PACIFIC ISLANDS COLLECTIONS AT THE CALIFORNIA MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA–RIVERSIDE

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More than twenty thousand photographs in the collections at the California Museum of Photography, University of California–Riverside (UCR CMP), document a century of history in the Pacific region. Most were taken between 1870 and 1930, many by a corps of unnamed photographers dispatched by stereographic companies to collect images for commercial purposes. There were also individuals like Harry Pidgeon, who crossed the Pacific documenting all aspects of life in the region. The Pacific images in two of the principal stereographic collections at UCR CMP, the Keystone-Mast Collection and the Harry Pidgeon Collection, are described. These collections have not been cataloged, yet for those willing to brave the idiosyncratic filing systems established by the original stereographic companies as well as Pidgeon himself, they are well worth the time and effort. For the archaeologist, anthropologist, and historian working in the region, the collections provide a wealth of information that complements and illustrates other research materials. Represented are traditional activities and occupations, rituals, crafts, architecture, monuments, and other material culture elements, along with images of burgeoning development and "modern" industrial societies.

FROM "SAVAGE MANEATERS of New Guinea" to "Samoan Maidens," perhaps twenty thousand or more of the nearly half-million photographs housed in the collections at the California Museum of Photography, University of California–Riverside (UCR CMP), document a century of history in the Pacific region, with the majority of images taken between 1870 and 1930. Most of the photographs were produced by stereographic companies that dispatched vast

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armies of photographers to collect images of all kinds for commercial opportunities in educational and home entertainment markets. But there were also people like Harry Pidgeon, an adventurous soul who crossed the Pacific in a small handmade boat to document all aspects of life in the region. Represented are images of remnant traditional activities and occupations, rituals, crafts, architecture, monuments, and sundry other material culture elements, as well as images of burgeoning development and "modern" industrial societies.

For the archaeologist, anthropologist, and historian working in the Pacific, the collections provide a vast wealth of information that complements or supplements other, more conventional research. Many of the photographs are particularly useful in establishing a context within which to view and interpret the less well understood elements or artifacts of material culture across the Pacific. Before entering these collections, however, one should be forewarned that very little, if anything, has been cataloged. Still, these underutilized collections are available for use by anyone willing to brave the stacks and contend with the idiosyncratic filing systems established by the original stereographic companies.

Background

The nineteenth century was an extraordinary period in every way. The face of human affairs was changing at an accelerated pace, particularly among the Western industrialized nations, where the machine age had arrived in full bloom with its dynamos, steam engines, iron-clad ships, telegraphs, wireless radio, photographic devices, mechanical printing, and machine-making machines for vast mechanized factories. This change in the West would soon spread, a mere trickle at first, but building quickly to a tidal wave that would touch the farthest corners of the globe, where many societies were barely more advanced technologically than their stone-age ancestors.

In the West an appetite for the new and novel was being fed and encouraged immediately and directly. The invention of photography in 1839, in particular, and its rapid progress from a quaint amusement to a burgeoning industry of cheap pictures and cheap apparatus for the masses in little more than a decade created a new sense of things, both spatially and emotionally. Populations, especially in the United States and Europe, were on the move, from the countryside to the city and from country to country in search of new opportunities for jobs, wealth, or just a general improvement in the quality of their lives. Change was in the air, awakening feelings that would introduce a new era of exploration and expansion—especially of the mind and experience. Ordinary people were gaining increased access to goods, includ-

ing many things that until then had been exclusive to the more affluent in society. Even distances seemed to diminish, as people became exposed to more of the world through traveling museum exhibits, world's fairs, inexpensive photographic images, cheap books, and especially newspapers. Printed matter in particular achieved wide success and in turn fueled the public's ever-growing need to be amused, tantalized, and astonished by scenes of the new or exotic, allowing millions of people to travel the world at least in spirit if not in body. Travel books were all the rage, as was fiction depicting exotic settings in far-off lands or imaginary places. Names like Jules Verne, Jack London, Mark Twain, and H. G. Wells led the list of authors whose reportage or tales of high adventure captured the minds and hearts of millions everywhere.

