

INVESTIGATION OF MATERIAL CULTURE

by K. P. Emory

In the determination of what in the culture is due to the particular environment of the atoll being studied, and what due to the cultural influences brought to the island, historically, it will be necessary to record details of structure and technique in the material culture, native terms, and what the people themselves have to say about origins.

For content and terminology of material culture investigations on an atoll one should have at hand Dr. Buck's "Material Culture of Kapingamarangi", Bishop Museum bulletin 200, designed to set a pattern for such recordings. What has been known of canoes is summarized by Hornell, "Canoes of Oceania," Bishop Museum special publication 27, vol. 1, pp. 345-361. Time would be saved by having a copy of this and simply noting anything different, new or additional.

Of special importance to record step by step in every detail is the preparation of pandanus flour, pandanus preserve, breadfruit preserve, preparations of arrow-root, etc. A photograph record of these in color as well as in black and white would give us material comparable to that we now have from the Marshalls and from Kapingamarangi. Always inquire what the ancient methods were like, - if they differed from the present and how and why.

An effort should be made to collect shell or stone adzes, ancient fish hooks and ornaments that the people may have found. Adults and children could be encouraged to hunt for them during the stay of the expedition.

For the island of Onotoa, in the Gilberts, it would be interesting to know if they also made the coconut fibre armor and if any now living know the techniques. Also, do they know how the shark's teeth were bored to be lashed to weapons. Tamana, next atoll south, seems to be the island mentioned as the homeland of the Kapingamarangi people. If so, it was once inhabited by Polynesians. Is there trace of an early occupation of Onotoa by Polynesians?

Arthur Grimble's, "The Migration of a Pandanus People," Journal of the Polynesian Society, Memoirs no. 12 (1933-1934) is our main source for the Gilberts, revealing how little we know of them.