A KULA PROWBOARD: AN ICONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION *

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I

In this article I shall attempt to explain the schema of visual signs found on the prowboard of a canoe used in the *kula* by the inhabitants of Kitava, an island near the Trobriands in the Marshall Bennett Group, Milne Bay, Melanesia. The aesthetic object [1] considered is known in the local languages (Nowau and Boyowa) as a *lagim*, and it is carved and painted by professional artists.

In this case I am analysing a particular *lagim* carved by Towitara, a *tokabitam bogwa* [2] who lives in the village of Kumwagea. The islanders consider Towitara an artist who expresses the classical aesthetic features of the *lagim* with great skill and a stylistic innovator at the same time.

Towitara's *lagim* will serve as a point of reference and as a schema for analyzing the logical and structural processes involved in the carving of the signs and their meanings. While this implies that I have already introduced the idea of " schema " with reference to the aesthetic object, suffice it here to state that a schema has actually been discovered, thanks to a particular methodology and helpful information from the *tokabitam bogwa* Towitara.

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[1] I use the term " aesthetic object " as defined by J. Mukařovský (1973: 136-140), since his definition is general and abstract. Furthermore, the notion of " art object " makes it possible to analyze " any kind of " object, whether it be found in a simple or complex society.

[2] The term *tokabitam bogwa* in Nowau, the language spoken in Kitava Island, is applied to an artist who succeds in introducing new symbols into the non-modifiable structure of the *lagim* and the *tabuya*. The new symbols must, however, be in harmony with the basic schema. The term *bogwa* also refers to the artist's technical skill. In addition to the *tokabitam bogwa*, there are also apprentice *tokabitam*. Both the *tokabitam bogwa* and the *tokabitam* are specialists in carving *lagim* and *tabuya*. The carving of the canoe itself is the job of the *tokataraki*. A *tokabitam* may also be a *tokataraki* but not the other way round.

1. My interpretation of the *lagim* is based on the conviction that in order to analyse any object or event we must construct a theory.

2. Such a theory can then serve as a working hypothesis for the analysis of a concrete object or event. In an anthropological study of this kind it follows that, if we use a general and abstract theory applicable to any kind of artistic expression, in both simple and complex societies, we can avoid *ad hoc* methods developed case by case, methods that would upset the unity of the logical process, having recourse to inductive rather than deductive reasoning [3].

3. Because of the unitary nature of this logico-deductive process, by articulating thought according to categories that classify and express nature (as well as ourselves), we can hypothesize the existence of a congeries of models (applicable to any kind of verbal or non-verbal expression) that can be used to analyze events, objects, words, etc., in their relation to those models.

By this I mean that there is a unitary nature in the way we express ourselves and the way we interpret expression according to determined models; and that the difference between the mode of expression of a simple society and that of a complex society does not lie in the fact that the product of a simple society is more easily related to a model or congeries of models. Nor is it true that a simple society's mode of expression cannot follow a logico-deductive process. On the contrary, the difference may probably be found in the different models that can be produced by applying the same logical deductive principles. But the logical method of developing and applying these models is the same in each case. The members of simple and complex societies alike produce and interpret their own artistic expression according to an ensemble of models. Methodogically speaking, therefore, we now know that an act or an object can be explained only if we establish its relationship to a model, or models, as in the case of a linguistic proposition. Moreover, a single aesthetic expression or a group of aesthetic expressions can be analytically interpreted only if we have a clear idea of the ensemble of models that has produced it.

Of course at a methodological level, once we maintain that any act or expression may be appraised only according to a particular reference system, the problem arises whether this appraisal should be made from within the group that proposed the system (and for whom it is most valid) or from the outside.

This problem is especially important in anthropological studies and even more so in the analysis of aesthetic objects. In the present case I begin with

[3] The deductive method (Hjelmslev, 1969: 11-13) suits the general abstract notion of an aesthetic object as developed by J. Mukařovský.

an analysis of a single object, the *lagim* or, rather, a collection of *lagim* (*i.e.*, different versions of the same object/schema) and try to establish its concretization (in both a formal and a material sense) of one version of a probable abstract *lagim* model. This is possible if we consider the *lagim* as a form of communication, a semiotic process, a structure of heterogeneous elements that implies a dual reference: " to itself (horizontal, syntagmatic-contextual) and to that ensemble of possible but not necessarily actualized choices that are equivalent or in opposition to the choices that have been made (vertical-paradigmatic-systematic references) " (Garroni 1973: 52).

This means that an aesthetic object produced by a simple society can be interpreted both by looking at the object (syntagmatic reference) and by referring it to an abstract model, in this case, a particular ensemble of possible but not actualized choices. The aesthetic object and the abstract model are linked in a relationship of equivalence/opposition.

It is possible, therefore, to discern the " abstract " schema in the object by analyzing a group of similar objects seen as specific examples of the same schema. When interpreting the meaning and importance of the signs of an object we should remember that they " present themselves " (Brandi 1974: 26)[4] in their visual function, that is, they do not have to be referred to anything apart from their visual components (lines, spots, colors, light, shade, depth, chromatism, form, etc.). If, however, we want to understand other kinds of meaning (which I roughly call symbolic) as well as the visual significance (the non-verbal elements of communication), then we cannot ignore other kinds of information – in this case ethnographical data.

For the same sign, therefore, we shall find an ensemble of non-verbal communicative elements and verbal ones as well. When analysing the non-verbal communicative elements we do not need a verbal " translation " of each one of them, but if we want to interpret the symbolic meaning of a sign, we need a set of elements, even heterogeneous ones, that are to be found outside the actual structure of the object.

Therefore, there must be an iconological as well as a visual interpretation. Both interpretations serve to explain an object, in that it is " heterogeneous in type ". But any appeal to data external to the " formal " structure of the aesthetic object loses much of its importance in anthropological studies if it is overemphasized.

For this reason, once we have accepted the notion of a model, an aesthetic

[4] I use the expression " present themselves " to stress the difficulty of assimilating a non-verbal sign to a verbal one. The difficulty arises because the non-verbal sign " presents itself " (Brandi, 1974: 26-77) in its totality. But the dual articulation of the non-verbal sign should not be neglected. It must be understood in a metaphorical sense and interpreted in a different way from the dual articulation of the verbal sign. While it is possible to speak of the " expression " of a red spot – a tiny dot –, difficulty arises when we try to discern its " content ".

In my opinion an analysis of " content " must be sought in an ensemble of signs – even a minimal ensemble – rather than in the single sign.

object m_1 that follows an abstract and general schema of rules, *M* will be interpreted *only* by reference to those norms it has achieved at a certain degree and level of specification. In this way, we can measure the distance between an abstract schema *M* and the real object m_1. This gap will constitute the specific nature of the object and its difference from any other object that refers to the same schema. If we know that two objects m_1 and m_2 share the same structure but differ from each other, because the artists were influenced by different master carvers or because they belong to clans that use different symbols, the difference will have no effect on the abstract schema *M*, which is the same for all objects, but will affect only the interpretation of *M* that is made concrete in m_1, m_2, m_3,... m_n.

An analysis of the concrete object, referred to the abstract schema *M*, shows that it has some individual values expressed through the combination of signs that constitute it; in order to determine these values we need further information (economic, political, mythological), but we must remember that the meanings are already established in the notion of the abstract schema *M*.

II

The aesthetic object analysed in this article is therefore to be considered as a schema of signs/symbols [5].

It should be borne in mind that:

1. Each sign/symbol has its meaning in each specific case as a part of the schema it belongs to and in relation to other signs/symbols; but if we consider the sign/symbol by itself and as part of a material model (the art object concerned), we can grasp the relationship between the symbol (a color, for example) and its meaning, as well as the multiple levels of meaning involved [6].

2. The same sign/symbol carved on one *lagim* (itself a schema of signs/symbols) may have a different value from that on another *lagim*, even though it still retains the same meaning. The difference in value is determined " par ce qui l'entoure " (Saussure, 1974: 160).

[5] I apply the term sign/symbol (which I abbreviate *S.sym.*) to each of the minimal elements that together make up the aesthetic object as a " schema ". I use the term to stress the heterogeneity of an aesthetic object. *S.sym.* not only communicate at level of meaning, but they are above all representation in so far as they recall " a mental image to those who use the signs " (Ducrot-Todorov 1972: 115).

[6] The meaning of a *S.sym.* comes from the relationship between the thing signified and signifier, which in a particular code distinguishes it from other *S.sym.* and gives it specificity. In addition to the basic " strict meaning " of a *S.sym.*, there are other meanings, which form successive layers over the first meaning. These meanings are established by historical, psychological, and other factors.

3. The fact that a single sign/symbol may have different values is due to the existence of a model of the symbol's meaning, in the sense that a sign/symbol may be envisaged as a micro-schema with an abstract meaning that acquires various values according to its relation to other micro-schemas, thereby contributing to the meaning of a macro-schema, the *lagim*. Instead of a single meaning there may be an ensemble of different meanings, and in this case it becomes a synonym for sense.

4. However, there are also some signs/symbols that always have the same value (which I will here call absolute value), even if the subsidiary elements, or micro-schema change. In this case both the meaning and the ensemble of meaning values remain unchanged, and it is through the discovery of these absolute signs/symbols that it becomes possible to reconstruct the abstract schema both in the formal sense of a logico-visual process and in the material sense of a model of a concrete object.

In this context, therefore, the idea of a schema should be understood as the logical process of formation and classification in space and time of the categories that constitute the signs/symbols on the surface of the *lagim*. While the sign/symbol must be considered as a material feature, the schema to which it is referred (*M*) is not " material " even though it is perceived in a concrete way when it is part of a specific aesthetic object.

III

My reconstruction of the schema of the *lagim* is based on information from Towitara, the carver which made it clear that the *tokabitam* themselves are aware of a schema before they express it in the single object, the *lagim*. When an apprentice « sees » [7] a *lagim* in a vision or a dream during his initiation period, the *lagim* must also be interpreted as a visual metaphor for the notion of « schema ». The boy who is to become a *tokabitam* sees the whole structure of the *lagim* with its signs/symbols carved in the correct " spaces ". What he sees is in fact, an " ensemble of interconnected signs ", the visual image of a mode of organising concepts, which together with the

[7] One of the more important stages in an apprentice carver's initiation is the " vision " or " dream " of the *lagim* and the *tabuya*. Although my information is not all of a kind, it is reported that the boy who has been " spurred on " by a series of initiatory rites " sees " the *lagim* and *tabuya* as " finished " objects. He probably sees the structure of the object; the carving of the *S.sym.* is the most important aspect of his apprenticeship. Here I wish to emphazise the fact that the " vision " of the *lagim* and *tabuya* serves to establish the logical priority of the notion of schema or structure with regard to the various *S.sym.* of which it is composed.