Adding greatly to this mood of excitement was the stereograph, a 3 × 6 inch card with two nearly identical photographic images mounted side by side (each recorded from a slightly different perspective). When viewed through a stereoviewer, the images combine to create the illusion of three dimensions. The stereograph was first produced experimentally in the 1840s, but by 1850 it was being produced commercially and quickly became one of the most popular means of armchair travel. Very early on, companies were offering cheap views of all manner of exotica (Figure 1), natural and man-made wonders, world leaders and popular figures, disasters large and small. Remember the U.S.S. *Maine*? There are stereographs of the ship before and after its sinking. Then there are the images of battlefields—the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, the Sino-Russian War, the Boxer Rebellion in China, to mention but a few. Just about any event or theme, large or small, that might capture public attention—from royal coronations in Great Britain or Russia to shoe manufacturing in one place to tobacco growing in another—found its way onto sterographic cards. Advertisements published by Keystone View Company, one of the leading publishers of stereographs, proudly quoted Carl Sandburg, the author and a member of their advisory editorial board at the turn of the century, who proclaimed that "the best substitute for intelligent travel is intelligent use of stereographs." And such was the popularity of stereographs that in short order nearly every Victorian parlor had a stereoscope and a selection of views at hand for the enjoyment of family and friends. The stereoscopic photograph persisted for nearly a century, between 1850 and 1950, and was nearly as pervasive in its time as television has become in ours.

To understand the utility of these images and how they can expand or at least shape our interpretation of the past, it is useful to know a little something about the terms of their production. As a publishing venture, the business of stereographic documentation was primarily a commercial undertaking.

FIGURE 1. **"Hula dancer," in front of painted backdrop of Diamond Head, O'ahu, Hawai'i.** (Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

Legions of mostly nameless and faceless photographers, both professional and amateur, some independent and some employed by the publishing companies, scoured the world to capture images ranging from the exotic to the mundane. The quality, as you might expect, varied according to the talents of the photographer, the conditions in which the photographs were made, and the advantages and disadvantages of raw luck.

The photographer generally lugged around a heavy two-lens camera and other cumbersome equipment, though few went with the advantages of light

meters or long lenses. Sometimes the camera would not even have a shutter. Often, too, a photographer was obliged to carry the means for developing the pictures, such as a dark box or perhaps a photographic tent, as well as chemicals and other accessories.

Today, the stereograph is a mere relic. Gone are the publishing companies. Gone are the armies of photographers. The photographic records have survived, however, perhaps countless thousands hidden away in attic boxes, held in private collections, or scattered among museum holdings here and there. But, by far, the richest and most expansive collection held in one location is housed at the University of California, Riverside, in its California Museum of Photography.

The Keystone-Mast Collection

Since 1978 most of the world's surviving stereographic negatives and prints have been housed at UCR CMP, as the result of a gift to the museum from the Mast family of Iowa. Known now as the Keystone-Mast Collection, it consists of over thirty tons of original stereoscopic negatives (mostly glass), cards, record books, and salesmen's catalogs from several publishers—Keystone View Company, Underwood and Underwood Company, B. W. Kilburn Company, H. C. White Company, Universal Photo-Art Company, American Stereoscopic Company, W. H. Rau, T. W. Ingersoll, and Berry, Kelley and Chadwick—most of whom were bought out by Keystone View Company by 1920. "After 1920, for all practical purposes, Keystone View Company was the only major producer of stereographs in the world," writes William C. Darrah in his book *The World of Stereographs.*[1] He goes on to say, "With the passing of years has come a growing recognition of the invaluable record provided by Underwood and Keystone View Company, perhaps unwittingly, as they documented the modernization of the world."

