of social activities. There was no centralized political authority, shell valuables were not ranked, and except for *poata*, the white clamshell ring, one specific ring was employed in changing contexts.

Chief Qutu (in the 1800s) was the last overall chief of Nusa Roviana and Munda (except for the village of Kindu, which had also been founded as a separate political entity by the Roviana people). It was not during his rule that the Roviana polity reached its greatest power but later. Qutu had several wives, and their descendants established the polities of Saikile, Kalikoqu (which in-

cluded part of Nusa Roviana), Kokorapa on Nusa Roviana, and Dunde and Kekehe on the Munda mainland in addition to Kindu. From this time on shell-valuable production intensified, along with headhunting raids, etc.

There were no chiefly deities in Roviana from which chiefs claimed descent. The concept of *banara mateana* has been invented in the present context of land disputes in an attempt to exaggerate the status of a chief in reaction to others' claims of sole landownership by denying any role of chiefs in matters of land. The concept of *banara mateana* did not exist as such before land became a capitalist commodity. The two were separate concepts and recorded accordingly by Hocart (MSS 3, 8, 22). Chiefs always administered land issues, but they did not have sole control over territorial estates, and shrines were only markers of political boundaries. There is no matrilineal bias in the reckoning of descent (see Schneider 1998).

In times of headhunting there was no need for chiefs to claim divine descent to legitimate their authority. In addition to descending from dead chiefs, a chief had to achieve his position. Returning from a successful headhunting raid, he validated his power by presenting the transformed heads as skulls to the spirits. This was the visible expression that his communication with the spirits had been effective (*mana*). Chiefs worshipped at their own ancestral shrines to get support for their undertakings from dead chiefs and spirits.

A main priest ensured and restored the fertility of all the garden plots of the Munda polity through rites conducted at a main shrine. A minor priest worshipped at local shrines to ensure the fertility of a single garden plot. The insignia of the main priest was the shell ring *upahae*, which was similar in shape to the *bareke*, the insignia of the minor priest. The insignia of the chief was the *bakiha zinara*, which had a larger yellow stain than the *bakiha*. These rings were used in the sphere of relationships with spirits and made visible the connection of chiefs and priests with the spiritual world. The *bakiha* circulated in the political realm, being exchanged in ceremonies installing chiefs, cementing alliances within the Roviana polity and beyond, making peace, and deposing tyrants. *Hokata* were given in marriage transactions and in exchange for permitted premarital sexual relations. *Poata* served as a general medium of exchange facilitating social relations within Roviana and integrating the polities of the New Georgia Group.

Before the intensification of trade with Europeans, the shell valuables had their distinct sphere of circulation and were not substitutable for each other. There was no internal exchange rate amongst them. Certain shell valuables sustained a distinct politico-religious realm, and all the others were equally important for social reproduction. One set was not worth more than the other because neither would have worked without the other.

With the intensification of trade with Europeans, the situation gradually changed. Shell valuables became interchangeable, and Hocart's list (MS 6:4) of their exchange rates reflects the particular articulation of Roviana and Western social relations. Assuming that these exchange ratios have always corresponded to a kind of

Western commodity relations would mean ignoring history and a reliance on texts. At the time when shell valuables took on "transcontextual values" and an internal exchange rate, the old Roviana political hierarchy broke down. To put it briefly: In the beginning, Western commodities were incorporated into the Roviana exchange system. First Munda polities gained superior power because they were the centre of shell-valuable production and therefore were able to amass European commodities, notably superior weapons. Over time shell valuables came to be more evenly distributed within the Western Solomons, and the relatives of victims of headhunting raids were able to defeat the Roviana in their pursuit of heads. This suggested that chiefs were not communicating successfully with the spirits, and therefore they had to launch more raids to acquire skulls in order to appease the spirits. In the end raids were carried out within the New Georgia Group. The cultural logic of the old Roviana social system was no longer compatible with commoditized relations of a Western type.