It is worth stressing that the schema and its elements exert reciprocal influence.

external expressive element (in this case, the carved symbol) and its color form the sign.

The organization and articulation of there signs/symbols will be the young man's main concern as he strives to become a *tokabitam* and make the sign he carves identical with the sign he has " seen ".

Among the terms used by the *tokabitam* there is one that expresses this concept of schema or structure: *m'wa* or *mwata*. It is used only in connection with the *lagim* and the *tabuya*, another piece of the prowboard [8]. The tern *kwabu*, on the other hand, is used for a collection of parts that lack the characteristic of the first term, namely, the opposition as well as the correlation between signs/symbols, which acquire their meaning and value only within the schema. The term *kwabu*, for example, is used only for the parts of the canoe (seen as a whole, parts which call up an image of a single unity).

A third term, which is generic and all-inclusive, is used to describe the surface or, more precisely, the external image of the *lagim* and the canoe. This is *migira*, which means " face ".

Moreover, there are certain elements that Towitara considers " basic " to the schema; and there are other elements related to them that I call " subsidiary ". Characteristic of the basic elements is that they always have the same value and the same meaning. The subsidiary elements, on the other hand, may have different values in relation to the same meanings.

The connection between basic and subsidiary elements reflects the problem of external influences and the possible modifications they may entail, although, according to my informants, these influences do not affect the schema/structure of the *lagim*. The problem arises because, in addition to the abstract schema and the actual object, there is a third element, the model created by the master carver, which at a secondary level is taken as a reference point in relation to the schema *M*. It is in connection with this concrete model that the problems of modification and reciprocal influences between basic and subsidiary signs/symbols must be considered.

Following Leach's example (1954: 103-105) in the interpretation of the painted Trobriand war-shields, I have applied my knowledge of the linguistic terms that denote (*i.e.* refer to material elements, such as colors) and represent (*i.e.* call to mind a corresponding image) the signs/symbols that are carved and painted on the *lagim*. But this does not mean that I have treated linguistic and visual signs (verbal and non-verbal signs) on the same level, or treated two different elements as if their nature were homogeneous. I have used verbal terms in an attempt to interpret the *lagim* and the *tabuya* iconologically, although I shall consider the latter only to complement my analysis of the *lagim*. The sense of the ensemble of meanings of an aesthetic object can

[8] The *tabuya* is the other piece of the canoe prowboard. Together with the *lagim* it forms a more complex " meaningful unity ". It is set obliquely to the *lagim* and can be observed from two sides, both of which are carved (Plate V and VI).

only be discerned by relating it to a linguistic-visual, that is semiotic, system of which it is one possible example.

Finally, by tracing each stage of the carving of a *lagim* I have been able to classify the logico-temporal succession of signs/symbols as they are applied to the surface of the *lagim*.

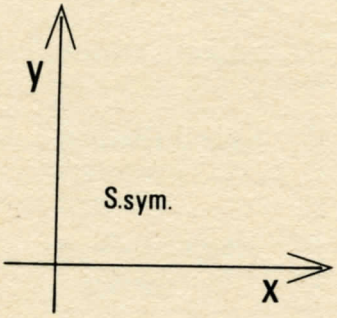
An interpretation of the lagim

Plate 1. shows a *lagim* carved by Towitara, which is the reference model for my interpretation of the values of the carved *S.syms* (or signs/symbols) and of the visual meaning of the object as a whole. Looking at the surface/schema of the *lagim* we note that it is the result of the interplay of spatial and temporal elements.

Temporal elements: I use this term for the *S.syms.* that are carved first and thus establish a logico-temporal progression, *i.e.* they make concrete the categories which order the elements in time.

Spatial elements: I use this term in reference to the order of distribution of the *S.syms.* on the surface of the *lagim*.

These categories of *S.syms.* are of fundamental importance in the visual and verbal reconstruction of the *lagim*. They distinguish the basic *S.syms.* in space and not even a *tokabitam bogwa* may change them. Each *S.sym.* then can be read on both the logico-temporal and the logico-spatial planes, since they occupy both planes at the same time:



x = logico-spatial plane
y = logico-temporal plane
S.sym. = sign/symbol

On the logico-spatial and logico-temporal planes the particular importance of any *S.sym.* will depend on the role it plays in determining the structure, and it can be read in a hierarchico-normative sense; but as far as visual perception is concerned, the *S.syms.* are all of equal importance in estab-

lishing the form of the aesthetic object as a whole [9]. This means that while the subsidiary elements have no relevance as regards the abstract schema *M*, they play an important role in establishing the visual meanings of the *lagim*, its aesthetic form seen either in itself or in relation to the viewer.

Another logico-technical element to be considered is the " direction " the carving takes, that is, on which part of the surface the *S.syms.* are carved first.

I have shown this in Fig. A. The triangle represents the abstract form of the *lagim* divided into three horizontal bands (X, Y, J). In each band all the *S.syms.* are shown according to their actual distribution, that is, the order in which they were carved by the *tokabitam*. In band X I have grouped all the basic *S.syms.* as defined by the *tokabitam*: *doka*, *gigiwana (i)*, *weku*, *kwaisaru*. In band Y I have shown the subsidiary elements functioning as a link between band X and band J, even if this is not true in the case of every *lagim*. In this band we have the *S.syms. dudua* or *dudwa*, which plays a key role in my interpretation of the *lagim*. In band J the *S.syms.* do not, at least on first showing, have any great importance in determining the *lagim*'s structure, although I disagree somewhat with Towitara about this. The horizontal divisions are my own, but they are based on the actual distribution of *S.syms.*

Another spatial division is made by the *tokabitam*, and there are specific terms for it. Looking at the *lagim* frontally (Plate I) we have the following vertical divisions:

A = *vatakora*
B = *kailamilabeba*
C = *kaimatarabeba*

The intersections between vertical and horizontal bands form a network (see Fig. B), and the surface of the *lagim* is articulated into squares, which establish the temporal and spatial order followed by the *tokabitam* Towitara.

Square CXi:	*susawila* *kabilabala*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
	gigiwana - i *weku*	basic *S.syms.*
	mataraina *ubwoli* *monikiniki*	subsidiary *S.syms.*

[9] Subsidiary *S.syms.* have a secondary function in regard to the *lagim*'s structure, but when they are perceived " aesthetically " they have the same value as the basic *S.syms.* Therefore, in determining and perceiving the form of an aesthetic object, the distinction between basic and subsidiary *S.syms.* does not have the same value that it has in the area of logic.

Moreover, in square CXi one of two supporting side bands begins and ends with *karakaimalaka* (red), F.

Square AAo:	*susawila* *kabilabala*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
	gigiwana-i *doka*	basic *S.syms.*
	tokwalu *ubwoli* *karau (karawa)*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
Square BX:	*susawila* *kabilabala*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
	gigiwana-i *kwaisaru*	basic *S.syms.*
	mataraina *ubwoli* *rekoreko* *ubwara*	subsidiary *S.syms.*

In square BX the other supporting band *karakaimalaka* (Fi) also begins and ends.

Square CYi:	*dudua or dudwa* *mataraina*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
Square AAi:	*karau (karawa)* *vakaboda* *ubwara* *dudua* or *dudwa*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
Square BY:	*dudua* or *dudwa* *mataraina*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
Square CJi:	*kaikikila* *mataraina* *ubwara*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
Square Aii:	*kaikikila* *mataraina* *ubwara*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
Square BJ:	*kaikikila* *ubwara* *mataraina*	subsidiary *S.syms.*
F, Fi:	supporting bands, *karakaimalaka.*	

The outer sides of the *lagim* are delimited by two symmetrical supporting bands, which converge below. They are termed *karakaimalaka* because are painted red (*malaka*: a red pigment). Though they are not classed as basic *S.syms.* in the abstract schema *M*, they do play an important role in my interpretation of the *lagim*'s structure, along with the *S.syms. dudua* or *dudwa.*

Looking at the positioning of the *S.syms.* in the *lagim* schema/figure and taking verbal meanings into account as well, we find that the basic *S.syms.* are all in band X (squares CX, AAo, BX). If we read from left to right we have *weku*, *doka*, *kwaisaru*, and *gigiwana.* They are all carved in the upper part (see Plate II for *weku* and *gigiwana*; Plate III for *doka*; Plate IV for *kwaisaru*). Like all *S.syms.*, they can be read vertically (A, B, C) and horizontally (X, Y, J), (Fig. B). But in comparison with the other S.syms. which are subsidiary, they occupy a primary position in both logical time and logical space. The are the first *S.syms.* carved on the *lagim's* surface and (considering the abstract category schema/structure *mwata*) other *S.syms.* set on the logico-abstract axes of time and space, will be articulated around them. Moreover, the basic *S.syms.* are in the *o'dabwara*, the upper part or head of the *lagim.*

IV

The verbal meanings of the *S.syms.* carved on the *lagim* are given below. These meanings provide an iconological interpretation [10], the sense of which can only be appreciated at a visual level.

1. *susawila* (subsidiary *S.sym.* – Plate I, letter *a*). One meaning is " to go to and fro ", or " to laze about ". The visual representation of " lazing about " is a long line of birds (*Fregata ariel*) linked together, and this may be the non-verbal interpretation.

In Towitara's *lagim* the *monikiniki* or snake's head gives birth to the line of birds (Plate I, letter *l*). They are painted red and black on a white ground. There may be variations in these *S.syms.* even among Towitara's pupils. For example, one of them, Gumaligisa, carves the *S.syms. papa* to depict the same meaning as *susawila.*

2. *kabilabala* (subsidiary *S.sym.* – Plate I, letter *b*). This is the narrow band that divides *S.sym. a* from *S.syms. d, e.* This band, an innovation introduced by Towitara, has a stylistic function in that it clarifies the formal relationship between the carved band *a* and bands *d. e.* It has also been adopted in Lalela village. Earlier *lagim* do not have this dividing line, and in Towitara's opinion, the lack causes confusion in understanding the *S.syms.* Towitara introduced this method of dividing the ensemble of *S.syms.* because he felt the need (something to be appraised on the logico-perceptive plane

[10] Here I use the term " iconology " in the sense used by E. Panofsky (1939).

Plate 1
Towitara's lagim.

Plate 2
l = weku and gigiwani.

Plate 3
g = doka.

Plate 4
f = kwaisaru.

Plate 5
tabuya.

Plate 6
lagim and tabuya.

as well) to solve the problem of the relationship between elements that contribute to the visualization of a conceptual process (man's logico-expressive process) but take part in that process at different levels and have different functions.

