



Portrait of the artist with an idol
Oil on canvas, 1890. W. 415
The Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute
San Antonio, Texas

The Exotic Sources of GAUGUIN'S ART

By BENGT DANIELSSON

Non, mille fois non, l'artiste ne naît pas tout d'une pièce. Qu'il apporte un nouveau maillon à la chaîne commencée, c'est déjà beaucoup . . . Les idées sont comme les rêves un assemblage plus ou moins formé de choses ou pensées entrevues; sait-on bien d'où elles viennent.

PAUL GAUGUIN: Racontars de rapin.

Gauguin was certainly not the first great European artist to seek inspiration in foreign, exotic parts of the world. Delacroix and several lesser painters of the romantic generation for instance visited Morocco, Algeria, and the Middle East. The stimulation they received, however, resulted simply in pictorial anecdotes, high in local color to be sure, but the new motifs were never accompanied by any stylistic borrowings or technical innovations. If for the moment we pass over the very special case of the great appeal Japanese art had for European artists during the second half of the last century, it can safely be claimed that Paul Gauguin was the first painter to discover and appreciate the aesthetic merits of the hitherto neglected and disdained arts of the so-called primitive peoples—even to the point of adopting and using in his own works many of their characteristic features and designs. The earliest impact can be dated to 1886, i.e. almost twenty years before the famous incident when Matisse and Picasso were stunned by the sight of an African mask in Derain's studio, an event which so often has quite erroneously been heralded as the first decisive encounter between European and primitive art. The aim of the present exhibition in the University Museum is to

present material showing in detail how, when, and to what extent Gauguin was influenced by the artistic traditions of non-western peoples.

Most of Gauguin's numerous biographers have vaguely attributed the origin of his life-long interest in primitive art (if I may use this convenient term throughout this paper) to the various voyages and sojourns he made in the tropics in his childhood and youth, before he took up painting in 1871. These included a six-year stay in Lima, Peru, from the age of one to seven and two voyages to South America (and perhaps even round the world) as an apprentice and second mate on various merchant ships, between the ages of seventeen and twenty. Next followed a three-year military service in the Imperial Navy of Napoleon III, during which period he came to know most ports around the Mediterranean. Finally, he made an adventurous trip in 1887 to Panama and Martinique, where he for the first time tried to paint scenes bathed by the intense tropical sunlight.

There is no doubt that these early foreign experiences marked Gauguin in many ways—for instance, he talks often of his "terrible itchings for the unknown"—and that the free and easy life he had witnessed in the tropics contributed to



Three pottery vessels from Peru in the University Museum. (Left and center), Moche, from the north coastal area; (right) Nazca, from the south. 200 B.C.—A.D. 400

a large extent to his ultimate decision to flee to the South Seas from his dreary Parisian existence. But as far as his art is concerned, the influence of these roving years is nil for the very simple reason that there was no indigenous art left either in Martinique or in the few South American ports he visited. The nearest contact he had with a living native art during these periods of his life actually occurred at the tender age when he lived with his mother in Lima, where the Indians who were employed in his great-grandfather's household or came to the city markets still wore home-woven costumes of traditional, pre-Spanish design. The only known result of this stimulus is negligible; it consists of an embroidery in distinctly Peruvian style that Gauguin helped his wife to execute at the beginning of their marriage, in the early 1870's.

The situation is quite different in respect to Peruvian and other American pre-Columbian ceramic art, for here Gauguin's numerous borrowings are obvious and well documented. To begin with, in his youth he had constantly before his eyes a small collection of Peruvian clay vessels that his mother had brought back with her from Lima. Furthermore, he specifically mentions in his *Intimate Journals* (as the American edition of *Avant et Apès* is called) that he had been shown a splendid private collection of such ceramic works in Paris. Finally, many fine specimens of American pre-Columbian pottery were exhibited in the Trocadéro Museum which opened in 1878.

Gauguin's response to this exotic stimulus was, however, very slow, for it was not until 1886 that he began to make ceramic pieces, in the quickly deceived hope of earning a regular income. To understand his epoch-making achievement in this new field, into which he entered with his usual boldness and energy, it must be remembered that in his day the only accepted norm for ceramic works was the symmetrical, cylindrical

shape of the Classical vase, formed on a potter's wheel. If a real artist deigned to pay a little attention to the ceramic art, he invariably concentrated on adding some sort of decorations to this given, immutable form. In most instances he didn't even condescend to touch the clay himself but simply furnished a design which was actually executed by a master craftsman.