## Reply

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We thank the commentators for their careful consideration of the various facets of our paper. As Hviding points out, this paper is ambitious in attempting to present aspects of a large project (the New Georgia Archaeological Survey, 1996–2000) that involved considerable archaeological, ethnohistorical, and palaeoenvironmental research conducted by three universities (the University of Auckland [Sheppard and Aswani], the University of Otago [Richard Walter], the University of Western Australia [John Dodson]) over a four-year period within the confines of a short journal paper. Its focus is the ethnohistorical and ethnographic research conducted by Aswani on the Roviana shell-valuable system, building on comments on New Georgia exchange made by Thomas (1991). In the course of its development, increasing amounts of archaeological data were added as it was recognized that the chronology of the development of the system and the associated hypothesis of sociopolitical transformation in Roviana provided a needed context for and a new look at the prehistory of an Island Melanesian exchange system. The resulting paper is, therefore, one that most commentators have found useful but, given the breadth of its approach, not much concerned with developing a particular line of argument. It presents a limited view of the data from the archaeological survey and excavation led by Sheppard and Walter (Sheppard, Walter, and Aswani n.d., Felgate 2001, Sheppard, Walter, and Nagaoka 2000, Walter and Sheppard 2000), still largely in press or contained in student theses nearing completion. This work includes comprehensive reports on the archaeology of mainland New Georgia and the

Roviana Lagoon beyond Nusa Roviana (Sheppard and Walter n.d.), detailed study of the material culture including shell valuables found associated with shrines, and the results of analysis of a series of pollen cores which provide some proxy data for changes in food production going back some 3,000 years. Members of the NGAS project plan to prepare a multidisciplinary paper that focuses on the archaeological argument and looks more closely at the economic and the regional context of the Roviana development.

Both Hviding and Bayliss-Smith comment on the absence of data on the “material basis of Roviana chieftainship.” Sheppard and Walter have found considerable evidence of old settlements, terraces, taro irrigation systems (*ruta*), and shrines on mainland New Georgia, both in the coastal hills and inland. This is in keeping with earlier reports (Reeve 1986, Tedder and Barrus 1976) from Northwest New Georgia indicating major interior settlements and large-scale taro production. That research and subsequent reconnaissance by Sheppard and Walter on Rannonga and Vella Lavella, along with the work of Hviding and Bayliss-Smith in Marovo (Bayliss-Smith, Hviding, and Whitmore 2003, Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000) and other researchers elsewhere in the Western Solomons (Chickamori 1967), confirms that prior to the major population crashes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries the islands of the Western Solomons had large inland taro-based populations, probably comparable in size and distribution to those found on Malaita today. Therefore, we take it as given that taro horticulture underwrote the Roviana economy, with taro moving from areas of production to areas of scarcity. Certainly the small barrier island of Nusa Roviana could not have supported the apparently dense settlement attested to by archaeology and early ethnography without mainland taro production. Unfortunately, data on the nature of taro production and movement in the later 19th century are very limited. Hocart provides some data on the provision of taro for feasts and its role in the exchange economy, but these are mainly for the small, apparently resource-poor island of Simbo, 80 km west of Roviana. The archaeology of taro production in the Western Solomons is in its infancy, and it will be some time before we have even a skeletal picture of its chronology and scale. Considerably more data are required to tackle the notoriously difficult subject of identifying intensification in the record. Pollen data may provide some proxy for variation in overall food production through time, and it will be interesting to examine the correlation between that data set and the archaeological evidence of sociopolitical and religious change. As Bayliss-Smith notes, the work of Sahlins and others would indicate that changes in the material basis of this society should accompany the kind of changes observed in Roviana. In fact, in his seminal paper on political organization and stratification Sahlins (1963), after calling for caution in the use of his abstractions of big men and chiefs, indicates in a seldom-read footnote that many of the societies of the Western Solomons seemed to be more “complex” than could be accounted for by the big-man concept. Bayliss-Smith and

Hviding may also be correct in hypothesizing that development occurred in the region through complex interrelationships between the coast and interior, with the growth of taro production in the interior. We are not arguing here for an abandonment of the interior; in fact, we can show that it was inhabited in the 19th century. We do, however, argue that the coastal/interior tension was a fundamental aspect of social relationships in the region and that this played a role in the development of the Roviana polity in the 16th century. Although the interior remained inhabited, the focus of history, at least from a Roviana perspective, shifted at that time from the interior to the coast.

