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Tapa cloth from the Cook voyages:
the Shaw Catalogue

[COOK: THIRD VOYAGE] SHAW, Alexander.

A Catalogue of the Different Specimens of Cloth collected in the three voyages of Captain Cook...

Quarto (220 x 164 mm.), pp [8, comprising title and three leaves of descriptions], with 56 tapa cloth specimens interleaved between or tipped on 30 blank leaves, with sample numbers in manuscript 1-39; fine copy in its original publisher's binding of sheep-backed marbled boards, preserved in a morocco-backed box. London, Alexander Shaw 1787.

EXCEPTIONAL ARTEFACT FROM COOK'S PACIFIC VOYAGES: WITH 56 SPECIMENS OF NATIVE TAPA CLOTH INCLUDING A SUITE OF 17 EXTRA SPECIMENS, MOST OF THEM HAWAIIAN

An exceptional and very rare artefact arising from the three voyages of James Cook in the Pacific, Alexander Shaw's *Catalogue* has long been regarded as one of the rarest and most desirable of all Pacific voyage books, in which the printed text is slender compared with its large cloth specimens: samples of indigenous tapa cloth collected by Cook's men, at times of first or very early contact with native peoples; Tahiti and the Hawaiian islands are amply represented. This is an example of one of very few copies to contain an additional series of 17 specimens, mostly of Hawaiian manufacture.

History of the "Catalogue"

The book was published in 1787, some seven years after the return of the *Resolution* and *Discovery* at the conclusion of the third voyage. The earliest copies issued typically contain just 39 samples, as listed by Shaw in the preface. Later, some copies had additional cloth specimens added, probably in response to new supplies of tapa that became available, likely from the sale of the collections of Sir Ashton Lever and David Samwell (the latter surgeon's mate of the *Discovery* during the third voyage, and author of the equally rare *Narrative of the Death of Captain James Cook*, published a year before this). This very desirable expanded example includes 17 additional cloth samples, bringing the total to 56 specimens, and may have been prepared in 1805-1806 (on the basis of dated watermarks of some blank leaves). Most significantly, the majority of these additional specimens were collected by Cook's men and officers in Hawaii. There were relatively few Hawaiian specimens in the copies first issued which were limited to 39 specimens.

Unsurprisingly, Shaw's *Catalogue* has been the subject of intense scholarly focus for many decades, including a comprehensive world-wide survey of all remaining copies by Dr. Donald Kerr of the University of Otago. Dr. Kerr has identified 66 examples in his census, of which 57 are held by libraries and institutions, six are in private possession, and three whose whereabouts are not known at present. To this total can be added the copy recently included in the Brooke-Hitching sale and the present example, bringing the total to 68. Research by a London-based colleague has so far revealed that eight copies, including this one, are examples of the expanded issue (while it is known that this is the rarest state of this book, further investigation is required to finalise the total).

However, as tapa from different sheets was dissected to make up the books, no two copies

A CATALOGUE

OF THE

DIFFERENT SPECIMENS OF CLOTH

COLLECTED IN THE THREE VOYAGES OF

CAPTAIN COOK,

TO THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE;

WITH A

PARTICULAR ACCOUNT

OF THE

Manner of the Manufacturing the same in the various Islands of the

SOUTH SEAS;

PARTLY EXTRACTED FROM

Mr. ANDERSON and REINHOLD FORSTER's Observations,
And the verbal Account of some of the most knowing of the Navigators:

WITH

SOME ANECDOTES THAT HAPPENED TO THEM AMONG
THE NATIVES.

Now properly arranged and printed

For ALEXANDER SHAW, No. 379, STRAND, LONDON,

MDCCLXXXVII.

of the work are identical (as demonstrated by David Forbes in the Hawaiian National Biography). Furthermore, the craze for 'artificial curiosities' from the Pacific during the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seems to have inspired a sort of drawing-room activity where sections were cut from the tapa specimens and the small cuttings rearranged in what are often called 'snippet books', probably to share with friends. As a result of these samplings, many copies are incomplete or include specimens that have been heavily clipped. The present example is unscathed and contains large generous tapa samples – indeed some 15 of them measure a full or three-quarter page. Significantly, the offsetting from the tapa to the interleaved sheets shows that this copy is in entirely original condition, and has not been modified or tampered with in the two centuries since its production. As such, not only is this the most desirable issue with the additional Hawaiian specimens, but it is unusually complete, unmolested and well preserved, and bound in the marbled paper boards as originally sold from the residence of Alexander Shaw in the Strand.