What Gauguin did during the winter of 1886-87, when by devious arguments he succeeded in gaining access to the workshop of the well-known ceramist Ernst Chapelet was, as usual, something quite shocking and revolutionary. He completely left aside the most indispensable tool of the trade, the potter's wheel, which in Europe had been used since the remotest antiquity, and simply kneaded big chunks of clay into vases of new, fantastic forms with his bare hands. Some of his creations departed so radically from the established tradition that perhaps we should call them hollow clay sculptures. The best and most succinct formulation of his procedure is contained



Pot in the shape of a fountain
Un glazed stoneware.
1886-87
Bodelsen 26;
Gray 21
Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens,
Paris



Pot decorated with a figure of a woman (Eve)
After a relief from the Temple of Borobudur
Unglazed stoneware. 1886-87
Bodelsen 39; Gray 15
Musée des Arts Africains
et Océaniens, Paris



Page from Noa Noa
Showing a page from Hokusai's Manga (Vol. 5),
two sketches after Delacroix,
and a facsimile of an engraving by Lucas van Leyden
Musée du Louvre, Paris (R.F. 7259; p. 239)

in a little-known article in the French newspaper *Le Soir* of April 25, 1895: "My aim is to transform the eternal Greek vase and replace the potter's wheel by intelligent hands able to infuse it with the life of a work of art." Gauguin's ceramic works are therefore unique, not only because of his complete break with the previously existing but also in the most literal sense of the word: he never made any copies or allowed his ceramic pieces to be reproduced mechanically for mass consumption.

Gauguin willingly admitted his indebtedness to the anonymous master craftsmen of Peru and Mexico, as for instance when he pointedly remarked in a blistering attack against the conventional trash shown at the Universal Exhibition in Paris: "The ceramic art is not an idle pastime. In the most distant periods of the past, this art was held in great esteem by the American Indians. God also created man from a little clay." It may be worth adding that his basic technique, to build up and form the vessels exclusively by hand, was precisely the one used by the American Indians, who never had the potter's wheel.

Unfortunately for Gauguin, he was too far ahead of his times in this medium also, which meant that his achievements were completely overlooked and that he, therefore, failed miserably to earn a regular income as he had hoped.

That was, however, probably not the principal reason he eventually gave up his ceramic experiments altogether, after having tried very hard during three successive winters to establish himself as a potter. The explanation for this is the simple fact that in departing for Tahiti and remaining there, Gauguin unknowingly deprived himself of all possibilities of making pottery, because of the complete lack in this island of suitable clay.

Fired clay is always a fragile material, and Gauguin's delicate, elaborate ceramic works have fared worse than most others. Of the 63 known pieces which have survived, not less than 47 belong to private collectors, and the few that have been acquired by museums have practically all ended up in such peripheral and forbidding places as Copenhagen, Réunion, and the partly closed former Museum of Colonies in Paris. The private collectors have rarely been asked to lend a representative number of pieces to the five big retrospective Gauguin exhibitions that have been held hitherto. No special exhibition of his ceramic works has ever been undertaken. For these various reasons Gauguin's originality and greatness as a ceramist have first been realized during the last few years through the publication by Christopher Gray and Merete Bodelsen of two excellent *catalogues raisonnés*.



THE VISION AFTER THE SERMON
Oil on canvas. 1888. W. 245
The National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

In his appreciation then of pre-Columbian ceramics Gauguin was alone among contemporary European artists. When we come to the Japanese color print, the next exotic stimulus that became a dominant force in his development, we find that its appeal was much wider. Already in the late 1850's it had fired the imagination of several French artists, and during the following decades the importation and sale of Japanese objects d'art grew so rapidly that we can definitely speak of a generally accepted fashion. Of the first-rate painters at least Manet, Pissarro, Degas, Monet, and van Gogh, all of whom Gauguin knew well, carefully studied and in numerous instances adopted the technique of the Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints. Gauguin shared this general interest in everything Japanese almost from the beginning of his career as a painter and demonstrated it in a visual manner as early as 1885 by painting a still life that included a Japanese puppet as well as several fans. What we have here is, however, only a mechanical assembly of Japanese art objects; and stylistically this little-known picture, owned by a French private collector, is still executed in the Impressionist manner to which Gauguin adhered during his first fifteen years as an artist. The same holds true for the many pastels in the form of Japanese fans that he made during these years.