The *kabilabala* " sign " (I use this term following Hjelmslev) denote the transition from an amorphous state of thought (material-*susawila*) to a state that is formed semiotically (the semiotic substance *gigiwana* and *doka*).

kabilabala may be translated at a verbal level as " transverse horizontal axis ". It is derived from *kai* –, a prefix meaning " wooden " or " wood " in general, and *-bilabala* " horizontal " [11].

3. *gigiwna-i* (Plate I, letter *c*). These *S.syms.* are considered basic and unchangeable by *tokabitam* [12]. They must be carved on all *lagim*. They are carved parallel to the *susawila* and the *kabilabala* and emphasize their relationship.

The *gigiwana S.syms.* however, begin from opposite directions (right and left sides of the *lagim*) and end in the middle in the two *doka* (the most important *S.syms.* at both a figurative and a logical level).

Visually, the *gigiwana-i* " push " towards the *doka* and the *tokwalu* (in the middle of the *lagim*), and balance (even if not completely) the horizontal, abstract axis of the *lagim*, which on a perceptual level tends towards a certain balance in the areas marked by the *weku* and *kwaisaru*.

The visual similarity between *doka* and *gigiwana*, which is more apparent than real, raises the problem of the verbal interpretation of the two terms. The answer may be provided by a third term, *dodoleta*, which is used for both the *doka* and the *gigiwana-i* (according to information from the *tokabitam* Tonori in Lalela village). When Tonori uses the term *dodoleta* for both *gigiwana-i* and *doka*, he is probably stressing their identical content (the concept, the classificatory category) at the expense of the difference suggested by the two terms *doka* and *gigiwana*, and considering them forms that divide similar content in different ways, thus rendering them semiotic substances.

The term *dodoleta* is made up of the prefix *do-* meaning " activity at sea " (the second *-do* is for emphasis) plus *-leta* meaning " to carve " and " to be in full sail ". If, instead, we divide the term *dodoleta* into *dodo-* and *-leta*, the root *dodo-* can be traced to *wodudu*, which means " to push " or " to drive ", or " the crowding together of many people or things ". The prefix *do-* may also be interpreted as a contracted form of *o'dabwara* (the top, head, or upper part of a man's body). If we consider *dodoleta* in relation to the

[11] Towitara introduced the *S.sym. kabilabala* to clarify the relationship between *susawila* and *gigiwana-i*. Hitherto the two *S.syms.* were tangent to each other, and the aesthetic effect was less satisfying. The *kabilabala* has a logical as well as a stylistic function, as I have tried to show in the present article.

[12] " Unchangeable " here refers to the categories that provide the basis of the *lagim* structure and make the entire ensemble of *S.syms.* comprehensible. These categories/symbols are not analysed, for they guarantee the correctness of the logical process, proceeding from the abstract and general to the concrete and particular.

term *doka* (or *doki* in the Nowau language) we can translate it as " imagination ". I find this latter meaning the most significant in relation to the S.sym. *doka*, partly on the basis of the information I collected. Moreover, the term *doka* is also the root of the word *tokabitam* (*doka* → *toka-*), and in this case refers to intelligence, or more exactly, to the ability to create interpretive and expressive categories. None of these interpretations is contradictory, in light of our working hypothesis that all aesthetic objects are heterogeneous in nature and that linguistic terms are semantically ambiguous, even through the values they express must be established. For example, the term *gigiwana* may be translated as " moving the water with a paddle ", and the carving of the *S.sym.* expresses this concept metaphorically. But, as far as the *doka* is concerned, this interpretation is not very pertinent. In ' form ' the *doka* is a swollen *gigiwana*. It seems more proper to intepret *gigiwana* as " pushing towards the centre " (towards an ' end '), an action emphasized by the term *dodoleta* which is assimilated to the *S.syms. doka* and *gigiwana*.

Since the *gigiwana* are found in the top part of the *lagim* (*o'dabwara*), in the area where concepts are forged, the most likely interpretation is that *gigiwana* and *doka* are simply visual metaphors for man's cognitive precesses, symbolized by *doka* (the mental, conceptual element) and *tokwalu* (the material, corporal element) in the middle of the *lagim*.

The *gigiwana* are therefore concepts, or a " chain " of concepts, that determine the classification and interpretation of nature. They can be compared to Hjelmslev's " semiotic substance " because of the intervention of " form " (the *doka*).

4. *doka* (Plate I, letter *d*). Some of the meanings of this *S.syms.* are linked directly to the *gigiwana*, and in fact it represents the final and perfected form. It represents the concept that has been formed and is ready to be expressed externally. The *doka* derives its form from the sea snail *Nautilus pompilius* [13] chosen by the *tokabitam* as a symbol of intelligence and imagination. If a *tokabitam* is unable to carve this sign it means he has not attained sufficient expressive and technical skill to be considered an artist.

5. *weku* (Plate I, letter *e*). This is another basic *S.sym.* carved in the upper part of the *lagim*. Graphically it is represented by two oblong holes on the left side of the *lagim*, in square CXi (Fig. B).

According to Towitara the *weku* is the *S.sym.* most heavily laden with symbolic meaning. One of them is that of the barely audible voice of a blind forest bird no one has ever seen. At a stretch, one might interpret it as the

[13] It is no accident that the *tokabitam* took *Nautilus pompilius* as a symbol of intelligence and imagination. At the level of graphic representation (based on the golden section) this symbol visualizes both the " ... bright articulation and distinction of the antitheses (which) are absolutely essential since learning and classification are synonymous " and " ... the genesis of both nature and thought against rigidity. In general we have to understand rigidity as the absence of the process of becoming: the gap between a result and its premises " (Klee, 1970, 293).

S.sym. of the phonatory act through which the *doka* and *gigiwana* find external expression as communicating verbal signs. The verbal meanings of the term *ubwolà*, which helps determine the *S.sym. weku*, are hard to interpret, because one meaning very often evokes its opposite. For example, a possible interpretation of the term *ubwola*, made up of *u* + *bola*, is a word that means both a vocal emission and its absence (silence, lack of sound).

Moreover, *u-* (contracted form of *uo*, is the transitive form of *-wa*, an element concerned with the utterance of magical words, *megwa*. The term *bola* refers to the period devoted to funeral rites, the time of death, when noise and happy songs are banned in the village.

Thus the most pertinent meaning is that of a phonatory act considered as the possibility of communicating externally a concept that has already been formed. The fact that *ubwola* can be translated as " lack of sound " (a meaning stressed particularly by the element *bola*) or " silence " strengthens rather than contradicts my interpretation. In fact, the presence or the absence of the phonatory act stresses the independence of the expressive and cognitive actions, which become signs only through the phonatory act (*weku*). (This independence was also noted with regard to the *gigiwana* and *doka S.syms.*).

6. *kwaisaru* (Plate I, letter *f*). This sign is found in Square BX (Fig. B), which faces the canoe's outrigger. This is another *S.sym.* that is basic to the structure of the *lagim*. One meaning of the term, provided by Towitara, is " burnt coconut husk " [14]. By this the *tokabitam* means both the semantic origin of the *S.sym.* carved on the *lagim* and the " ambiguous " dialectical-contrasting nature of every natural and artificial element. The reference to the husk of a coconut stresses the contact-opposition between inside and outside, even if the two spatial categories remain independent of each other.

Moreover, the burnt part of the coconut (the tough epicarp and the fibrous mesocarp) is used to make a black pigment, thus reflecting the transformation of one element into another (coconut → black pigment).

Of all the *S.syms.* used on the *lagim*, the *kwaisaru* best expresses the heterogeneity of each *S.sym.*, a heterogeneity that allows the same term to have many meanings. This happens, for example, if we separate the root or prefix of a term functioning in reference to a micro-schema that quantifies the various " compositions " formed around that root or prefix.

In the case of the *kwaisaru*, we have the semantically heterogeneous prefix *kwai* + *sa(l)ru*.

The prefix *kwai-* is used in the Nowau language to refer to elements of sound and sonority (and thereby connected with uttering magical words). It also stands for abstraction, which is found in every term with this prefix.

The fact that the *tokabitam* chose a *S.sym.* involving the process of abstraction shows that he wished to emphasize man's capacity for abstract thought

[14] As far as possible I have based the signification of each *S.sym.* on a literal translation of the term; for the significance I have tried to follow the sense provided by Towitara.

(cultural element) in relation to natural data. Tha prefix *kwai-*, however, is also used for terms denoting the weight or consistency of matter. Moreover, the term *kwaisaru* is associated with another word, *kwaisai*, used to indicate something solid, compact, enclosed and isolated, the way the *kwaisaru* is carved in relation to other *S.syms.* on the *lagim*.

Consideration is also due to Towitara's explanation for choosing the *kwaisaru* to give visual weight to the *lagim* (and the whole of the canoe) on the outrigger side, which actually stands higher out of the water (see Fig. L).

According to Towitara, this is why the *kwaisaru* (and the *rekoreko*) are found in the BX area: to restore a visual balance that had been disturbed. Moreover, the *kwaisaru* is coloured black, and this adds weight to the *S.sym.*

A *tokabitam* would be criticized for carving BX and CXi symmetrically, because a symmetrical carving would wrong for a " correct " understanding of the canoe as a whole.

7. *karawa* or *karau* (Plate I, letter *g*). This is the term for the *S.sym.* found in the upper-middle part of the *lagim*. The word *karawa* can be interpreted in the following way. *Karawa* is a term used in counting; the verb " to count " is *i- karawa* (the Boyowa equivalent of *karau* is *kalau*, the *l* becoming *r* in Kitava).

The term is composed of *ka* + *rawa*, the prefix *ka-* being the contracted form of *kai* (wood or fibrous material), but when it is applied to verbs, it denotes the act of classifying. The term *-rawa*, a variant of the Boyowa term *lawa*, can be translated as " wisp of grass " or " splinter of wood ", as well as " moth ", this last being its most significant meaning. The verb *ilau* means " to go away ", " to fly ".

Towitara, moreover, spoke of the *karawa* as the " centre " of the *lagim*, or as the breast-bone. The correlation fern-sternum-moth emerges from the fact that the three *S.syms.* express the symmetry of the two elements on a central axis, as in the case of the sternum, the moth's body and wings, and the fern's leaves and stem.

These elements suggest a division of space to the right and left. When the *tokabitam* carves a *karawa* he may be suggesting the necessity of classifying, dividing, and distributing visual elements according to categories metaphorically deduced from nature. In the *lagim* carved in Kumwagea village (a " school " influenced by Towitara and famous for the clarity and beauty of its carved *S.syms.*), the *karawa* has an important position in the centre of the *lagim* (although it is not a basic element in the abstract schema *M*), almost as if to stress this logical function.