Indeed, the collection at UCR CMP holds the bulk of that production, nearly 140,000 cards and 350,000 negatives covering more than 40,000 titles as listed in the various and unsystematic filing systems of the stereographic companies (made all the more confusing by the recataloging efforts of the Keystone View Company when it bought up the stores of the other companies). One might find, for example, images of Hawai'i filed under "Samoa" or "Guam," images of Fiji under "Australia," or images of New Guinea under "Philippine Islands." Many of the stereographic file cards include useful handwritten or typed notes by the photographer or by company editors that describe the subject. Indeed, some notes go further, providing additional information such as the problems faced by the photographer in the field and, occasionally, the name of the photographer. There are also grade stamps,

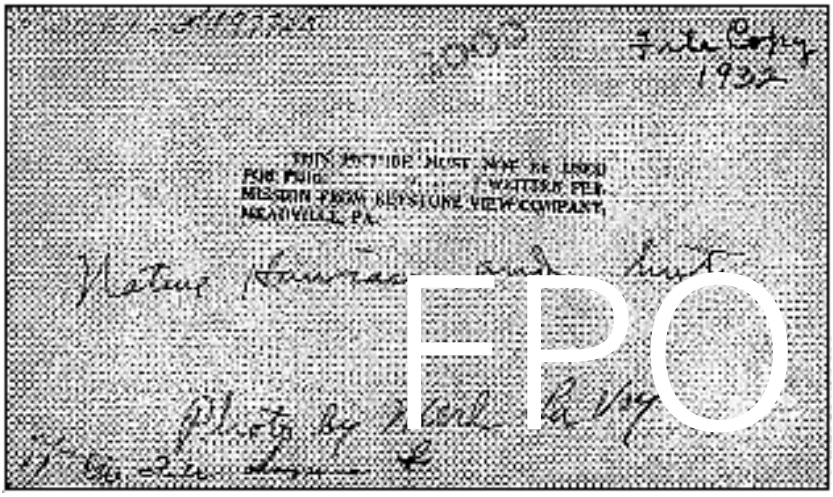

FIGURE 2. **"Native Hawaiian and hut," card back.** (Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

presumably applied by the editors, noting the quality of image and its degree of utility in the commercial scheme (Figure 2).

Edward R. Beardsley, the museum's founding director, described the collection as a vast omniform literature that is accessible to everyone, regardless of interest, language, or habit. Joe Deal, former UCR CMP curator, described it as a wide, unknown, and essentially untapped literature where one could conceivably pick a subject, any subject, and it would undoubtedly be depicted in some form. The stereographic images of the Pacific alone amount to roughly 20,000 images filed under various categories (mostly broad geographic groupings). The following is just a rough selection of categories I have identified as useful to Pacific scholars:

- Australia
- Guam
- Hawai'i
- New Guinea
- Samoa/Fiji
- Philippine Islands
- Outlying Possessions of the United States
- Chicago's World's Fair (1893)
- Miscellaneous Racial Types, with a subcategory of South Sea Islands
- Australia Collection, covering Australia, Fiji, Hawai'i, New Zealand, New Guinea (this is in addition to the categories listed above)

- Industry files, covering topics such as fishing, shoes, clothing, stone, and quarries from around the world.

The geographic categories may be classed as ports of call. Each area is within the major shipping lanes and belies the probable mode and course of travel for many or most of the photographers crossing the Pacific (as deck passengers on steamers or as hands on freighters). Classification of these images as port-of-call photographs lends the potential researcher a broader view of the scope of travel by these photographers and offers clues as to which Pacific islands are apt to be represented.

The stereographs in the collection are in good to excellent condition. Among the glass negatives or on the printed cards can be found views of traditional activities (poi pounding, for example) and occupations (fishing, sailing), rituals, crafts, architecture, monuments, and sundry material culture elements that once dominated the daily lives of the indigenes (Figures 3, 4), as well as views of the modern, burgeoning development in many of the ports and towns across the Pacific (people, architecture, street scenes, industries, natural vistas). Admittedly, some shots have been manipulated or exaggerated (a studio shot of a Hawaiian dancer posed against a painted backdrop of Diamond Head, for example; see Figure 1), but overall the introduction of foreign elements into an image does not appear to be a routine practice (at least when compared with Native American portraits in the Southwestern United States, where the subject was often made to look more "Indian-like" by the addition of costume elements from other, geographically distant tribal cultures). As the photographers were fanning out across the Pacific, one has to ask if they would include all sorts of accoutrements and decorative devices for their pictures of exotic people and places in their already voluminous baggage of camera, developing equipment, and photographic accessories.