Then a sudden break occurred in Gauguin's artistic development during the summer of 1888, when in rapid succession he produced a whole series of works in a completely new style, promptly baptized 'synthetic' because of the strong effort to simplify and reduce everything to its most

essential forms. There is no doubt that some of his sources of inspiration must have been mediæval church windows and Epinal prints and that the young painter Emile Bernard transmitted much of his boundless enthusiasm for these models to Gauguin. But their importance has constantly been much overrated whereas the even stronger Japanese influence still is underrated or neglected, in spite of a well-documented and penetrating thesis by Yvonne Thirion, excerpts of which were published in 1956. Gauguin himself also admitted his debt right from the beginning by describing in a letter the first picture painted in this new series, representing a wrestling bout between two nude urchins, as "quite Japanese, by a savage from Peru." This reference to his Peruvian background and links is very natural and appropriate, if we remember that he had spent the previous two winters making ceramic works so exquisite and highly original that they were unsalable.

The apotheosis of this new stylistic adventure that lasted less than six months was of course the famous *Vision après le sermon* in which almost all the typically Japanese *ukiyo-e* features are present: flat areas of unmodulated color, simplified forms, arbitrary perspective, high viewpoint, asymmetric composition, decorative elaboration, and a conception of painting as symbolic. Though Gauguin's style continued to change and evolve, his admiration for Japanese art continued to manifest itself by the inclusion of many color prints in the portable museum of reproductions that he took with him to the South Seas; and

typical *ukiyo-e* stylistic devices re-occur in his pictures at frequent intervals right up to his death in 1903.

The third group of non-European cultures that fascinated Gauguin at about the same time, the late 1880's, was generally labelled 'Oriental' by himself. When he occasionally cares to explain what he actually meant by this rather vague term, however, he mentions specifically only Egypt, Persia, and Cambodia. Since he never visited any of these countries he must have seen the much-prized examples of 'Oriental art' he so often refers to in the museum collections in Paris or simply as photographs or illustrations in books and magazines. The possibilities of determining with exactitude what Gauguin saw or read are unfortunately very small, but Merete Bodelsen's recent investigations have for instance shown that he must have come across reproductions of the friezes from the Javanese temple at Borobudur that impressed him so much as early as during the winter of 1886-87. On the other hand, we know for certain, from various references in his letters and writings, that he looked for and found inspiration for many of his paintings in three precise localities in Paris.

The first was, of course, the Louvre that possessed among other things a fine collection of Egyptian and Persian (Assyrian) sculptures and bas-reliefs. Gauguin expresses his admiration for some of Assurbanipal's lions in these revealing

terms: "I maintain that it has required a great genius to think up flowers that are in fact muscles on these animals, or inversely muscles that are flowers. There we have the whole mysterious Orient."

In addition, there were representative collections of Egyptian and Far Eastern antiquities in the Musée Guimet which had opened its door to the general public early in 1888. The fact that this museum was organized so as to give a panorama of the non-Christian religions only made it more interesting to Gauguin whose friend, the painter Sérusier, was already explaining the Buddhist philosophy and trying hard to convert him to the theosophic faith.

Last but not least, the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889 offered Gauguin a splendid opportunity to see a wide range of Oriental architecture, sculpture, and other works of art. France had then recently conquered several small kingdoms in southeast Asia which had been amalgamated into a new possession with the artificial name of Indo-China—today's Vietnam—and this valuable addition to the rapidly expanding French colonial empire was duly celebrated by the erection of several temples from Annam, Tonkin, and Cochinchina on the exhibition grounds at the Hôtel des Invalides. There was also a curious 'composite' replica, made up of 'typical' portions of the famous Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia and several Vietnamese villages, theaters, and res-

taurants. Gauguin spent many days strolling about in the colonial section, where he also could study whole villages from Africa, Oceania, and Java, inhabited by authentic but, of course, well-trained and well-behaved savages.