If we translate *karawa* as moth, the term will be clearer in the context of the triple vertical division of the *lagim*: *kailamilabeba* (B), *vatakora* (C), and *kaimatarabeba* (C) (Fig. B).

The term *kailamilabeba* can be translated as " butterfly wing " turned towards the *lamina* (that is, to the right, when facing the front of the *lagim*). *Lamina* is the Boyowa word for " outrigger ", while the Nowau term *vatakora*,

(*vatakola* or *vitakola* in Boyowa) can be related to " sternum ", " center ". *Vatakora* is thus related to *karawa* and reflects a correspondence between the central axis of the whole *lagim*, the *vatakora*, and the interpretation of *karawa* as " sternum ". Consequently, one of the visual meanings of *karawa* might be a body (the *lagim* as a whole) spreading out from a point of origin (the *karawa*). However, the opposite (inward motion) is also correct.

The term *kaimatarabeba* can be translated as " butterfly eye ", and the visual representation of the sign *weku* (two holes on the surface of the *lagim*) reflects tha connection between the terms *kaimatarabeba* and *weku*, if one considers the " visual translation " of *kaimatarabeba* as a synonym for lightness (butterfly wing), and *weku* as " emptiness ", " weightlessness ". Both terms imply an idea of abstraction.

However, if we verbally consider the two lateral parts of the *lagim* as butterfly wings, the terms *kaimatarabeba* and *kailamilabeba* evidently suggest the idea of lightness and the sensation of flying (which should be considered in relation to the story of the " flying canoes " (Malinowski 1972: 311-316).

8. *dudua* or *dudwa* (Plate I, letter *h*). This sign appears in square YAi-Y of the *lagim* surface. According to Towitara, it means " chin " or " mouth ". The small concentric circles in the *dudua* are stylized versions of the snails found on banana leaves.

Other possible meanings include " caterpillar " and " rapacious person ". However, I feel the meaning of the S.sym. *dudua* must have something to do with the vocal-phonatory apparatus, particularly because Towitara relates it to the chin or mouth.

There is a parallel between Towitara's explanation of the *dudua* as chin and a decoration the men use during the *lapula* dances performed in Kitava Island [15]. This design, *bulukalakala*, is painted around the dancer's chin and mouth with burnt coconut. The design is almost always surrounded by small white dots. The *bulukalakala* is the same shape as the *dudua* (Fig. F).

9. *kaikikila* (Plate I, letter *i*). These are signs carved in the lower part of the *lagim*, Ji-Aii-J (Fig. B). None of my informants gave special importance to these *S.syms.*, but said they might be related to the lower parts of the body. The verbal term *kaikikila* can be translated as " foot ", " supporting element ", or " support ". It may be divided into *kai* + *ki* + *kila*. The prefix *kai-* refers to " wood ", *ki* – can be interpreted as a suffix for the act of " keeping together ", while – *kila* is the Nowau form of the Boyowa term *kela* or " foot ".

[15] Here I refer to the dances that follow the *milamala* feast. The dances are preceded by lenghty preparations and take place in the late morning and afternoon. It is during these two periods that the symbols are used. They are colored only black and white. The *bulukalakala* is used exclusively by men and *pakeke* by women. Other symbols include *taudumu*, *kaburuwai*, *bulupaleitala*, and *kariobiku*.

So far we have looked at the distribution of the *S.syms.* carved on the *lagim* and seen that it depends on an abstract and general schema (*M*). This schema will not be discussed in detail at the present stage of my analysis, precisely because it is abstract and general. We have also seen that there is a particular model which is one of the possible concretizations of the abstract schema and which differentiates one *tokabitam*, or group of *tokabitam* from another. We have been able largely to reconstruct, with the help of informants, the visual meanings of the carved *S.syms.* using the linguistic terms that represent them verbally.

For the moment I shall leave aside the problem of the relation between verbals signs (linguistic terms which represent a carved symbol) and non-verbal signs (the same symbol expressed at a purely visual level).

In summary, my interpretation is that:

a, there is a notion of schema/structure used as a general and abstract idea that has a determinant role in the whole *lagim*. The Nowau verbal term for this idea is *mwata* or *m'wa*. It differs from the idea of an ensemble, in that it organizes the separate elements of the canoe to create a new complex object;

b, there are elements, too, which are defined individually by special terms, but make sense only as parts of a schema. In fact, the position of each single element is determined by the abstract/schema *M* and by the concrete model *Ma*. Some elements, which I have called basic, cannot be modified, because they are part of an abstract schema and integral to the general and abstract nature of *M*. Other elements, which I have called subsidiary, may be modified, but only if they harmonize with the basic elements (principle of logical non-contradiction). The absence of any contradiction between *M* and the basic elements " makes sense " of *Ma*.

c, there are constant values, as F. de Saussure conceived them. The constant value of *S.sym.* is expressed visually by one of the three colors: white, red, or black – used in painting the *lagim*.

Let us consider, for example, what happens when a *S.sym.* is carved in the wrong square and upsets the abstract schema and logical order. The *S.sym.* is still called by the color that distinguishes that square, even though the *S.sym.* is not the one that showed properly appear in that position, following *M*. Thus, in the finished *lagim*, color maintains the constant value of *M*. For example, if the *S.sym. kwaisaru* (painted black) is moved from BX to square CXi, it will no longer be called " black " (*karakaivau*) as it was in BX. It will take the name of the color of square CXi (white, *karakaipupwakau*).

If a new color is painted in the position of a traditional color (e.g. replacing the traditional red of band F or Fi by yellow), the new color will be called by the name of the traditional one.

The whole surface of the *lagim* is divided according to well defined rules. For example, basic and subsidiary elements follow a strict plan of distribution, and this assures verbal and non-verbal communication on the logical plane.

Of course, not all the *S.syms.* can be transferred; otherwise the schema they are meant to express would be incomprehensible.

This division of the surface of the *lagim* according to the abstract schema *M* also follows composite rules governing elements that represent a structure of concepts at a visual level. The *lagim*, then, is a " figure " (in the sense of a logical idea), a harmonious ensemble of basic and subsidiary elements.

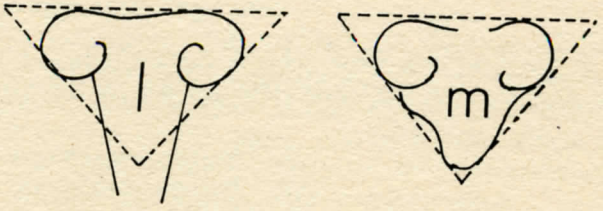
The *lagim* (and the *tabuya* as well) is an aesthetic object incorporated in the *kula* canoes. The *kula* provides a reference model (the ceremonial of gifts) and a way of interpreting the meaning of the *lagim*. Correlating the " sense " of the *lagim* and the *kula* is justified, although it should be made clear that this is necessary only for a visual interpretation of the *lagim*.

The *lagim* has been described by my informants as a " face or body " and often as sun's face (*migira*), while the *tabuya* is seen as the sun's nose and also as the moon.

Among the chief requisites of the men who take part in the *kula* are an attractive body and face and skill in speaking. When a man goes on *kula* expedition he uses betel red coloring (made from betel nut and lime) to attract and influence his partner. The capacity to charm people with words and the semantic beauty of sentences are also of fundamental importance. These elements (verbal, words; non-verbal, color) have parallels in the *lagim*

Another element worth considering is the tale of the flying witches, but I am not certain what it means. According to Malinowski, it is connected with the wrecking of a canoe during the *kula*.

The *S.sym.* of the *monikiniki* snake, which is depicted naturalistically on nearly all the *lagim*, is related to the *lagim*'s structure (*i.e.* the form in which it is visually perceived). Another term for the *monikiniki* is *mwa* or *mwata*, the same term Towitara used to describe the structure of the *lagim*. There is a close visual correlation between the external form of the *lagim* and the stylised representation of the *monikiniki* snake:



l = lagim
m = monikiniki

Thus we have an ensemble of reference models to assist in interpreting the *lagim*, but it should be remarked that any interpretation can only be valid when the aesthetic object is visually perceived.

If we analyse the positions of the S.syms. on the surface of the *lagim* according to the divisions shown in Fig. B, we can read them vertically, following the " directions " indicated by the *tokabitam*, that is, along the axes *kaimatarabeba*, *kailamilabeba*, and *vatakora*. Taking the central axis

(*vatakora*, reference point for the spatial division) and reading from top to bottom, we have the following combination of *S.syms.*:

A, Ao, Ai, Aii	*susawila* *kabilabala* *gigiwana-i* *tokwalu* *doka*	mental elements (head)
	karawa (karau) *dudua (dudwa)*	central elements (trunk)
	kaikikila	lower elements (legs)
C, Xi, Yi, Ji	*susawila* *kabilabala* *gigiwana-i* *weku*	mental elements (head)
	dudua (dudwa)	central elements (trunk)
	kaikikila	lower elements (legs)
D, X, Y, J	*susawila* *kabilabala* *gigiwana-i* *kwaisaru*	mental elements (head)
	dudua (dudwa)	central elements (trunk)
	kaikikila	lower elements (legs)

If we read the same schema horizontally (in the direction C → A → B) we find that all the basic elements are in the upper parts:

CXi → *gigiwana-i/weku*
AAo → *gigiwana-i/doka*
BX → *gigiwana-i/kwaisaru*

Thus we find that squares CXi, AAo, and BX contain the basic elements of the abstract schema *M*. I have called these elements " mental " ones (concepts), a decision supported by my interpretation and by the linguistic meanings of these elements. They express man's cognitive and classificatory ability to make a logical process of categories and transform an " amorphous " mental state into an " organized " one. The *S.sym. doka* synthetizes this transformation and expresses in a perfected form what the *gigiwana* expresses at a

formative stage. It is not by accident that the *tokabitam* chose the *doka* as the *S.sym.* of artist, " creator " of images.

Moreover, the root *do* exactly " marks " the space it occupies in the *lagim* – the top.

The *gigiwana-i* and *doka* are therefore *S.syms.* of the mind. Then come three other *S.syms.* (*weku, karawa,* and *kwaisaru*). Two of them (*kwaisaru* and *weku*) lie on the orizontal axis, while the third lies at point *x*, the intersection of the axes *a* and *b* (Fig. C).