My selections from the Keystone-Mast Collection shown in this article have been made with archaeological issues in mind, especially the elements that might shed light on material culture of the indigenous populations and how those elements play into the context of current archaeological interpretation.[2] To this end, close examination of these photographs can show how an item was used or worn, what it looked like in its complete form, and, in some cases, how it was fashioned. As a supplement to standard archaeological interpretation, the photographs establish a context and, in some cases, suggest alternative explanations. Shell rings, for example, have been recovered in both fragmentary and complete forms from archaeological contexts across the Pacific. Within the literature, the rings have often been described as bracelets or bangles. Yet, images from New Guinea suggest their use as elements in a necklace or as breastplates (Figure 5). As an alternative explana-

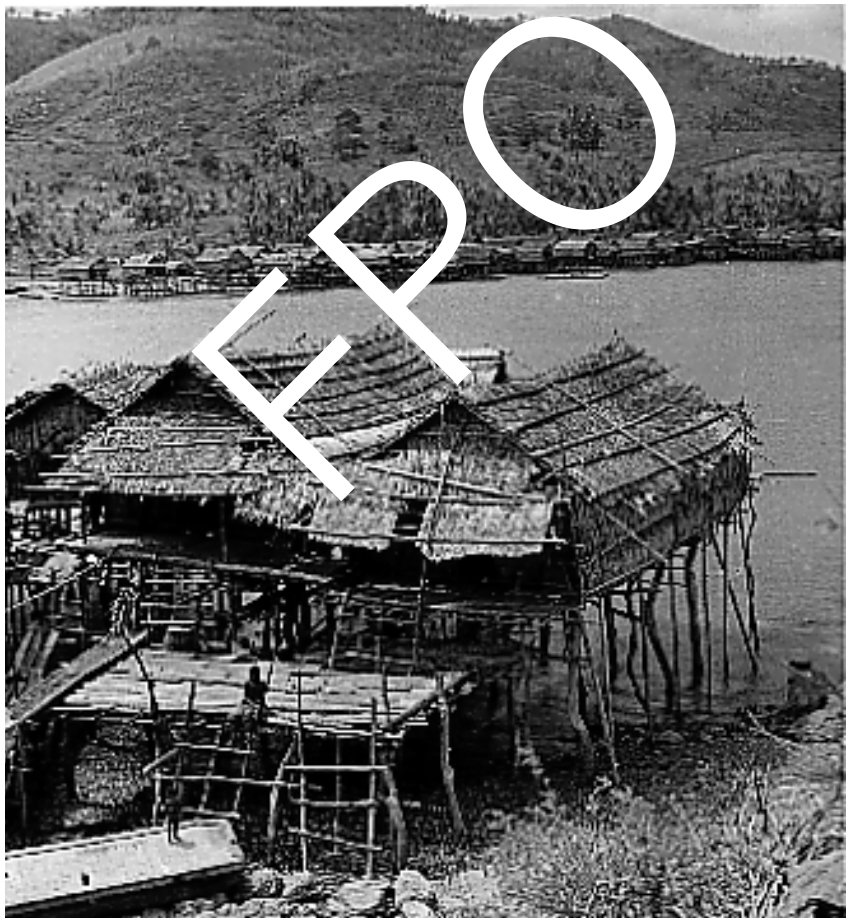

FIGURE 3. **"Native houses on piles, Port Moresby, British New Guinea. This gives a splendid idea of the style of construction."** (Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

tion, this possibility should be added to the list of potential interpretations. Of course, the body of ethnographic literature is another routine source of information that adds to the interpretation of material culture items such as shell rings; however, nothing can supplant the power of the visual image to suggest the manner in which something was worn, displayed, used, or made.