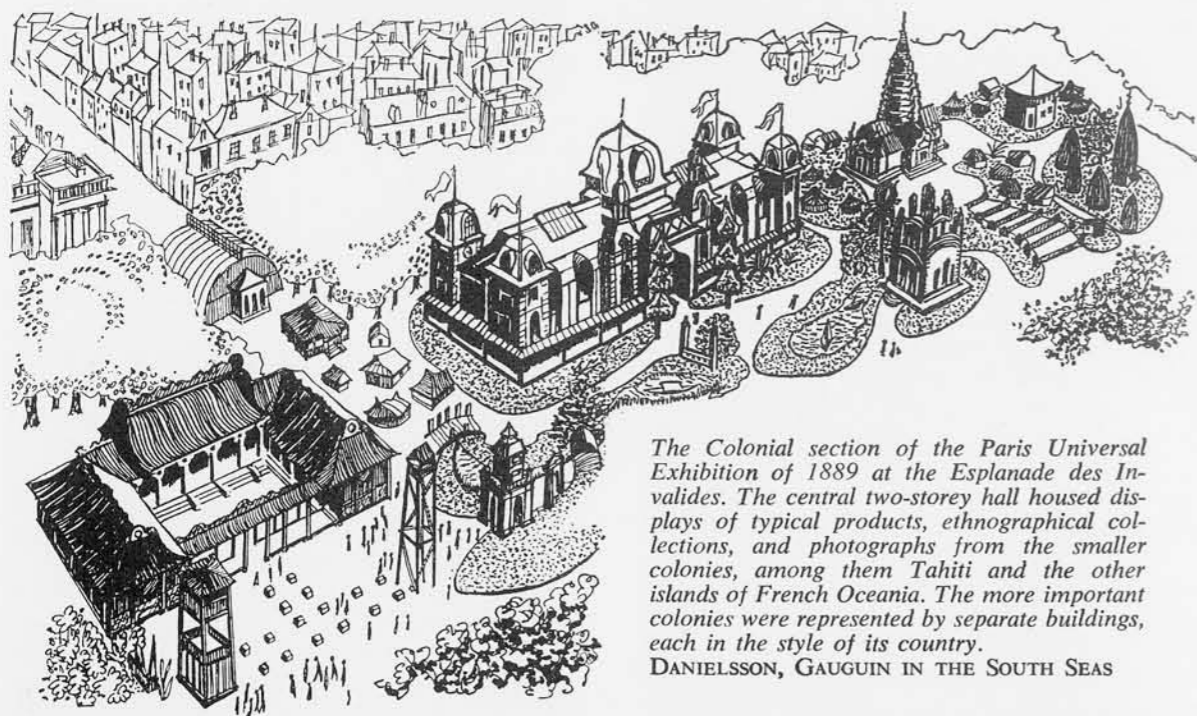
To establish a detailed list of all Gauguin's direct borrowings from the 'Oriental' art he saw at the Louvre, the Musée Guimet, and the colonial section at the Universal Exhibition would be an almost impossible task—and hardly worth attempting. For the impact these new discoveries had on Gauguin is not limited to the copying and incorporation in his paintings of this or that figure or design, but resulted above all in the reformulation of his whole artistic program, henceforth based on what he with good reasons considered to be the essential, common qualities of these various forms of 'Oriental' art, i.e. their static, decorative, 'synthetic,' and symbolic character. The resemblance of this program to the stylistic ideal of the *ukiyo-e* art is striking, and it is certainly no coincidence that it was precisely during this period that his lifelong admiration for Japanese prints began to bear fruit.

For a painter so fascinated by non-European art as Gauguin it was only a matter of time before he would begin to make a serious effort to study it more closely, at its source, by living among one of the peoples who had produced it. In addition, he had another, more prosaic reason for wishing to leave Europe around 1890: he was still starving and believed that life in the tropics was cheaper and easier. His first choice was quite naturally French Indo-China. What he expected to find there was "the entire Orient and its philosophy as it is inscribed in its art." As for the financial side of his project, Gauguin seems to have taken for granted that the new French colonial authorities would gladly employ him as an administrator or inspector at a remote jungle post in Tonkin "where I can work at my painting and save money."

Unfortunately, the bureaucrats in the Colonial Department did not realize what an admirable empire-builder was concealed in this unknown, synthetist painter and to Gauguin's great indignation they eventually turned down his application. His next choice was Madagascar. The motivation was the same, for in a letter he speaks of the many exotic races and religions, rich in mysticism and symbolism, that he wanted to study there. The financial problems could be solved with the same ease, albeit in a completely different manner. He maintained optimistically that by gathering a little group of artists who were willing to work together, till the ground and keep a couple of cows, it would be possible



EVE
Oil on cardboard.
1890. W. 389
Private Collection,
Paris
What Gauguin
dreamt of finding
in Tahiti
is shown by
this image of a
nude Eve in a
tropical paradise,
painted while in
France in 1890
before his
departure for
the South Seas.