Considering the meaning of the *S.syms.* carved along these two axes, *karau* becomes the central pivotal element. Again there is the idea of the " sternum ", an axis supporting elements on the right and left. The visual position would seem to militate against the view that this is a non-basic sign. It lies in the middle of the *lagim*, with all the significance this implies. It has the function of dividing the structure, supporting the two protuding sections of the *lagim*, CX and BX, both metaphorically and structurally. Thus it crosses the horizontal axis *a-x-b* and is connected to the two supporting bands *karakaimalaka* (F, Fi, in Figs. B and C).

The sternum/moth figure provides the central pivot (at point *x*) of the *lagim* figure. It is from this point that the upper elements of the figure begin. The *karawa* functions as a central support for the upper bands, without being cramped by them. Indeed, they seem to be compressed towards the lower section.

As for the horizontal axis as a whole (*a-x-b*) the *doka* and *gigiwana* in the upper bands are almost blocked by the protruding figures CXi and BX.

Now, since the *doka* and the *gigiwana* represent the mental elements of the *lagim*, one viewpoint requires that they be moved to a position that is structurally more in accord with the rules of perception and naturalistic representation.

They will have to be transferred from their confined position to the top, thus taking on the basic/mental elements of a head. They will become the prominent features through this shift (Fig. D).

The *karau* " remains " at the centre of the *lagim*, and together with the two side hands, F and Fi, and the two protruding figures, CXi and BX, provides the fixed elements upon which the *lagim*-figure is supported. The two bands (*karakaimalaka*) start at the bottom of the *lagim*, extend up and across the whole structure, and join the lower part (legs/feet) to the middle and side parts (Fig. C). The bands support the *lagim's* framework/schema.

When Towitara spoke of his idea of " schema " (*M*), he probably intended to include these two red bands as well, since their position is a decisive factor in establishing the *lagim*'s schema. The fact that these bands connect all the features of the central body, and the relative order in which they are carved (both in time and surface/space) would support this thesis.

The overall structure/framework of the *lagim* is established by the intersection of the horizontal and vertical axes. At an abstract level, these are established by the elements *karau* and *karakaimalaka.*

Bands F and Fi begin and end in the protruding figures CXi and BX, and

this overall structure may be interpreted as a human skeleton. This hypothesis finds support in the fact that the *lagim* is both a face (*migira*) and a body (*wowola*). And bearing in mind the sense of the tripartite vertical division of the *lagim*'s abstract schema (*kaimatarabeba*, *vatakora*, *kailamilabeba*), it seems correct to consider the bands as establishing the visual division of a body into right arm, torso, and left arm. If one considers " butterfly " or " butterfly wings " the correct translation of the term *beba*, this would add further support to my interpretation, although data from *kula* myths must also be accounted for.

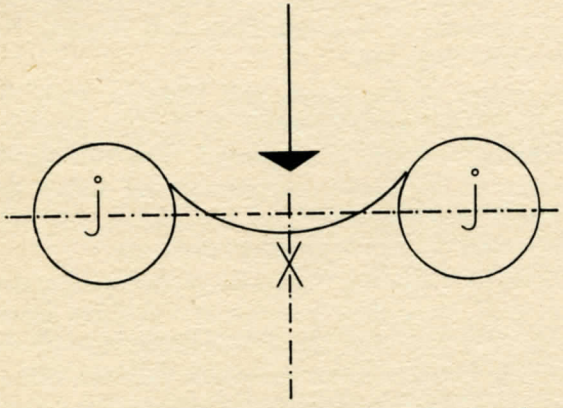
The central elements of this hypothetical body have been singled out, without any violation of the rules of figural representation.

So far, those elements which do not fit our idea of perceiving the human body (*i.e.* according to schemas), are the *S.syms. gigiwana, doka, kwaisaru*, and *weku*, all of them lying roughly along the horizontal axis *a-x-b*. Towitara's stylistic device of introducing the *kabilabala* band between *S.sym. susavila* and *gigiwana* suggests the logico-formal (and therefore stylistic) operation required to transfer these elements from the axis *a-x-b* to the top.

Towitara's innovation was clearly logical (as the term *kabilabala* shows); it indicates the separation that must be made between two or more elements in order to interpret them and establish their interrelationship.

A solution to this eminently aesthetic problem in representing a whole human body has been found, at least in so far as the head-body relation is concerned, by squashing the head (symbolized by *gigiwana* and *doka*) on to the body and squeezing it between the shoulders. Thus, several elements are spatially articulated in relation to one of the functions this representation must perform. For while the *lagim* is an aesthetic object of expression, it must also fend off the waves.

Indeed, if we look at the horizontal line *a-x-b*, the stylistic situation is the following:



j = shoulders

It is not difficult to make out the head squeezed between the shoulders at *x*.

One element, however, completely destroys this naturalistic reading. (And I refer not only to one of the many perceptive capacities based on a presumed

figural adherence to the structure of nature, but also to the way the Kitava people perceive). This is the *S.sym. dudua* lying immediately below the sign *karau.*

From a strictly logical point of view, *i.e.*, for establishing structure, the *dudua* is a subsidiary *S.sym.*, but it is also one of the *S.sms.* that make it possible for us to decipher the *lagim*'s meaning.

There is no doubt about the correct translation of this S.sym.: the *dudua* must be interpreted as the S.sym. *bulukalakala* used in the dances. I have already pointed out that it is one of the major elements in the interpretation of the *lagim*'s meanings, but it is the odd man out in the naturalistic representation.

If the *dudua* is a sign used for the dances (bearing in mind that it is also a sign of the phonatory apparatus) its naturalistic figural position would be in the upper band X; we can therefore move it up from axis Yi-Ai-Y to axis C-A-B (Figs. B and E).

A further element supporting this interpretation is the possible link between the *dudua* and the two spiral bands (one red and one black) around the *weku* and the *kwaisaru* (in squares CXi and BX, Figs. B and F). If these two *S.syms.* are considered a single figure, they give a fuller picture or the *bulukalakala* and can also be read as the structure of a face. In this way we obtain a key to the understanding of the whole *lagim* as the face of the mystic snake *monikiniki.*

There are also two basic elements that do not fit a naturalistic reading, *weku* and *kwaisaru* (Fig. B, squares CXi and BX). These two basic elements must also be transferred to their " natural perceptive " position. Visually and aesthetically those two signs solve the problem of balance, as I noted above, because they offset the visual imbalance between the outrigger and the canoe (Fig. L).

The solution is a valid one, in harmony with the eye's tendency to right any apparent imbalance. But for a synchronic iconological interpretation, these two *S.syms.* must be considered in terms of the multiplicity of meanings they carry.

The *weku* suggests " emptiness " (through the visual metaphor of two holes in te surface of the wood) and absence of sound or its opposite. Here again we note the ambiguous relationship between an element and its opposite. This is the " voice ", but it is a barely audible bird's voice. While the *S.sym.* stands for this mysterious bird's voice, it can be also interpreted not as a voice but as " voice " itself. The *weku*, therefore, is invisible to the eye and can only be " thought of ". It is represented as a hole and, in the iconological reconstruction of the *lagim*, the *weku* " figure " should be placed (rather " misplaced ") in the *dudua.* Another interpretation of the *weku* has been suggested by informants: the *weku*, like the *kwaisaru*, is the eye of the *lagim* figure (Fig. G). Given the haterogeneous nature of aesthetic objects, these various interpretations need not be mutually exclusive. Because there is no relationship between verbal meaning and the visual

reference of the *kwaisaru*, the harmony must be found at the visual-formal level of color.

The *kwaisaru* is painted black with two white dots at the center. For this reason it can be linked to the *pakeke*, one of the women's symbols used during the *lapula* dances. The *pakeke* resembles a black fish that is considered particularly beautiful. The *pakeke* is painted black around the right eye with a circle of white dots.

Since the term *kwaisaru* refers to burnt coconut husk, the connection with the symbol *pakeke* has to do with the use of coconuts in preparing the black dye for the *pakeke*.

If the *weku* is also interpreted as eye, a more correct reading will be " emptiness ", in the sense of " open ", *i.e.* the open eye. So we have a face with one eye open and the other encompassed by the *pakeke* symbol.

One feature remains to complete my interpretation of the *lagim*: the nose.

This feature is to be found in the *tabuya*, which is spatially extraneous to the facial structure. It is outside the *lagim* and provides a logical link between *lagim* and *tabuya*. Factors that support the interpretation of the *tabuya* as the nose of the *lagim* face include the following:

a) the *tokabitam* speaks of the *tabuya* as the nose of the *lagim* face (*tabuya makara kaburura lagim*), although the term *kaburura* also means any projecting object;

b) the *tabuya* can be observed from both sides (both surfaces are carved and painted, and the *S.syms.* carved on them are perfectly symmetrical), because the *tokabitam* has tried to suggest a " projection " into space;

c) considering the verbal meanings of *tabuya*, we find that the term can be divided into *tabu-* and *-ya*. The root *tabu-* refers to lineal-kinship descent, while the suffix *-ya* is a possessive pronoun and also means " place where a person is ". It would not be incorrect to consider the term *tabuya* a feature " belonging " to the face (although it also means the moon's face).

Structurally, the *tabuya* has to occupy the position shown in Figs. G and H. It is the only element outside tre structure of the *lagim* proper.

Now we have a complete face from a figural point of view, as well as a body, the elements of which now become clearer. They can summarized as follows.

1. The two side bands, *karakaimalaka*, representing the structure/framework of the *lagim* and ideally supporting a body. All the other *S.syms.* are arranged around the two side bands, *karakaimalaka*.

When Towitara said that *tokabitam* modify some *S.syms.* but not others (which leads us to the individuality and specificity of every single *lagim* with regard to the abstract schema), he probably considered these elements also in the sense that a body can be modelled around a fixed structure.

2. From an iconological point of view, the upper bands represent man's intellectual parts and activity as synthesized in the mind/head (*doka*, *gigi-wana*), plus the *dudua*, which represents the dance symbol.

3. Iconologically the middle part represents the torso with its internal organs.

4. The lower belly is iconologically represented by the *kaikikila.*

The full iconological interpretation of the *lagim* suggested here is illustrated in Fig. I. This is an attempt to reconstruct the visual meaning of the *lagim* and is partly based on the meaning of the terms of the *S.syms.* carved on it.

But this interpretation is based primarily on my initial hypothesis of the *lagim.* I consider it a non-verbal aesthetic object communicating an ensemble of reference models that are to be found in the mythology of the *kula*, as in the reference to the mythological hero *monikiniki*; in the body of rules that regulate initiation into the artist's profession; and in the visual formalization (in the *lagim* as *S.sym.*) of the logical mechanism that characterizes man's expressive capacities.

Moreover, this interpretation presupposes the application of deductive reasoning, which requires that a theory be formulated in order to develop a working hypothesis. I have also tried to emphasize the independent values of the visual categories, in the sense that the categories have individual meaning.