Architecture is another area that benefits from the availability of a visual image. Stone and coral foundations are common features in the archaeolog-

FIGURE 4. **"An up-to-date sailing craft" [Fiji?].** (Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/ California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

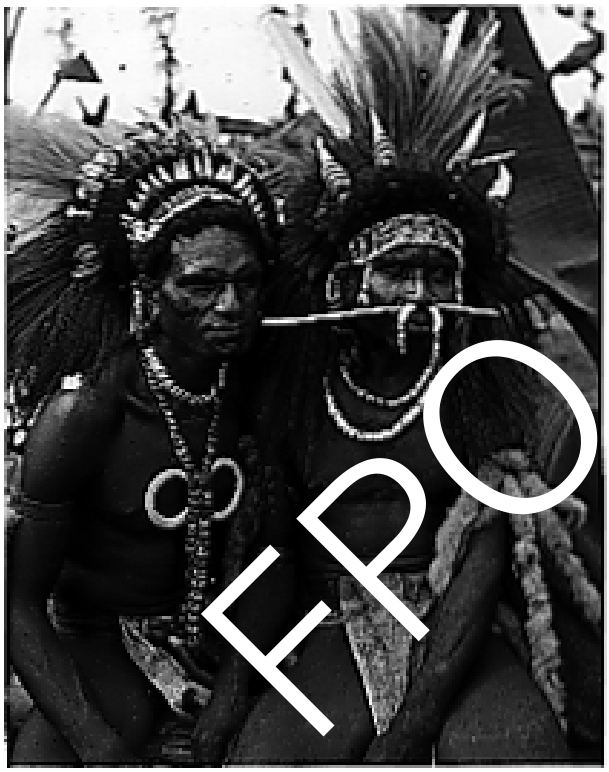

FIGURE 5. **"Savage maneaters of New Guinea in their warpaint, British New Guinea."** (Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

ical landscape throughout the Pacific and pose another fundamental line of inquiry. The question most often asked—What sort of structures were raised on or adjacent to such foundations?—can find some resolution in the stereograph images, which, deliberately or inadvertently as part of the background, portray the complex of structures that make up a village or, for that matter, isolated field housing, boathouses, cooking houses, and sundry other structures and architectural features. The stereographs add a kind of substance to the archaeological remains. For architecture in particular, the visual image offers a range of interpretations that can assist in resolving the confusion over structure type, use, appearance, and even construction techniques and methods.

The Harry Pidgeon Collection

Donation of the Keystone-Mast Collection stimulated other donations to the archives of the UCR CMP. One of these donations was a series of over 1,500 negatives (mostly glass, with a few of acetate) produced by Harry Pidgeon, an amateur photographer who traveled around the world twice (a feat that few had successfully completed at the time) in a boat he built himself after the age of fifty. As a child Commander Robert Mohle of Manhattan Beach, California, had known Pidgeon and was to become the unlikely beneficiary of his photographic industry. Around 1924 or 1925, sometime after completion of his first trip around the world, Pidgeon left his negatives with Mohle's father. The negatives remained with the Mohle family when Pidgeon set out to sea for his second trip; Pidgeon maintained that it was easier to leave his negatives in one place so he would always know where they were. Robert Mohle more or less inherited the negatives from both trips, as Pidgeon died in 1954 (at the age of eighty-six) without leaving instructions for their disposition, and Pidgeon's widow, Margaret, declined to claim them.

Pidgeon was apparently rather modest, unassuming, soft-spoken, and almost frail. Nonetheless, he seems to have been a man driven by the spirit of adventure, and from all indications he was welcomed everywhere he went (Figure 6). A telling story recounts how, at the age of eighty-one, Pidgeon, who was a vegetarian, and a nephew climbed Mount Whitney, each carrying a watermelon to the top, presumably as sustenance. The climb was simply for the adventure; it was something he had not yet done but was determined to accomplish. In his younger days he traveled by pony cart from Mexico to the Canadian border for no other reason than to see what it would be like to make such a journey. It is recorded in museum documents that he also practiced a variety of occupations, but the role of photographer seems to have been his constant interest. Among the Pidgeon artifacts are photographs he made in the lumber camps of California and the Pacific Northwest, as well as photographs of miners, camps, and towns in Alaska during the gold rush of 1898. And, upon his return to the lower forty-eight, he traveled down the Mississippi River, documenting life in the towns and rural areas along the river corridor.

Finally, in about 1920, Pidgeon embarked on the first of two voyages around the world in the *Islander,* a boat he had painstakingly built himself. He had never sailed before, so he set about reading all he could on the art of sailing while at the same time building the *Islander.* His first trip was initially to be a voyage to Hawai'i and back. From Hawai'i, however, he traveled to various islands in the South Pacific, and then on to Australia.