The Colonial section of the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889 at the Esplanade des Invalides. The central two-storey hall housed displays of typical products, ethnographical collections, and photographs from the smaller colonies, among them Tahiti and the other islands of French Oceania. The more important colonies were represented by separate buildings, each in the style of its country.
DANIELSSON, GAUGUIN IN THE SOUTH SEAS

to live entirely without money. The only fellow-painter who immediately accepted Gauguin's invitation was Emile Bernard, who found the plan wonderful—except for one thing. He had just read the sentimental best-seller *Le mariage de Loti* and was now firmly convinced that the still more remote Polynesian island of Tahiti in the South Pacific offered even greater advantages, from both the artistic and the economic point of view. Knowing as little about Tahiti as about Madagascar, Gauguin quickly gave in—whereupon Bernard dropped out.

How strongly and sincerely he believed in the popular myth, dating from Rousseau's time and depicting Tahiti as an earthly paradise, is best seen from the following brief summary of his personal situation and artistic aims, which he gave in an interview in the *Echo de Paris*, on February 23, 1891, some months before his departure:

"The reason why I am leaving is that I wish to live in peace and to avoid being influenced by our civilization. I only desire to create a simple art. In order to achieve this, it is necessary for me to steep myself in virgin nature, to see no one but savages, to share their life and have as my sole occupation to render, just as children would do, the images of my own brain, using exclusively the means offered by primitive art, which are the only true and valid ones."

The pictorial equivalent of this charming program was a painting of a nude Eve in a tropical landscape, executed in France before his



The Tahitian Eves as they were in the 1890's after one hundred years of civilizing efforts by the missionaries. Photograph ca. 1890.

departure, about which Henri Dorra has written: "Eve stands primarily for the artist's quest for the primitive. Gauguin, whose social philosophy owes much to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, frequently juxtaposes in his writings the corrupt civilization of the West with man's primeval bliss. And when seeking inspiration from the types, religion, symbolism, mysticism of primitive peoples he was looking for the traces of a distant and glorious past common to all humanity. What better symbol for this dream of a golden age than the robust and fertile mother of all races?"

To such a seeker of paradise as Gauguin it must have been a terrible disappointment to discover that the small capital of Papeete, where he landed on June 9, 1891, was an ugly shantytown, consisting mainly of Chinese shops and taverns. As for the naked Eves and noble savages that he had come halfway around the world to study and paint, all the native women in sight decorously wore wide, ankle-length, so-called Mother Hubbard dresses that completely hid their figures. The town dress of the men was

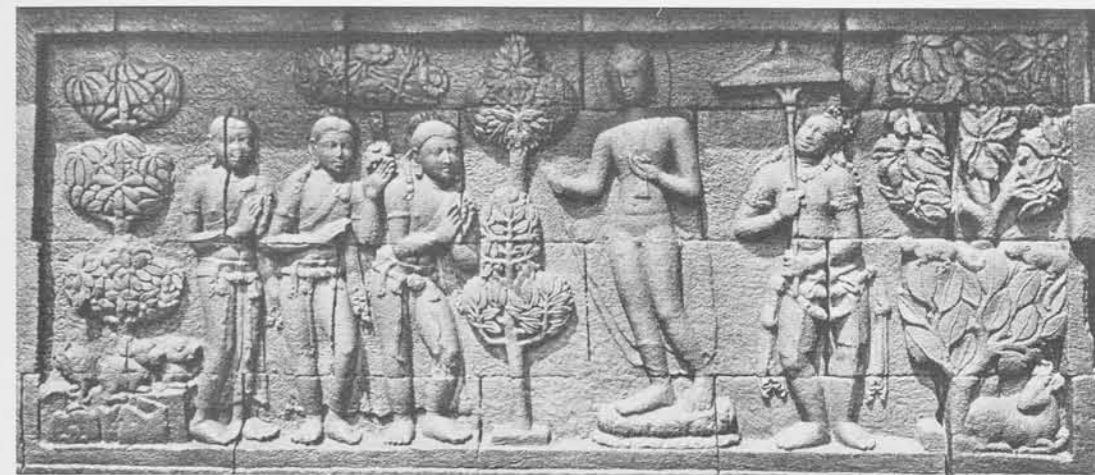
even more civilized and ludicrous, since it consisted of a skirt-like piece of cotton, a white shirt, and a yellow straw hat.

Gauguin fled quickly to the district of Mataiea on the other side of the island—only to find that even there precious little remained of the native culture. What the Tahitians had managed to preserve was mainly their language, traditional subsistence economy, and family-centered social organization, whereas the aspects in which Gauguin was most interested, the artistically sculptured utensils and decorated barkcloths, had long ago been replaced by imported articles of European manufacture. As for the many sculptures of wood and stone that existed in Tahiti in pre-European times they had all had a religious character and function. Unavoidably, when the old 'pagan' religion and its practitioners disappeared, this art too had died out.

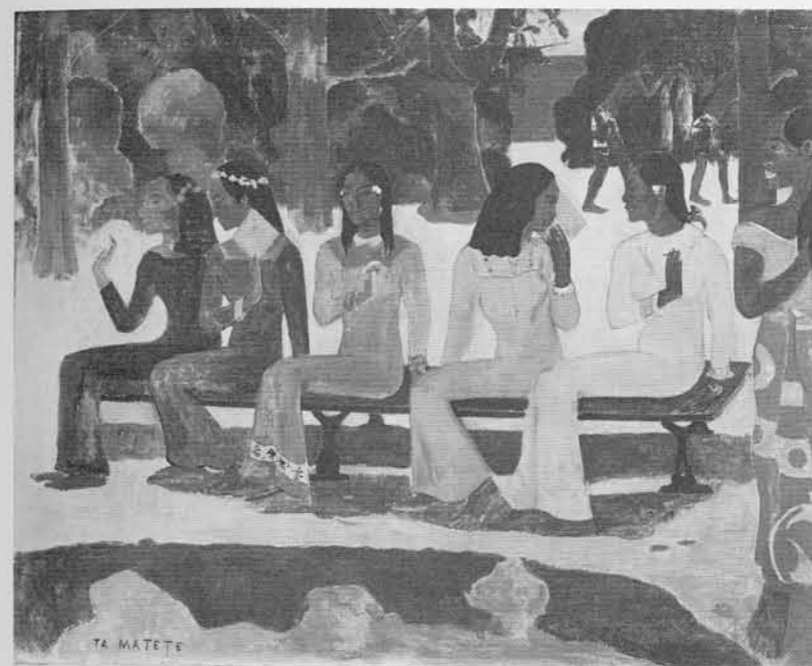
Under these circumstances it is only natural that the first pictures Gauguin painted at Mataiea had no symbolic significance and contained no new stylistic innovations, but were instead portraits and simple scenes of everyday native life. And yet, in at least one respect the Tahitians satisfied his esthetic requirements, since one of his favorite precepts (inspired by his studies of 'Oriental' art) reads: "Let everything you do carry the imprint of repose and tranquility. Avoid therefore action poses. Every figure should be static." In Tahiti, Gauguin for the first time found people who in their way of life and manners embodied this ideal, for indeed the Tahitians have an astonishing ability to sit motionless for hours at a time. While many of the poses in Gauguin's South Sea pictures seem by our standards contrived, they are thus in fact very realistic.

Gauguin's principal artistic aim was, however, not purely stylistic, formal, like that of Cézanne, Seurat, or van Gogh. He was, on the contrary greatly concerned with meaning and symbolism and tried constantly to express the images of his inner mind. Or as he himself formulated his artistic credo: "Do not paint too much from nature. Art is an abstraction. Seek it in nature by dreaming in the presence of it, and above all concentrate your thoughts more on the creative process than on the final result that will ensue."

In spite of its stimulating newness, the world of reality therefore could not hold his attention for any length of time, and before the end of 1891 he turned away from it and created an imaginative picture with a mythological theme, the famous *Ia orana Maria* (Hail thee Mary). In view of the great extent to which the Tahitians had become Europeanized and Christianized, it



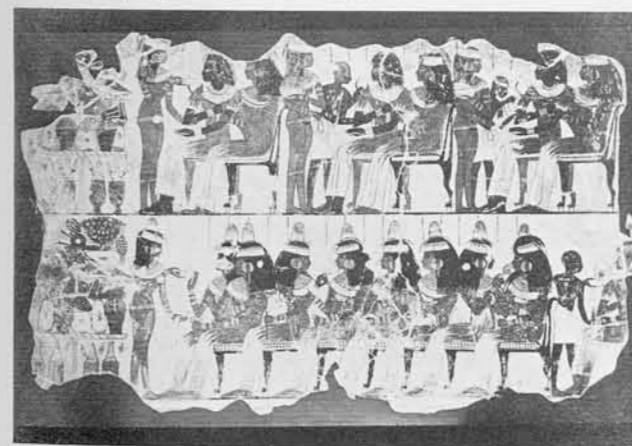
The Tathagata meets an Ajiwaka monk on the Benares road. Stone relief from the Temple of Borobudur, Java. 12th century Photograph from N. J. Krom, Beschrijving van Barabudur, The Hague, 1920.