Finally, the *lagim* is a typical heterogeneous aesthetic object and therefore has a certain visual " ambiguity ".

If my interpretation of the *lagim* is correct, the figure has both male and female attributes (cf. the story of flying witches). If, for example, the interpretation of *kwaisaru* as an " eye " is correct and is related to the *pakeke* symbol, then we have a female symbol on a man's face. (In fact, the *lagim* is the face and body of the sun or of the snake *monikiniki*, the male attributes of which are stressed by the symbol *bulukalakala*). In the same way the *S.sym. weku* both as eye and voice (or silence) of a mysterious bird, creates visual ambiguity.

The figure proposed in Fig. I is a floating, winged object (*beba*). The fact that the upper part of the torso and the head are sunk between the shoulder blades reflects the *lagim*'s concrete function.

From a structural point of view, a feature like the head cannot be too disjunct from the compact body of the *lagim*, otherwise it might easily break off. The whole *lagim* may even be read as a head bowed over the chest of a body taking wing or jumping into the air [16].

[16] The structure of the *lagim* figure as I interpret it, calls to mind " ... the laws of motion of the human body in space: here they have the form of rotation, directionality, the intersection of space: cone, volute, spiral, disc. Result: a technical organism ", as well as " the expressive, metaphysical forms ... the sign ∞ for folded arms, the form of a cross for the spine and shoulders and, besides, bifrontism, polymorphism, subdivision, and suppression of forms. Result: dematerialization ". (Schlemmer, 1975: 15).

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SUMMARY

The present article attempts to explain the probable visual meaning of the prowboard of the *kula* canoes carved in Kitava Island.

The author's interpretation consists in an iconological analysis of the carved symbols in relation to their verbal meaning. The essential thesis is that the verbal and non-verbal meanings of a sign share the same logical structure.

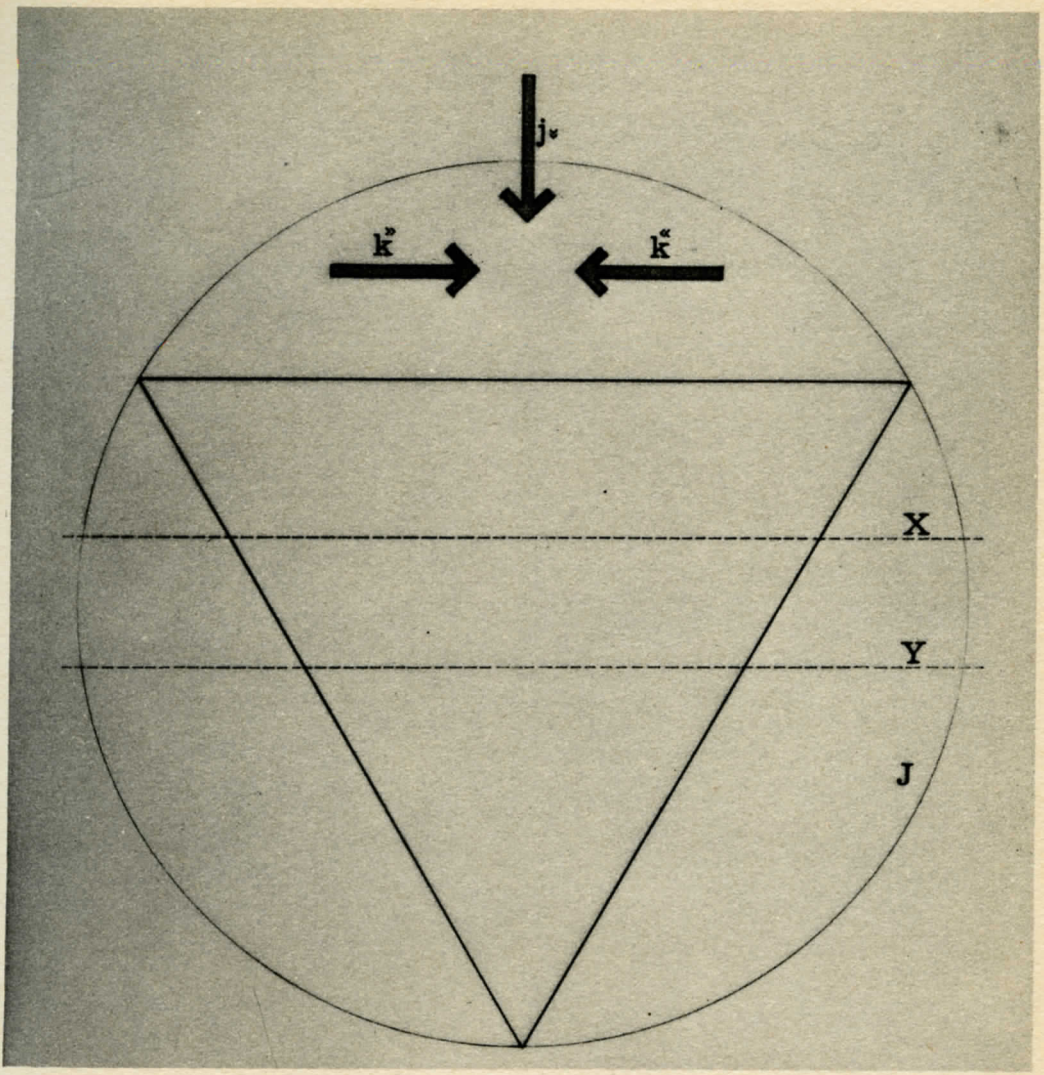

Fig. A. - The abstract form of the lagim. The letter X, Y, J denote the horizontal bands. The arrows mean the logico-technical direction of the carving: from top to bottom (*j*) and from outside to inside in (k).

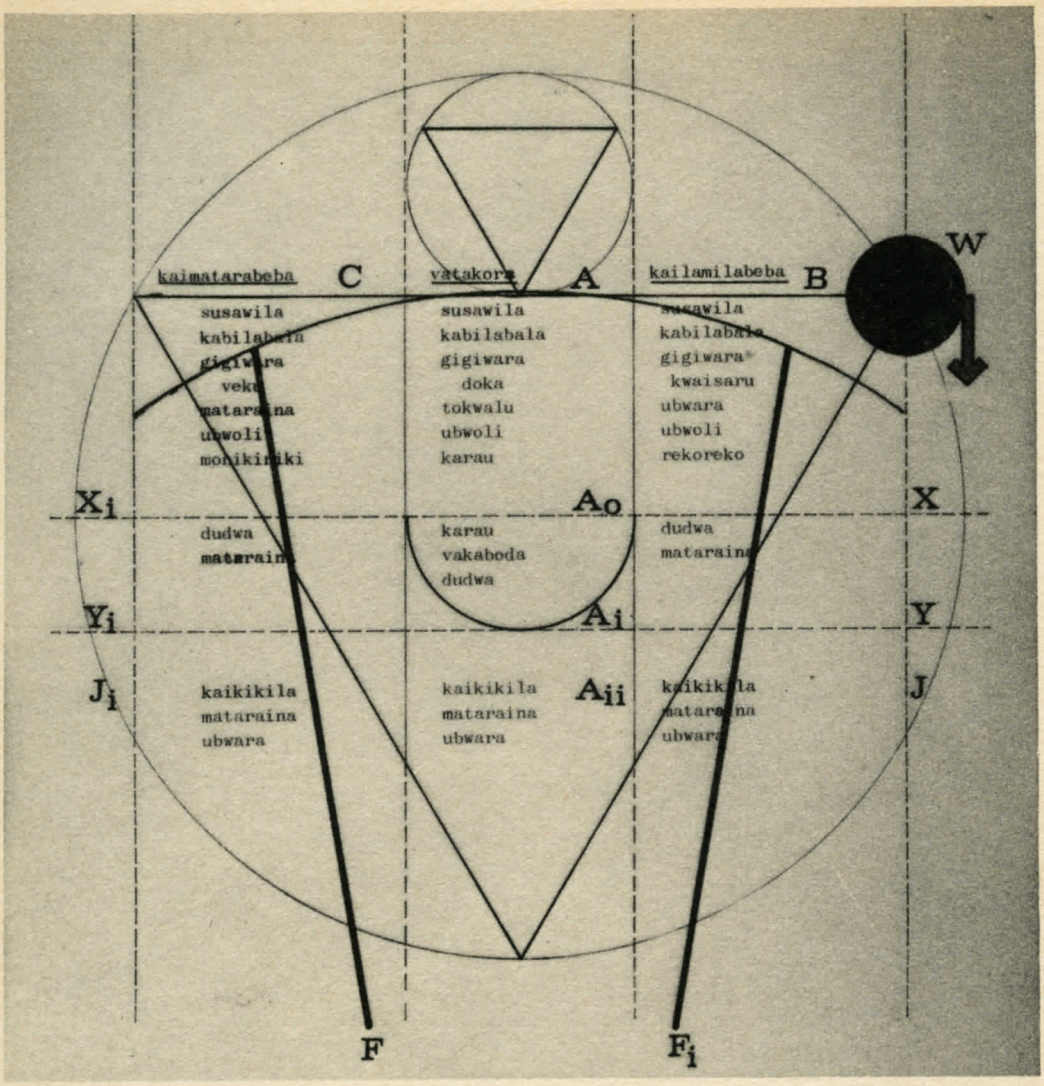

Fig. B. - The grid formed by the intersection of vertical and horizontal bands (A, B, C with X, Y, J) of the lagim surface with the relative position of the carved symbols. The kwaisaru and rekoreko symbols appear at W.

