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21. Decorated Shields from the Solomon Islands.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Solomon Islands.

With Plate C.

Hügel.

Decorated Shields from the Solomon Islands. By Baron Anatole von Hügel.

21

The beautiful pair of shields, which are shown on Plate C, were bought from a London dealer a few years ago, and were presented in 1904 to the University of Cambridge by Professor Bevan, Lord Almoner's reader in Arabic.

There is reason for believing that these shields, which bear traces of considerable age and wear, were obtained from the natives at the same date, though the striking resemblance one bears to the other would lead one to suppose that they had both been fashioned by the same skilful hand. In length they closely agree, viz., 34·6 inches (Fig. 1) and 33·6 inches (Fig. 2), and their breadth varies only by the tenth of an inch, the broader of the two shields (Fig. 1) measuring 11·1 inches. Every detail in their construction exactly corresponds; the plaiting of the wicker-work, which is left uncovered at the back (Fig. 1A), with its one longitudinal and two horizontal bands of dark paint; the seven neatly carved wooden braces, to which the pointed, cylindrical, stick-like handle is lashed, and the same pair of rattan loops (? for a suspension cord) are found on each shield. Only one trivial difference can be traced. The cylindrical handle-stick of one shield (Fig. 1B) is provided, top and bottom, with a groove formed by two encircling beads, which clip the support, formed by the last and the last but one of the braces, whereas that of the other (Fig. 2) is quite plain. Also, to the centre of the back of this shield (Fig. 1A), is attached a thin, much worn scale of turtle shell as a protection for the knuckles when gripping the handle-stick; but there is no reason why this feature should not originally have also formed part of shield No. 2.

The identity of design is even more strikingly manifest when the decoration of the faces of these shields is compared. It will be seen that the elaborate, highly conventionalised human-figure pattern, produced by lines of small squares of pearl shell, set in the black resinous substance with which the shields are faced (the design picked out in red paint), are line for line the same in both examples, although the pattern on No. 1 has been slightly more elaborated, by the insertion of a pair of human masks into the oblongs beneath the central figure, by the indication of the neck of the horned mask below, with a double instead of a single line, and by the addition of a pair of small scrolls to the border decoration above the head. In shield No. 1, also, the forehead of the main figure is inlaid, whereas in No. 2 these marks are indicated by red paint.

A third shield, showing a variant of the same design, preserved in the Montrose Museum, is figured in *Edge-Partington's Album* (Series II., plate 116): a further evidence as to the stereotyped character of this remarkable human-figure design. A fourth, and the only other specimen of which I have so far heard, is said to be preserved in a German museum, but I have so far failed to trace it. Edge-Partington gives no data with the figure of the Montrose specimen, except that it is made of *wood*, which may possibly be a slip of the pen, nor have I particulars concerning the origin or the collector of the Cambridge specimens.

As far as form and material are concerned these shields correspond exactly with the wicker-work shields of Florida, but the handle-stick with its method of attachment and the whole scheme of decoration are so different from that known to be in vogue as regards shields, in that and the neighbouring island, that I refrain from hazarding an opinion as to the *provenance* of these shields, or as to the special object for which they may have been made. Were they for some special ceremonial use or for the ordinary use of chiefs?

ANATOLE VON HÜGEL.

1B.

1.

1A.

2.

A PAIR OF SHELL-INLAID SHIELDS FROM THE SOLOMON ISLANDS.

CAMBRIDGE MUSEUM OF ARCHÆOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY.