

3. Production and decoration

Tapa making is a very elaborate process. The raw material for tapa is the inner bark of certain trees, removed from young saplings. In Polynesia, the paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) is usually used, whereas in Melanesia the range is extended to include other mulberry plants such as the bread fruit tree (*Artocarpus altilis*) or the banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*). The bark strips are soaked and beaten flat against a surface using wooden mallets. The beating not only enlarges the surface area, but also leads to a felting of the fibres to make a more stable fabric. Individual strips can then later be combined by gluing or additional felting to form larger pieces of material.

The finished tapa can be decorated using various techniques. Besides colouring the overall surface, the use of freely painted patterns, various printing and stamp techniques, stencils or pattern rubbing are all common procedures. Traditionally, the colours are created using natural materials. Today industrially produced colours are also used.



3.1.1

Scraping board *fai u'a*

Samoa, acquired from Carl Marquardt 1904

Wood, 75 x 19.4 x 2.8 cm

Köln: RJM (11207)



3.1.2

Tapa scraper 'asiasi

Samoa, acquired from Carl Marquardt 1904

Mollusca shell, 7.3 x 4.2 x 2.4 cm

Köln: RJM (11232)



3.1.3

A roll of barkcloth strips

Samoa, acquired from Carl Marquardt 1904

Barkcloth of the paper mulberry tree, hibiscus fibre, 18.2 x 14 x 4.8 cm

Köln: RJM (11241)



3.1.4

Tapa beater i'e tosi

Samoa, acquired from Carl Marquardt 1904

Wood, 30 x 6.8 x 6.5 cm

Köln: RJM (11203)



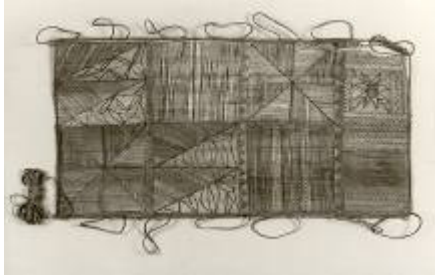
3.1.5

Barkcloth in its primary state of production *lau u'a* or *lau'a*

Samoa, acquired from Carl Marquardt 1904

Bast of the paper mulberry tree, 138 x 55.5 cm

Köln: RJM (11242)



3.1.6

Tapa template 'upeti elei

Samoa, acquired from Carl Marquardt 1904

Pandanus, coconut fibre & sinnet, 79 x 41.3 cm

Köln: RJM (11254)



3.1.7

Studio H. King, Sydney

Preparing Native Cloth, Samoa

Samoa, c. 1900

Albumin print, 13.6 x 18.7 cm

Köln: RJM, Historisches Photoarchiv (9817)



3.1.8

Thomas Andrew

Siapo Painting

Samoa, um 1900

Albumin print, 10.5 x 14.6 cm

Köln: RJM, Historisches Photoarchiv (10628)



3.1.9

Barkcloth *siapo*

Samoa, c. 1900

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 187.5 x 227.5 cm

Köln: RJM (22725)



3.1.10

Barkcloth *kapa*

Hawai'i, late 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 115 x 55.5 cm

Köln: RJM (26751)



3.1.11

Tapa beater *i'e kuku*

Hawai'i, late 19th cent.

Wood, 37 x 3.5 x 3.8 cm

Köln: RJM (23877)



3.1.12

Tapa stamp 'ohe kapala

Hawai'i, 2nd half 19th cent.

Bamboo, 46 x 1.4 x 0.5 cm

Köln: RJM (40593)

Besides the technique of freehand painting and the use of rulers, in Hawai'i also stamps were used to decorate barkcloths. Single pieces of *kapa* could thus be ornamented with even borders.



3.1.13

Tapa stamp 'ohe kapala

Hawai'i, 2nd half 19th cent.

Bamboo, 45.5 x 1.3 x 0.7 cm

Köln: RJM (40594)



3.1.14

Tapa stamp 'ohe kapala

Hawai'i, 2nd half 19th cent.