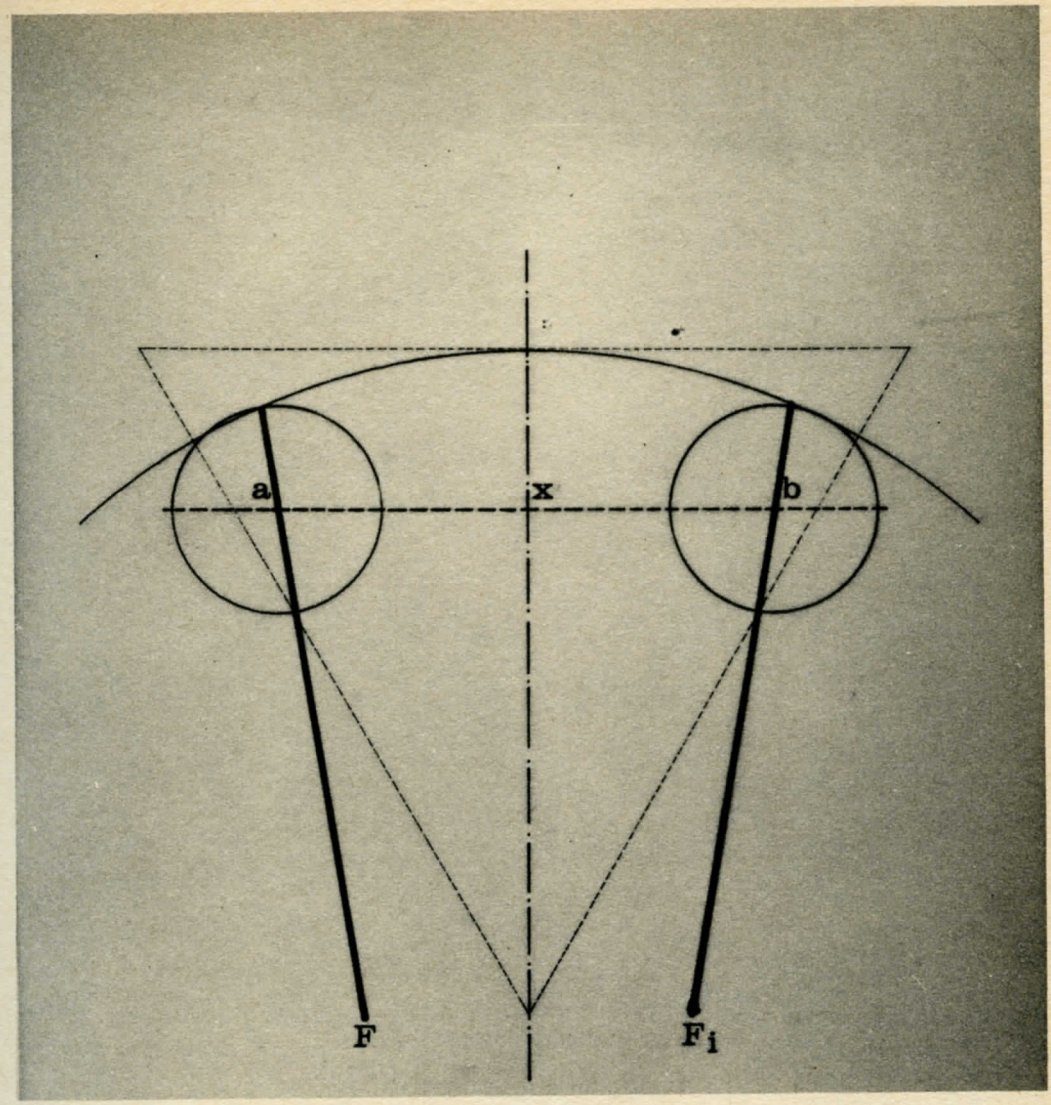

Fig. C. - The symbol karawa, the pivot of the lagim, lies at x, the midpoint of the axis a-b. It divides the lagim surface supporting the two protruding sections CX and BX (a and b in this figure). F and Fi are the two bands karakaimalaka, painted red.

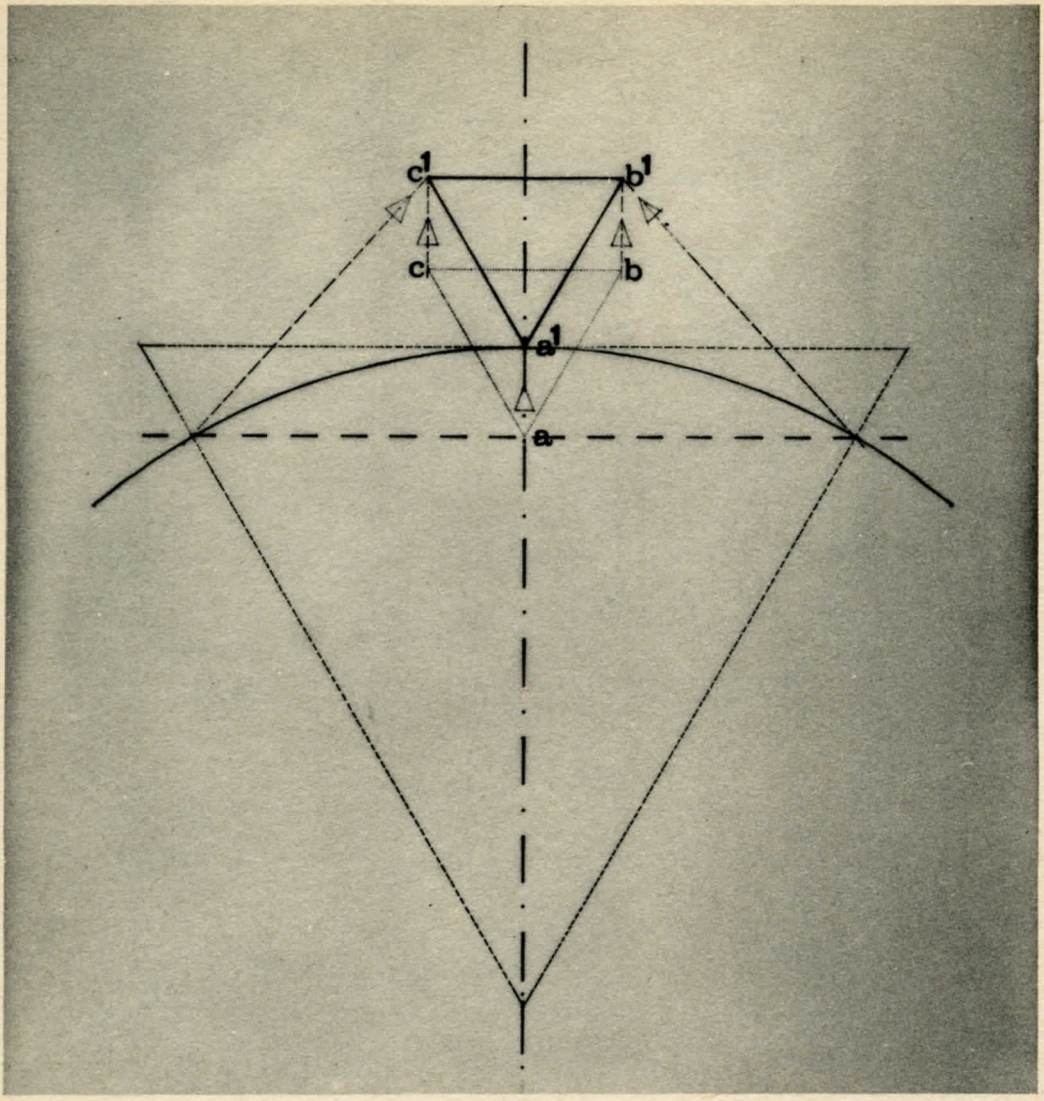

Fig. D. - The letters a^1, b^1, and c^1 indicate the upward shift of the symbols doka and gigiwana. The symbols would take on the basic mental elements of a head if they were moved up.

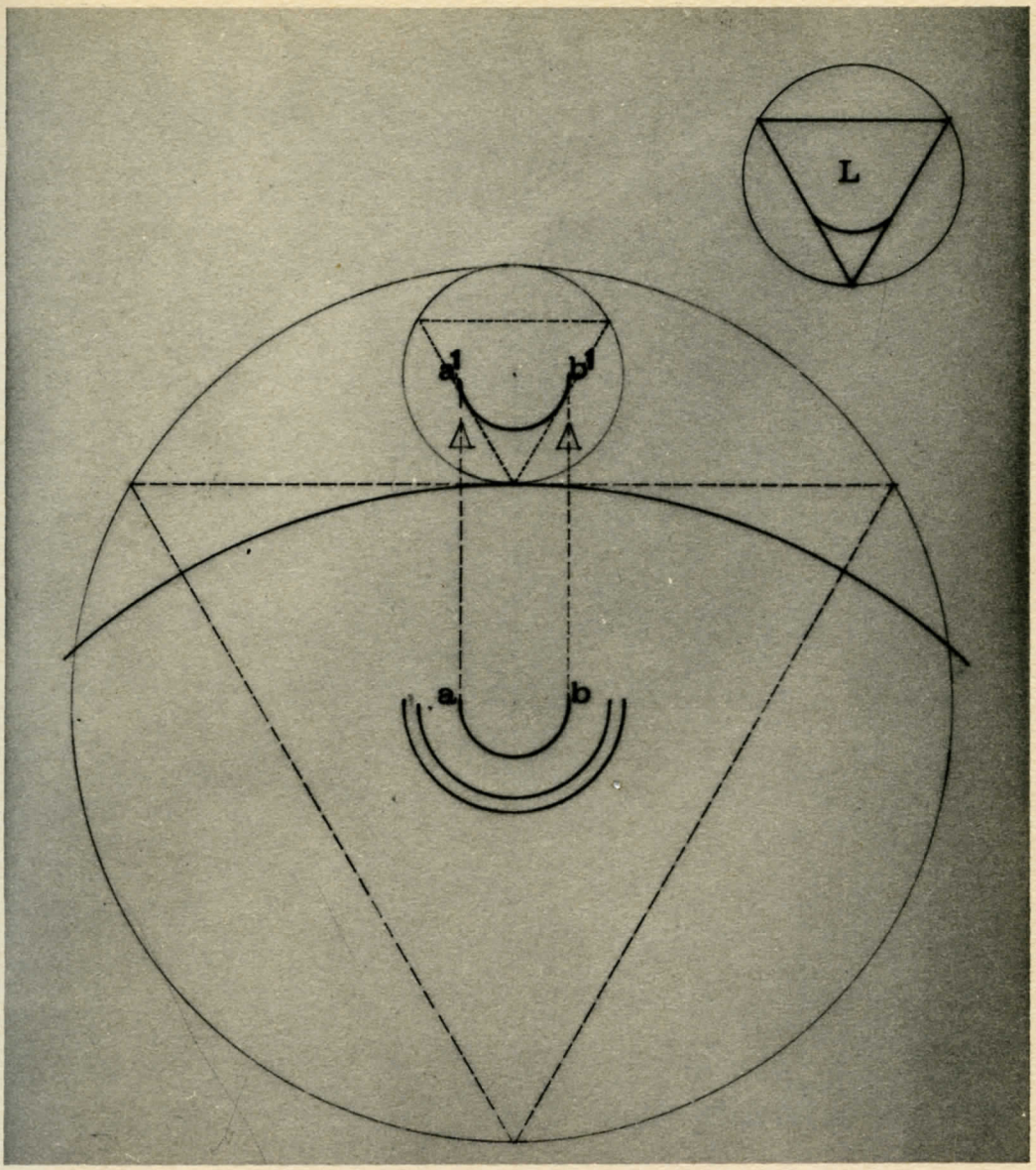

Fig. E. - The letters a' and b' show the shift of the dudwa from a and b.
L = the lagim face.