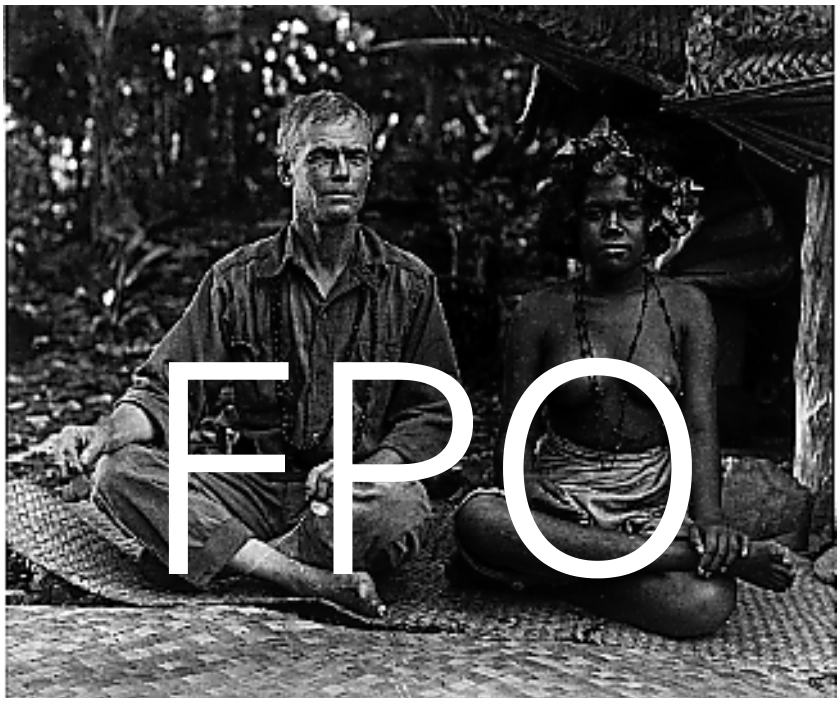

FIGURE 6. **"Poli and me," Society Islands.** (Harry Pidgeon Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

Instead of returning the same way he had come, he decided the most expeditious course would be simply to continue around the world.

This self-taught sailor had few charts and no motor on his boat, and for ballast Pidgeon used nuts and bolts from the San Pedro shipyard, which were later traded for food, coconuts, and other items on his voyage, with sand used to replace the ballast. Sadly, on his second voyage he lost the *Islander* in a typhoon off Espiritu Santo. It is worth noting that Pidgeon developed his own photographs during the voyages, using a makeshift darkroom in the forward cabin of his boat.

Of particular interest to Pacific researchers are the nearly 300 photographs of Pacific Island subjects made over the course of Pidgeon's two circumnavigations of the globe—the first undertaken about 1920, the second made roughly during the 1940s; Pidgeon was planning a third voyage in the 1950s but died before getting under way. Among Pidgeon's ports of call

FIGURE 7. **"Street scene at Harahetau on Uapu Island, Marquesas. Houses surrounded with breadfruit trees."** (Harry Pidgeon Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

were Hawai'i, the Marquesas, Samoa, the Society Islands, New Guinea, the New Hebrides, Fiji, and the Tuamotus.

Images from this group portray a wide array of subjects, such as architecture, people, antiquities, traditional villages, crafts, traditional occupations and activities, monuments, and port towns and cities. Some of the photographs of villages, for example, provide excellent information about elements of construction, such as the pattern of house posts and arrangement of structures, the remnants of which have been encountered frequently in archaeological investigations (Figure 7). To be able to draw comparisons between what at first seem like randomly arranged clusters of post molds and wall foundations and actual images of structures raised on poles or walled platforms significantly enriches the archaeological record. The images not only suggest possible structure types that could have rested on the poles or platforms, but also the spatial patterning of these structures and their potential functions.

