Traditional sculpture in the Eastern Solomon Islands draws heavily upon mythology for its imagery. One can even say that the depiction of myth is an essential component of the Eastern Solomon sculptural tradition with respect to creating major works such as altars, posts, and other prominent architectural features of sacred structures. This applies as well to the caskets in which the skulls and sometimes long bones of notable men are encased.

In 1964–66 while I was engaged in ethnographic field research on Santa Ana (Figs. 1 and 2) and Santa Catalina Islands, the easternmost of the Solomons, I paid particular attention to the accomplished carvers of Santa Ana. These carvers were no longer being called upon to practice their skills because Christianity had all but replaced the traditional religion, and, in the depictions of them which were carved at my request for the Museum. Both carvings are by the same individual, Nimanima of Gupuna village on Santa Ana Island. Nimanima, an avowed Christian, was one of five or six very gifted carvers on the island. I have selected his work, not because I think he was the best of the carvers, but because the two myths he chose to depict are well known throughout the Eastern Solomons culture region in general and are especially important in the oral literature of Santa Ana. Indeed, that was one of the reasons why Nimanima selected the two myths that he did.

He chose to depict the myth "Karemanua" on a carved house post of the special kind once used in the construction of "feast houses" (ruma tora), temporary structures in which prepared feast foods are displayed before they are pub-

Vengeful Spirits and Guardian Deities
Myth and Sculpture in the Eastern Solomon Islands
by William H. Davenport

Christian milieu, the depiction of sacred myths in sculpture was frowned upon. Nevertheless, the myths were still being told and retold by Christian and non-Christian alike, because they were regarded as an important part of the indigenous culture. At this time, too, the ritual fishing for skipjack tuna (bonito) in special canoes had ceased on Santa Ana (but not on neighboring Santa Catalina), yet two of the canoe houses in which these boats and other sacred objects had been stored were still standing in the village of Natagera. These canoe houses (a’fu) were still being used as gathering places for men (women were forbidden from coming near them), but the structures themselves as well as their contents were being allowed to molder away.

During this fieldwork I also made an extensive ethnographic collection for the University of Pennsylvania Museum, and carvings and sculpture, both old specimens and pieces specially commissioned by me, were included. In this article I present two myths and two sculptural

licity presented to honored guests. Nimanima chose to depict the second myth, "Wau’ama’ma,” on a casket of the type formerly used to contain the skull and/or long bones of an important man. On Santa Ana Island (but not always elsewhere in the Eastern Solomons) such caskets, as well as other kinds of containers with remains of important men, were kept in ossuary sections of the canoe houses (see Davenport 1968:14).

The first myth is of a part-shark, part-human individual named Karemanua (also rendered "Karimanua" and "Kareimanua"). Versions of this myth are known throughout the Eastern Solomon Islands and carved depictions of Karemanua were still to be found in the few sacred canoe houses that remained standing. Nimanima’s ancestry through his mother goes back to the island of Ulawa and to persons related to the veneration of the mythical figure Karemanua. The myth, as related by him, follows.
the Pagewa ("Shark") sublineage [now extinct], and they had their garden plots at Iqaruirong-awai on the tableland of the interior called Faraina. One day while working in their garden, they became hot and thirsty, so the two brothers took their bamboo water container and went to fetch water at Wai Mafuuru. There was a running stream and a pool there then, not the dry stream bed that is there today. On the way Karemanua plucked some cordyline leaves and put them in his hair [a common practice for men who pass through forest areas as they return from their garden plots].

At the pool the brothers took a swim to cool off, and Kakafu started playing like a shark and going after his brother. Karemanua told him, "You don't act like a shark at all. You just look like a clumsy human; watch me. I'll show you how." Karemanua then took the part of the shark, swam after his brother, and bit him in two (Figs. 3, 4a). Karemanua commenced to rejoin the two halves of his brother, but he was interrupted by the arrival of their parents, who, thirsty and tired of waiting for the boys to return with the drinking water, came to the pool to get their own. They sized up the situation and ran toward Karemanua, but he thrashed and swam downstream to the mouth of the stream at the shore.

This was at the canoe passage and landing called Inamaroguna, close by their village. Karemanua continued swimming right out on through the passage into the open sea.

After ten days, he returned and stole food from his family's dwelling, then went back to sea, and he repeated this many times. Finally, the people of the village decided to try to catch him and force him to stay ashore. They hid all around his house and, when he came for food, they caught hold of him, but Karemanua slipped away because by then his skin was slippery from sea growth.

Realizing he was not welcome in his village, Karemanua left the waters of Santa Ana and, still much harm and trouble." Awau-Pura got everything ready and put to sea in his canoe at daylight. The tutelary deity called out through Awau-Pura's mouth, "Who are you?" Karemanua heard him and surfaced, calling back, "Who are you?" Awau-Pura answered, "What are you, shark or human?" Karemanua was silent and made no move. The tutelary called again through Awau-Pura's mouth, "Are you Karemanua?" Karemanua replied affirmatively by nodding his head and rolling about.

"Karemanua, you come and bite my big leg," and Awau-Pura hung his elephantiasis-swollen leg over the side of his canoe. Karemanua grabbed the leg, and Awau-Pura pulled it back

... when a person dies in a violent and bloody way, the blood, not the soul, is transformed into a "wild," uncontrolled, and dangerous supernatural being . . .

carrying the bamboo water container and with the cordyline leaves streaming from his dorsal fin, he became a rapacious shark rampaging through the waters and islands of the Eastern Solomon Islands. Wherever he heard groups of people pounding cooked staples for the preparation of fancy feast puddings, he would steal ashore and poke his bamboo tube into the vessels holding the puddings. When the tube was filled to overflowing, he would go back to sea to consume the pudding. Wherever he swam, he was followed by a gogoqo bird [possibly a petrel] called Siriofa (Figs. 4b, 5), which had flown down from Faraina where his parents' gardens were located. Finally, Karemanua lost his external human features altogether and became all shark.

On Ulawa Island there was a man named Awau who was badly afflicted with elephantiasis (pura) of one leg, so people called him Awau-Pura. One night his tutelary, or guardian, deity spoke to him: "You and I must go out to sea and find this shark, Karemanua, who is causing so into the canoe. Embedded in the leg were all of Karemanua's teeth, but they were human, not shark's teeth. Awau-Pura just brushed the teeth out and hung his leg into the sea again, challenging Karemanua to bite it again. But Karemanua was cowed; he became calm and replied to Awau-Pura, "I will become a friend and guardian of yours," and they both proceeded back to the canoe passage at Mouta [on Ulawa].

Awau-Pura promised Karemanua that from then on he would make offerings to honor him at an altar at Mouta passage, if, that is, Karemanua would promise not to attack canoes and humans again. Also, Karemanua had to promise to become a guardian of canoes in rough seas and high winds, as well as a protector of men against shark attacks when they fell overboard or their canoes swamped. Since then, Karemanua has been the guardian and protector of canoes from Santa Ana, Santa Catalina, the eastern half of San Cristobal, Uki, and Ulawa Islands, and from that time on, the veneration of him has remained a rite that is observed on Ulawa alone. However,
formed Karamanaua. And there is another aspect of this narrative detail: Asau’s affliction, the pua, is believed to be supernaturally caused, so when the wild Karamanaua bites the swollen leg, he encounters another supernatural force. But the singular aspect of Karamanaua’s change into a tutelary is that he becomes a protector, not of a single client as is usual, but of any man who is engaged in fishing whether it be the ritual fishing for sacred skipjack tuna, which is a major religious rite (see Davenport 1981), or for subsistence.

**Nimanima’s Carving**

As mentioned, Nimanima chose the form of a special type of post formerly used in feast houses for his depiction of the Karamanaua myth. Decorated house posts of this kind are for a major celebration or feast to which surrounding communities are invited. It is a reciprocal event. Some groups of invited guests are being paid back for a feast to which they invited their hosts some time past. For other communities it is an invitation to a feast which they will be obligated to return some time in the future. The feast houses are more or less temporary structures for displaying the masses of prepared food to be given away. After the feasts are over, the structures are left standing as mementos of the event and are sometimes put to other uses until they disintegrate and collapse. Even though these structures are more or less temporary, they should be well decorated and look very attractive, the more so the better. The prepared food must also be carefully garnished and decorated so as to please the eye as well as the palate.

To designate the Karamanaua myth in carving, the figure need only have the tail of a shark with an anthropomorphic head. Usually, however, the dorsal fin is also indicated with some sort of linear motif to signify the streaming cordyline leaves (see Fig. 4b). But to show his sculptural virtuosity, Nimanima went all out in his portrayal of the myth by including as many details as he could. His

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**Fig. 3.** Karamanaua bites his brother in half. Drawing by Wagos of Gupuna village. The drawing and those of Figures 5 and 6 were made by informants at my request, and with materials provided by me, to draw all sorts of things we talked about. (See Davenport 1981 for other drawings.)

Karamanaua will still attack canoes and fishermen from elsewhere when they enter the waters of the eastern islands.

From a religious point of view, the Karamanaua myth is one of many that illustrate several important components of the traditional belief: when a person dies in a violent and bloody way, the blood, not the soul, is transformed into a “wild,” uncontrolled, and dangerous supernatural being (atao wa). This wild supernatural transformation seeks to avenge its own death by menacing and killing other humans. In due course, however, some wild rampaging spirits change themselves, of their own volition, into tutelary deities by singing out certain humans and becoming their protectors against other “wild deities.” In this myth it is the protective tutelary of the afflicted human Asau-Pura who subdues the trans-
creative approach was analogous to a master storyteller who takes innovative liberties to
enrich his tale.

The Myth of Waumaua

The second myth selected by Nimanima to be depicted on one of his carvings is that of
the deity Waumaua, but the version I give here was related to me by Reresime of Natgera
village, Santa Ana Island, who was still a devoted client of that deity and the ritual leader of
the last cult group on the island to yield to Christianity.

Waumaua and his maternal uncle Waita lived at Maroqorafu. One day Waumaua went
to where his uncle's betel pepper vines were growing without first informing him, and he
gathered leaves in an odd way: by climbing the tree on which the vines were growing and sliding
back down its trunk, which stripped the pepper vines away from their support. Waita discovered
the depredations to his pepper plants right away, and he asked everyone in the community
if he or she had done it. No one knew anything about it, and even Waumaua denied any re-
ponsibility. Enraged, Waita swore to get even. "Since none of you owns up to anything, I will
go to my tutelary deity [one manifestation of which was a shark] to get my revenge." Waita
took some leaves from his vines, went to his household shrine, and holding the leaves by
tongs, he burned them saying, "Whoever de-
stroayed my pepper leaves, you must destroy him
or her."

Not long after this Waumaua went out in his
cano to kite fish for garfish. [This involves a kite
made of dried sago leaves from which is trailed a
line with a lure attached.] Waita's shark tutelary
attacked Waumaua's canoe and killed him. As
Waita's shark swam away it snagged the kite string,
and wherever the shark swam, it towed the still-
lying kite behind. For five days Waumaua's wife
watched her husband's kite being towed up and
down the edge of the reef in front of their village.

On the fifth day, the shark dived deeply to rid
itself of the kite, and the string snagged on a coral
outcrop near Maroqorafu. That outcrop is still
pointed out as where this event took place.

Waumaua's supernatural influences and powers did
not extend beyond (Santa Ana) . . .

When Waumaua was killed by Waita's tut-
elary shark the sea was red from his blood, and out
of his blood was formed a wild and revengeful
spirit in the form of another menacing shark
(Fig. 6). It lingered there off the canoe passage,
and it demanded that every canoe trying to pass
out to sea first return to one village and bring
back an infant or child for him to consume.
Soon there were no more children left in the
village. One old man, in complying with
Waumaua's demand for a child, presented only
a flower from a betel (area) palm. As he placed it
on the shark's head, he said, "That is all that is
left here."

Waita had had his revenge on Waumaua and
Waumaua had vented his anger on the entire
community, so the shark manifestation of
Waumaua quit Santa Ana Island altogether. But
that is not the end of the story. When the human
Waumaua had been killed, his blood had been
transformed into several other wild deities as
well: the male supernatural Takata, Sausifo,
Pepefu, and Matana, and the female Karings. All
of these continued their retaliation of
adrift to rid the place of the supernatural curse of
Waumaua. The bowl drifted ashore at Tara-ufa-
nialo on Santa Ana Island, and it was discovered by
Mafuara and Rafa of Nafinutogo village. They
took it to their canoe house, and soon the spirit of
Waumaua ordered them to make ritual bowls, one
for each of Waumaua's manifestations, and gave
precise instructions on how to properly ven-
erate the tutelaries. This is the beginning of the
Waumaua cult on Santa Ana.