Battaglia, Breton, and Foster provide, in varying ways, insightful comment on theoretical issues arising from our handling of different forms of exchange. Ultimately this focuses on our use of the concept of the commodity, and we find ourselves having to agree with much of their critique. Our use of the term is perhaps simplistic, and our construction of the total system of exchange and social reproduction is partial. Unfortunately, ethnographic or ethnohistorical data on the details of the functioning of the shell-valuable system with regard to marriage or other compensation payments and its articulation with food exchanges are limited. Given the sketchy data provided by Hocart early in the 20th century, particularly with regard to exchange of shell rings for magic, it is clear that Roviana “commodity” exchange was a much more complex phenomenon than is implied by the Western concept of commodity and certainly, as Foster notes, did not imply a capitalist mode of social reproduction.

We appreciate the commentary of Schneider, one of the few people to have carried out ethnographic research in Roviana (Schneider 1996). His Ph.D. research was conducted in the regional center of Munda and dealt with the land dispute that has kept the local chieftainship unresolved for most of the last century. Munda is the major point of articulation with the Western economy today and has been since traders first became established there in the 1860s. In this context, commodification of land is rather well developed and claims to chiefly authority and “ownership” are contentious. Our work, however, has been carried out both in the Munda area and in the chiefly districts of Kalikoqu and Saikile in the inner lagoon east of Munda, where capitalist commodification of land is very limited, and this difference has created some ethnographic discrepancies between our explanation and Schneider’s. For instance, Schneider asserts that in Roviana “there is no matrilineal bias in reckoning descent.” The Roviana kinship system corresponds to what Hviding (1996) has described at nearby Marovo Lagoon and Schefler’s (1962) description of Simbo Island. Membership in a descent group is cognatic, acquired through either parent. In Roviana, as with other groups in New Georgia, cognatic descent is cumulative, allowing an individual to amass filial links through his or her genealogical association with various maternal and paternal ancestors. However, the cognatic descent rule is not universally binding; there is a tendency in some groups in Roviana (e.g., Kalikoqu) to stress female over male filial links in matters

of political authority and land rights. Senior men will refer frequently to their genealogical association with central females in their descent line (*podo varikaleqe*, "born to a woman") to accentuate the preeminence of their territorial claims over competing ones. Individuals who can trace or inconspicuously modify their descent to an unbroken line of females can, in principle, have stronger decision-making rights in matters of a tribe's estates than those who trace their descent patrilineally. This is particularly true for the Kalikoqu and Saikile areas (Aswani 1997, 1999). Discerning these ethnographic particularities requires proficiency in the Roviana vernacular and a research strategy that focuses on the entire region.

Schneider also claims that "the concept of *banāra mateana* has been invented in the present context of land disputes." There is little reason in Kalikoqu and Saikile in the historic period for such invention, although it is not inconceivable. Chiefs in those regions clearly trace their origins to the *mateana* shrines on Nusa Roviana and assign them a genealogical age that must be earlier than A.D. 1800 (cf. Parker 1994). We cannot, of course, "prove" this historical scenario, but there is some evidence to support it. The concept of *mateana* as a supernatural being intermediate between gods (*tamasa*) and ancestors (*to-mate*) is well known throughout the Western Solomons. In Marovo Hviding (1996) reports the use of the term to refer to a supernatural ancestor of a landholding group, while on Simbo Rivers reported, in 1908, the concept as an anomalous form of supernatural being, although he argued that its anomalous position indicated that it was a recent introduction. Schneider is correct in stating that Hocart did not report *banāra mateana* in his very brief notes on chiefs in Roviana (Hocart MSS). The story of the *mateana* shrines at which the ancestors of modern chiefs ascended or descended from their funeral biers is found in Waterhouse's (1949 [1928]) Roviana dictionary. (We do not know if it is found in the 1928 version.) It seems a rather complicated scenario to have the concept invented post-1908 and accepted and associated with specific supernatural events possibly by 1928 and ultimately with specific shrine locations in the hill fort of Nusa Roviana, which by the 20th century had long been abandoned. What Schneider is suggesting is of course that the concept was invented to provide legitimacy to specific chiefly claims. Our hypothesis is essentially the same, although we see this as occurring much earlier and associated with the development of skull shrines, hill forts, and the shell-valuable economy. We do not need to invoke capitalist commodification of land to explain this development. In our view this is another case of the widespread Austronesian transformation described by Fox (1995).

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