Among Pidgeon's images are depictions of tapa cloth manufacture and painting (Figure 8), as well as pictures of weaving and even tattooing. The details of his images provide information on patterns of plaiting and weaving

FIGURE 8. **Aged Samoan artist painting tapa.** (Harry Pidgeon Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

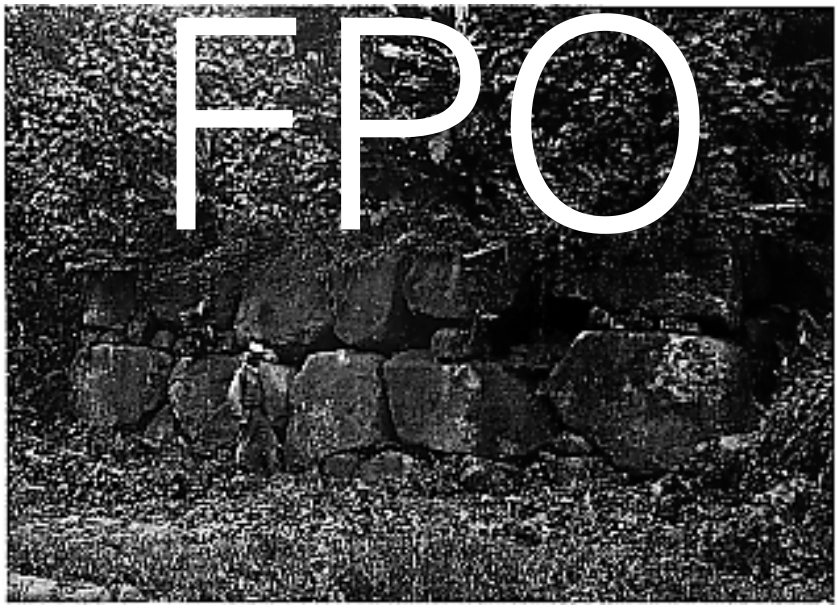

FIGURE 9. **"Pai Pai [platform] on the Coeka called 'Vahakekua'. Melville looked with wonder on these stones" [Marquesas].** (Harry Pidgeon Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside)

in mats and in wall construction (evidence of crafts that have mostly faded from the material record, owing to the extremes of climate, the ravages of global wars, and, not least of all, the effects of borrowing, adaptation, and "Westernization"); illustrate design themes common to a group of people and displayed in the ethereal arts of painting and tattooing; and show evidence of construction methods employed in the now-abandoned stone walls and platforms of historical sites in several important regions of the Pacific (Figure 9).

Summary Comments

This article is but a very brief introduction to the Pacific collections housed at UCR CMP. I have attempted only to illuminate the potentials inherent in this vast, interesting, and underutilized resource. The Pacific photographs in both the Keystone-Mast Collection and the Harry Pidgeon Collection provide rich interpretive tools for many fields including anthropology, archaeology, and history. It needs to be emphasized that these collections have

been only roughly cataloged, which means that anyone using them must spend a significant amount of time just wading through many thousands of images (both negatives and photographic cards) to identify those from the Pacific. There is a real need for a complete cataloging effort, including annotations, not just for the Pacific images but for the many more thousands of images represented in the several collections. In the end, such an effort would be greatly rewarded by the reappearance of images from a very active and interesting time in global history. Many surprises await, as most of these images have not been viewed in nearly half a century.

NOTES

The small curatorial staff at UCR CMP, particularly Edward Earle, former senior curator, and Steve Thomas, collections manager, deserve a great deal of praise for their enthusiasm and their tireless and often under-rewarded efforts. They not only provided me access to the collections, but also dusted off collection files and a variety of other background materials, all of which aided in enriching the underlaying fabric of this essay. My husband, Edward R. Beardsley, founder of UCR CMP, also deserves much credit, as he read, reread, and edited various versions of the essay. And Herbert Quick, photographer, developed the photographs selected for publication from the CMP negatives. I gratefully acknowledge all of their assistance and take responsibility for the content, notions, and comments contained here: they are mine alone and do not reflect the opinions or policies of UCR CMP or the reviewers.

1. William C. Darrah, *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg, Penn.: W. C. Darrah, Pub., 1977), 50.

2. I have sorted the images into three broad categories: architecture and monuments; implements and utensils, including weapons; and ornaments. As more work is done with the collections, these categories will likely be refined.