Bamboo, 41 x 1.5 x 0.6 cm

Köln: RJM (40595)



3.1.15

Tapa 'anvil'

Marquesas Islands, 19. cent.

Wood, 77.5 x 18 x 18 cm

Stuttgart: Linden-Museum – Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde
(49.606)

3.2 Polynesian Influences in Fiji

Collector and photographer J. W. Lindt noted that this tapa was acquired in Fiji in 1892 along with the three templates. However, this kind of pattern is not very typical of Fiji, it is more fitting for Samoa or Tonga. But there is one region in Fiji where similar patterns are found: the Lau Islands. Over the centuries, the Polynesian influence from Samoa and Tonga in this area was so important that certain techniques were adopted. It is also possible that Lindt noted the origin incorrectly, or that although he purchased the pieces in Fiji, they originally came from Tonga or Samoa.



3.2.1

Bamboo printing roller *bitunikesakesa* (*baba* type)

Colo Highland on Viti Levu or Kadavu Island, Fiji, c. 1900

Bamboo, 58 x 7.8 x 8.6 cm

Köln: RJM (10417)

These rolls with carved parallel lines are placed under the *masi*. With a swab, dye was rubbed over the material so that the lines appear on the material. This method was only widespread in the Colo Highlands on Viti Levu and in some parts of Kadavu Island. The last *masi* of this kind were created more than 50 years ago. While on Fiji *masi* is usually only made by women, this technique was only used by men.



3.2.2

Barkcloth *masi*

Colo Highland, Viti Levu, Fiji, c. 1900

Barkcloth, 704.5 x 64 cm

Köln: RJM (22503)

Those *masi* was created using a bamboo roller (see left). The parallel lines can be clearly recognized in the middle of the darker areas. In this case, the roller was also turned 90 degrees, creating a crosshatch pattern. The number of larger black stripes on both sides of the cross pattern allows conclusions to be drawn about the origin of the *masi*: each stripe refers to a subgroup within a larger clan, i.e., in this case, a clan with eight subgroups.



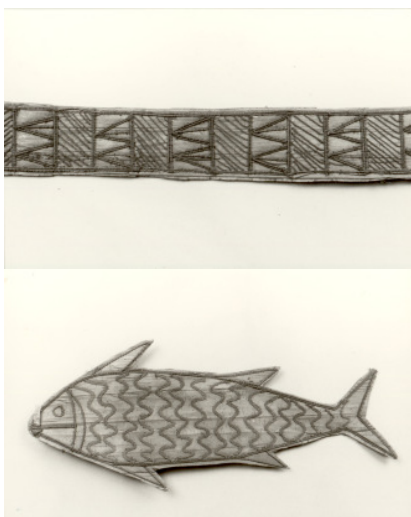
3.2.3

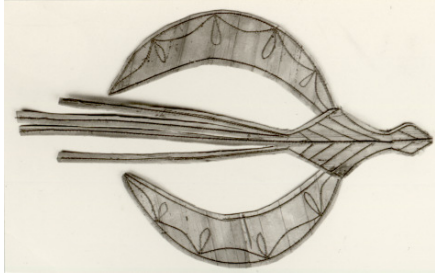
Barkcloth *masi*

Fiji (?), c. 1892

Barkcloth, 143 x 312.1 cm

Köln: RJM (31330)





3.2.4-3.2.6

Tapa matrices *kuveti*

Fiji (?), c. 1892

Pandan leaves, middle ribs of the coconut leaflets, coconut fibres, hibiscus bast, 52.5 x 6.5 cm; 31.5 x 13.5 cm; 38.5 x 34.5 cm

Köln: RJM (31331, 31332, 31333)

This tapa was printed using matrices: in this showcase two matrices in bird and fish shape can be found, the third one was used for the separating or marginal stripes. With this technique, the matrix was placed under the material and then rubbed with dye until the pattern clearly emerged.

It is striking that the pattern breaks off in two places in the middle of the motif. Originally, the piece was much larger. It is unknown if the piece had already been cut in parts during the purchase in Fiji or if that was done later by the collector.