Actually, when Waumaua's shark manifesta-
tion was told that there were no children left at
Maroqorafu and the betel palm flower was placed
on its head by the old man, one female child had
been concealed, and through her the continuity of
the Pagewa (Shark) sublineage was maintained.
Subsequently, however, the Pagewa sublineage
did die out, and it is remembered now only be-
cause of the myth of Waumaua. But to this day,
a betel palm flower is depicted somewhere in the
incised and painted decorations of the large
trading canoes. It is a visual petition to
Waumaua to keep the seas calm and make voy-
ages safe for the vessel.
As Christianity gained religious ascendancy in the two communities of Santa Ana—Gupuna and Nafinotsu—those who remained constant to the traditional religion slowly formed a third, new community at Natagora. There the veneration of Waumauema, in his several tutelary manifestations, continued to flourish as the dominant cult. The number of different but related manifestations even increased, as some human worshipers of Waumauema suffered violent deaths and were themselves transformed into tutelaries. As explained by Reresime, the scope of Waumauema's powers also increased, so that his cult came to dominate or incorporate all tutelary relationships on the island of Santa Ana. It was clearly acknowledged, however, that Waumauema's supernatural influences and powers did not extend beyond the island, not even to neighboring Santa Catalina Island. Even as Christianity was eclipsing the cult, it was Waumauema who instructed Reresima to urge the younger people of Natagora to convert, leaving only himself and a few associates to carry on the traditional faith until they died.

Fig. 6. Waumauema as a wild supernatural. Drawing by Reresime of Natagora village. The double nature of a supernatural is indicated by the two heads, one series, one human, and also by its having both pectoral fins and arms. The curled or scroll motif projecting behind the fish is not a tail, but an aesthetic convention used to indicate the figure is a supernatural being. Wild supernaturals are often pictured holding a bow, which is used by them to shoot garfish as arrows; here the arrow is held in the right hand. The garfish/arrow analogy is derived from the fact that sometimes a garfish skimming and straining along the surface of a calm sea actually does impale a fisherman in a canoe.

Fig. 7. Nimanima takes a break from carving to have a chew of betel. Photo taken at Gupuna village, July 12, 1966

NIMANIMA'S SECOND CARVING

Nimanima's reason for depicting the myth and image of Waumauema was obviously because of that supernatural's importance to the island. Reresima of Natagora village, also a master sculptor, refused to depict Waumauema in his contribution to the Museum collection. He and several other older men were the last remaining worshipers of this deity. He was not opposed to carving such a depiction for me personally, nor did he mind that it would end up in the United States, but he strongly disliked the possibility that it might be put on public display, where just anyone could view it. For his sculptural contribution he chose another myth.

Why Nimanima (Fig. 7) chose to carve a casket for a second contribution was not fully explained, nor did I ask him to do so. As with his other carving, he went all out to pack in the details. Actually, it is two superimposed carvings: one of the mythical figure Waumauema being killed by Waita's avenging shark resting on a second detailed replication of a sacred bonito-fishing canoe (Fig. 8). Either one of these
carvings would constitute a very suitable casket in which to encase the skull of an important man. After he had finished it, Nimanima explained that a similar casket had been made for an important man named Namata of Gupuna village. When that community became Christian, the casket was buried along with all the other caskets and remains that were in the ossuaries of local canoe houses. Of course, Nimanima was well aware of the fact that his elaborate casket would never serve as one, and he was very eager to show off his skill, not just to me but to other carvers in Gupuna village. However, I like to think that he wanted to create a cenotaph that enshrined the collective memory of both the last and greatest active supernatural of Santa Ana Island and all the other sacred activities that were associated with this traditional worship.

For formerly nonliterate societies in the Eastern Solomon Islands, their myths, such as the two given here, explain how and why things came to be as they are—a kind of history as understood by the people themselves. Depicted in three-dimensional wood sculpture, a myth is transformed from its fluid and ephemeral oral form into a static and concrete visual representation that can be reincorporated into social and ritual actions in the present. By this inclusion it establishes a relevant historical context for the activities at hand. Nimanima's carvings were executed not for local use or local people who would immediately understand what he was doing, but for the University of Pennsylvania Museum and unknown foreigners on the other side of the world. He was consciously trying to convey something very salient about his cultural tradition (and, of course, to demonstrate his skill as a carver). In writing this article it has been my wish to act mainly as interpreter between him—elderly resident of Gupuna village, skilled carver, spokesman of Santa Ana Island society—and those who are associated in any way at all with our Museum and its many activities.

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WILLIAM DAVENPORT is Curator Emeritus of the Oceanian Section and now lives in Maryland on the upper Chesapeake Bay. Since retiring, he has accompanied Museum tours to Indonesia, and been a consultant to museums in Taiwan and Oakland, California, and to the Peabody at Yale. Presently, he divides his time between writing up field notes from ethnographic field trips to Melanesia and sailing the rivers and inlets of the Eastern Shore.

Photograph by Edward Glendinning

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