Fascination with Tapa

The production of this book reflects the genuine curiosity aroused by tapa, a fascination that drove competition between collectors of 'artificial curiosities' and generated an active market for the sheets brought home by Cook's men. The preface of the book contains descriptions of bark cloth manufacture by Cook, Anderson, Forster and an anonymous officer titled 'one of the navigators', and is followed by the list of the specimens compiled by Shaw. The list is indeed rich in fascinating details; for example, we learn that the various uses of the tapa: 'wore (sic) by the people in the rainy season' or 'used at the human sacrifice'. Some of the notes in the list are longer, and doubtless arise from tales told by the mariners who collected the tapa in the first place (as boasted on the title page). For example, we learn that specimen number 18 is:

'The very finest of the inner coat of the mulberry; and wore by the chiefs of Otaheite – Some of the seamen were sent ashore to bring fresh provisions on board; and not having an opportunity to return immediately, one of them wandered a little way up country, where he saw some children at play, which to his surprize they all left, and surrounded him, making many antic gestures; at last a girl, about fourteen years of age, made a leap at him, at the same time endeavoured to seize a few red feathers which he had stuck in his cap, which he directly took out and presented to her; upon which she made off with amazing swiftness, and the rest after her; he then returned to his companions, who were preparing to go on board. It was now the cool of the evening, when she came down to the waterside, and singling him out from the rest, presented him with the piece of cloth from which this was cut. A true sign of the gratitude of those people'.

The Shaw Catalogue is of great significance as a repository of unique original tapa, but it also speaks of the time when Cook's sailors were spreading their stories of the alluring South Seas, while drawing-room chatter throughout the land luxuriated in descriptions of the new exotic. The publication forms a tangible link between these narratives, the indigenous cultures of the South Pacific and Hawaiian islands, the myriad personal and trading relationships that developed between the islanders and mariners, and the genteel world of gentleman collectors and their cabinets of curiosities. Recently the National