TA MATETE (The Market) Oil on canvas, 1892. W. 476 Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel (Gift of Robert von Hirsch)



IA ORANA MARIA (Ave Maria) Oil on canvas, 1891. W. 428 Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Bequest of Samuel A. Lewisohn, 1951)



Banquet Scene Fresco from an XVIII Dynasty Theban tomb Courtesy of the British Museum, London

is not at all surprising that the subject is Biblical: the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus, attended by two women and an angel. In all likelihood, he got the idea of this picture when he visited the nearby Catholic church and heard the Tahitian version of the prayer "Ave Maria." All the figures have Tahitian features, and yet his most important models were the figures in a photograph of the stone friezes at the Javanese temple at Borobudur that he had taken with him to Tahiti. In another well-known painting from 1892, *Ta matete*, the source of inspiration is Egyptian.

Then in March, 1892, Gauguin was at long last initiated into the mysteries of the ancient



HINA MARURU (Thanks to Hina)
Oil on canvas, 1893. W. 500
Lent by Mrs. McFadden Staempfli

Tahitian religion. This occurred quite prosaically through the discovery in Papeete of two learned works written half a century earlier respectively by a local merchant named Jacques Antoine Moerenhout and the French naval officer Edmond de Bovis. Both had obtained their information from the last surviving indigenous priests. Gauguin devoured these two studies with rising enthusiasm and exclaimed ecstatically in a letter to Sérusier: "What a religion it was, this old South Sea religion. How marvellous. My brain is burning, and the ideas all this produces will certainly scare the public. What will all those who were frightened by my previous works say about my new ones."

Not unexpectedly, Gauguin was particularly fascinated by the two authors' account of the *arioi* society, a kind of religious order in the service of the god Oro, comprising both men

and women who more completely than any other known human group had realized the ideal of free love. The first picture Gauguin painted after his sudden conversion to the long-vanished Tahitian religion was a splendid nude, *Te a'a no areois*, representing Oro's terrestrial wife Vairaumati. Altogether, during the next twelve months Gauguin painted twenty pictures and made about a dozen woodcarvings inspired by these two literary sources, the most well-known of these paintings being, *Arearea*, *Hina maruru*, and *Hina Tefatou*. Since Moerenhout's and Bovis's studies contained no illustrations or descriptions of the ancient idols and cult paraphernalia that Gauguin could draw on, he had in each case to rely on his own superb imagination—and the usual models from 'Oriental' sources. Of these, the prototype of the frequently occurring nude goddess with waiving hands and a narrow waist

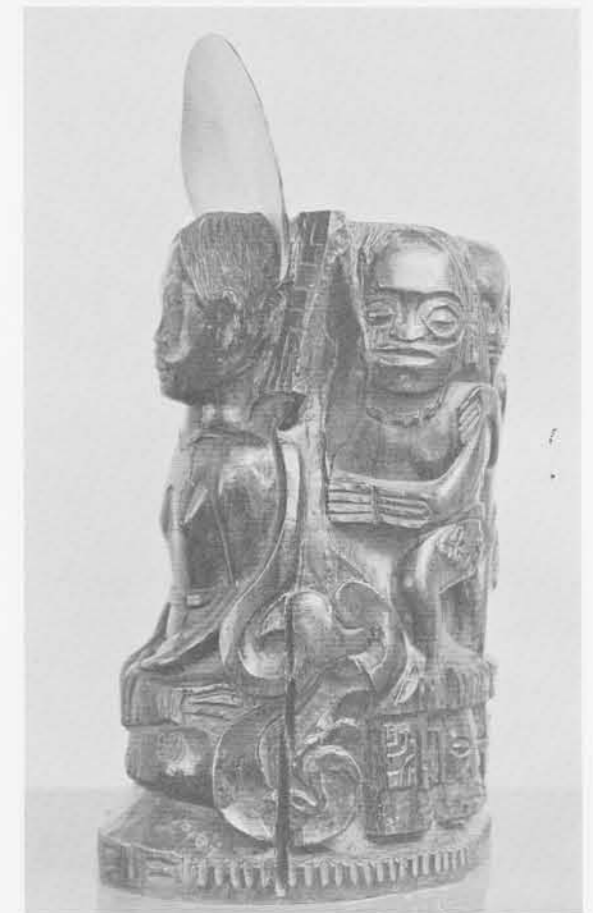


Head of a ceremonial club from the Marquesas in the University Museum

can be found in the Borobudur friezes, whereas the many colossal seated idols so beloved by Gauguin resemble more than anything else a Buddha or an enthroned Egyptian pharaoh. It must also be stressed that these 'statues' became permanent components in Gauguin's pictorial alphabet, for they often reappear in his paintings, as for instance in the monumental *D'où-venons nous?* from 1897.

Quite understandably, Gauguin soon became dissatisfied with the sort of half-dead, hollowed-out native culture with crazy Western admixtures he had found in Tahiti and began to look elsewhere for the unspoiled, primitive paradise he had dreamt of. The sight, in the home of the commander of the French gendarmerie in Papeete, of a huge collection of Marquesan bowls and weapons, all artistically decorated with intricate geometric designs, made him eager to visit at once the savage cannibals, in the 700 nautical miles distant islands, who had created these masterpieces. However, Gauguin's poor health and finances thwarted this plan. When Europe rejected him and he turned his back forever in 1895 on its "corrupt, bourgeois civilization" his first thoughts were to continue straight from Tahiti to the Marquesas Islands. But a new, long series of difficulties and personal tragedies delayed his departure until 1901 (!) when the longed-for miracle finally occurred. A young Parisian art-dealer by the name of Ambroise Vollard was bold enough to sign a contract with Gauguin, assuring him a regular income, sufficient to live on without further worries.

Once more Gauguin arrived too late at his paradise. The only difference was that now he had even more reason for regret than ten years earlier when he settled down in Tahiti, his first South Sea paradise. The Marquesans



IDOLE À LA COCQUILLE
(Idol with a shell)
Bronze cast of a carved wood cylinder, ca. 1892.
Gray 99. Edition of 6, 1959
Photograph courtesy of
Fine Arts Associates, New York City
The geometrical designs as well as the tandem figures were derived directly from Marquesan sources and reveal Gauguin's early interest in Marquesan art.

were rapidly disappearing, ravaged by tuberculosis, leprosy, and venereal diseases, and none of the apathetic survivors of this formerly magnificent race cared to continue the artistic wood-and stone-carving traditions of their ancestors. As for tattooing, an art in which the Marquesans were unsurpassed masters in pre-European times, this practice had been completely forbidden by the Catholic missionaries. Only in rare instances could specimens of the lost crafts be found here and there in old huts in remote valleys. With great bitterness Gauguin remarked: "In Europe no one seems to suspect that both the Maoris of New Zealand and the Marquesans once had a highly developed, decorative art. Our knowledgeable art critics are mistaken when they think that it is a (coarse) Papuan art. Particularly the Marquesas islanders have an incredibly keen



Christ on the Cross
Rubbing from a carved
wood cylinder of ca.
1896-97. (Gray 125)
Impressions taken in 1926
Collection of
Andrew C. Ritchie,
New Haven, Connecticut.

decorative sense. Give them an object of any geometrical shape, and they will succeed in covering it in a harmonious manner with designs, without leaving any ill-matched, shockingly empty spaces. The basis is the human body or face. Above all the face. One is often surprised to find a human face where there first seemed to exist only a strange geometrical pattern. Though continuously repeated, these designs are never identical. Even if one is willing to pay high prices, it is no longer possible to find any of those splendid objects of bone, turtle shell or ironwood that the natives made in olden times. The gendarmes have *stolen* them all and sold them to collectors. Yet the colonial authorities have never thought of building a museum in Tahiti for the arts of the South Seas—a project that could easily have been realized. All these people who pretend to be so cultured have no inkling whatsoever that true artists have existed in the Marquesas Islands.”

For the reasons that Gauguin himself ex-

plains so well here, he could, ironically, with equal ease have produced the twenty pictures that he painted during the last two years of his life, without moving from Tahiti to the Marquesas Islands, since there were no new discoveries to make on the artistic level. To the two final tragedies most frequently mentioned by his biographers, i.e. the total lack of medical facilities in the Marquesas and his exhausting struggle against a stupid and malevolent gendarme, we can therefore unhappily add a third and even greater one. This was his misfortune never to have been able to realize his long-cherished dream of living and working among a primitive people with a functioning culture and a flowering art.

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BENGT DANIELSSON, writer, anthropologist, and museum director, did field work in Amazonas, Australia, and the Pacific from 1946 to 1966. He was a member of the Kon-Tiki raft expedition, has been Associate in Anthropology in the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, since 1952, and Director of the National Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, since 1967. Dr. Danielsson is the author of *Work and Life on Raroia*, *Love in the South Seas*, *What Happened on the Bounty*, *Gauguin in the South Seas*, and numerous other travel books, scientific studies, biographies, children's books, and TV programs.