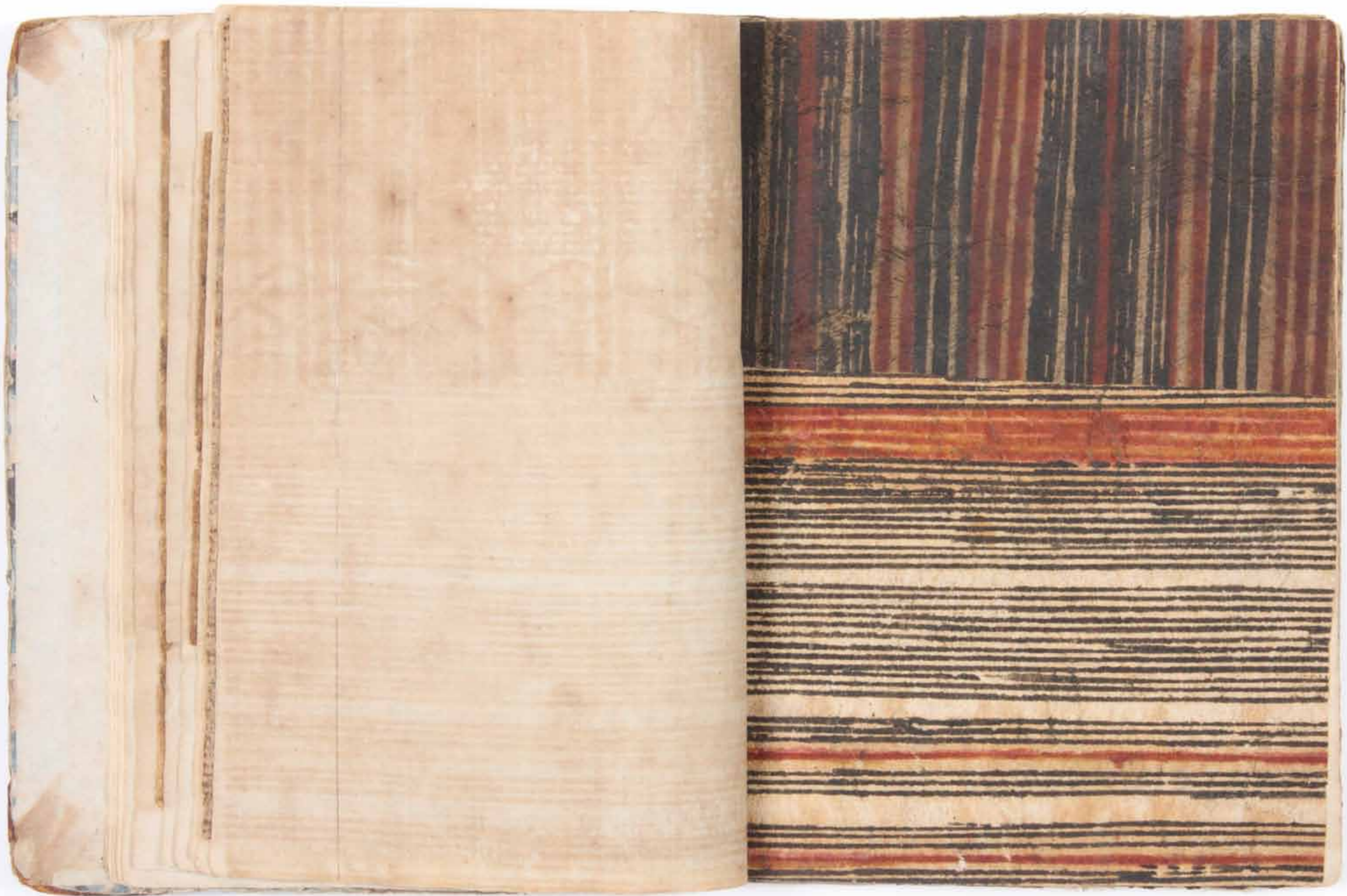
Library of Australia has mounted a splendid exhibition, "In Cook's Wake: Tapa Treasures from the Pacific", the catalogue for which contains important essays on Tapa cloth and specifically on Shaw's Catalogue by Nat Williams and Erica Ryan of the Library; Erica Ryan has made considerable progress in establishing many of the details of the manner in which Shaw's book was published.

 for details

Beddie, 3640; Forbes, 'Hawaiian National Bibliography', 139; Hawaii One Hundred, 7; Holmes, 67; not in the catalogue of the Hill collection; Donald Kerr, *Census of Alexander Shaw's Catalogue of Different Specimens of Cloth Collected in the Three Voyages of Captain Cook to the Southern Hemisphere, 1787* (University of Otago, Dunedin, 2015).

Sotheby's *Exploration and Discovery, 1576-1939. The Library of Franklin Brooke-Hitching*, n 317 (March 27, 2014); see A. L. Kaeppler, *Artificial Curiosities, being an exposition of native manufactures collected on the three Pacific voyages of Captain James Cook*, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 1978; and 'From the South Seas to the World (via London)' in Jeremy Coote (ed.), *Cook-Voyage Collections of 'Artificial Curiosities' in Britain and Ireland, 1771-2015* (MEG Occasional Paper, No. 5, Oxford: Museum Ethnographers Group (2015)); H. U. Hall, 'A book of tapa', in *The Museum Journal* XII, Philadelphia, March 1921; Ian Morrison, 'The Cloth, the Catalogue, and the Collectors', *Bulletin (Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand)*, v 27 nos 3 and 4 (2003), pp 48-59; Maryanne Larkin, 'Tales and Textiles from Cook's Pacific Voyages', *Bulletin (Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand)*, v 28, no 4 (2004), pp 20-33; Nat Williams, Erica Ryan, and Crispin Howarth, *In Cook's Wake: Tapa Treasures from the Pacific*, National Library of Australia, 2018; Louise Wilson, 'An investigation into the origin of the Tapa specimens collected by Captain Cook on his three voyages to the Pacific' (*Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand*), v 27, nos 3 and 4, 2003, pp 60-70.











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