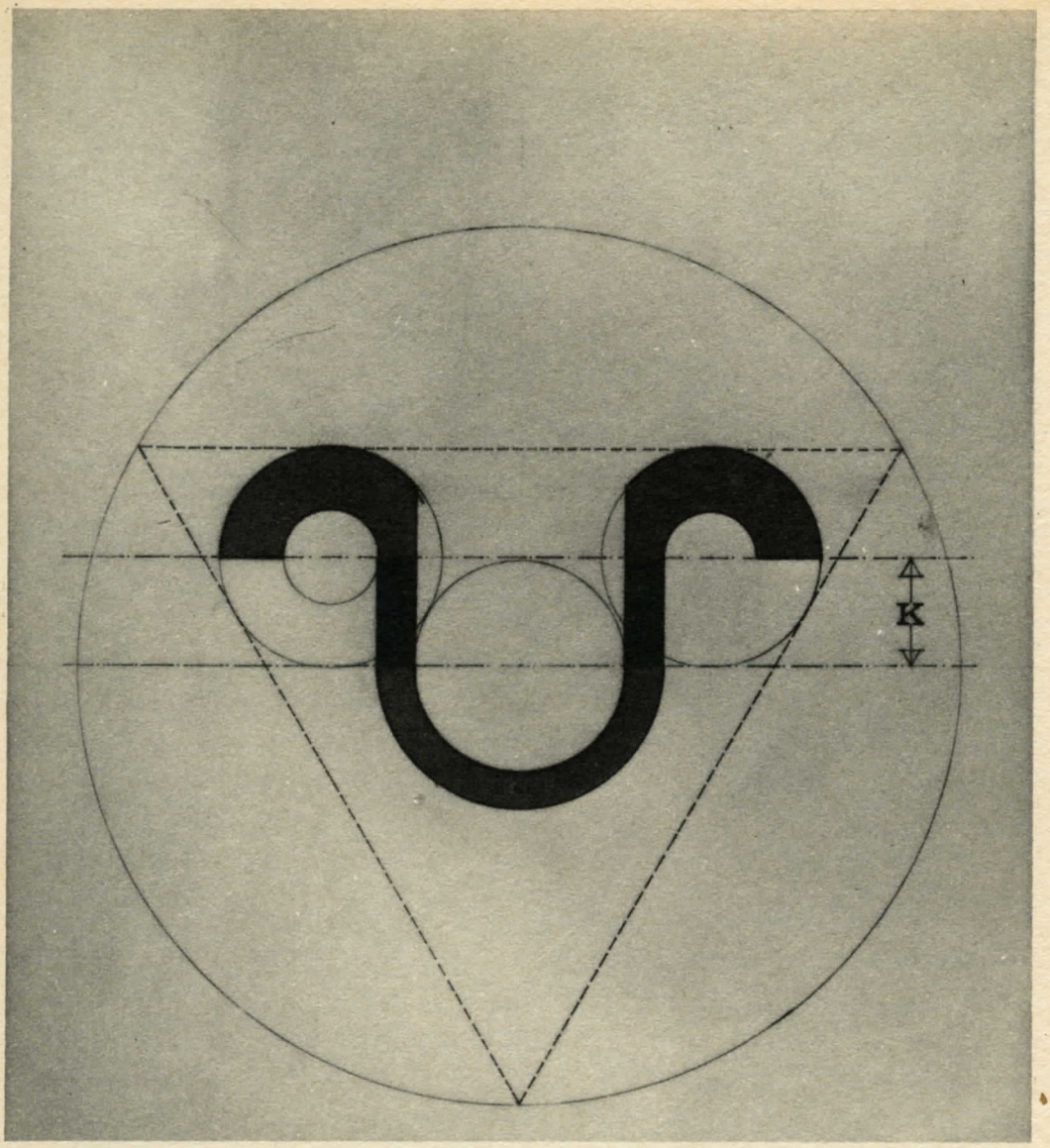

Fig. F. - A reconstruction of the bulukalakala dance symbol based upon the dudwa. The letter K refers to the connection between the dudwa and the two spiral bands surrounding the weku and the kwaisaru.

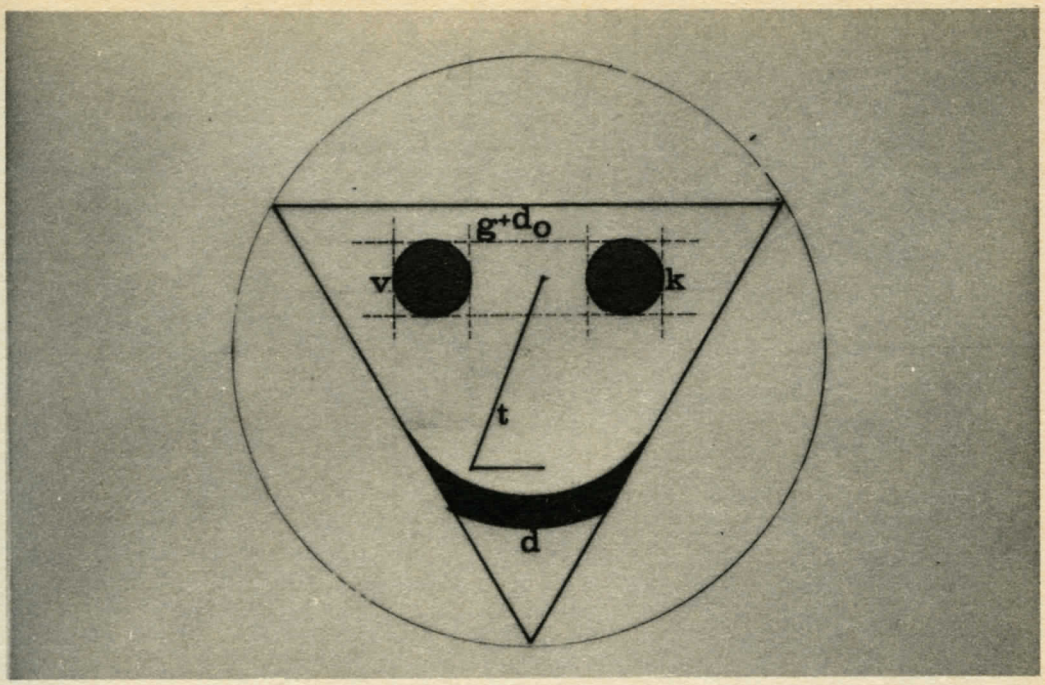

Fig. G. - The lagim face.
$g + d_o$ = mental elements gigiwana and doka.
w = weku; k = kwaisaru; t = tabuya; d = dudwa.

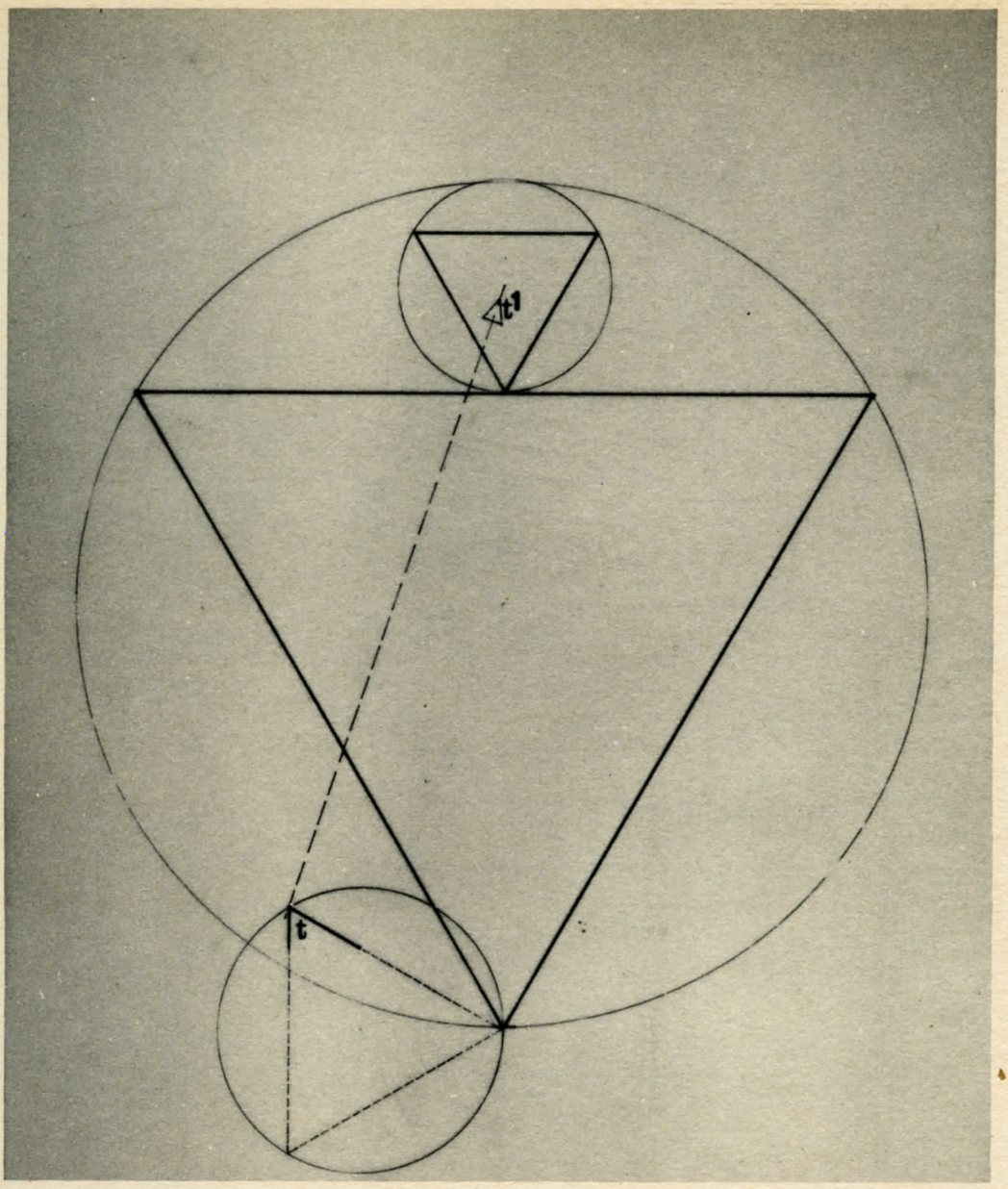

Fig. H. - The letter t' marks the shift of the tabuya from t.

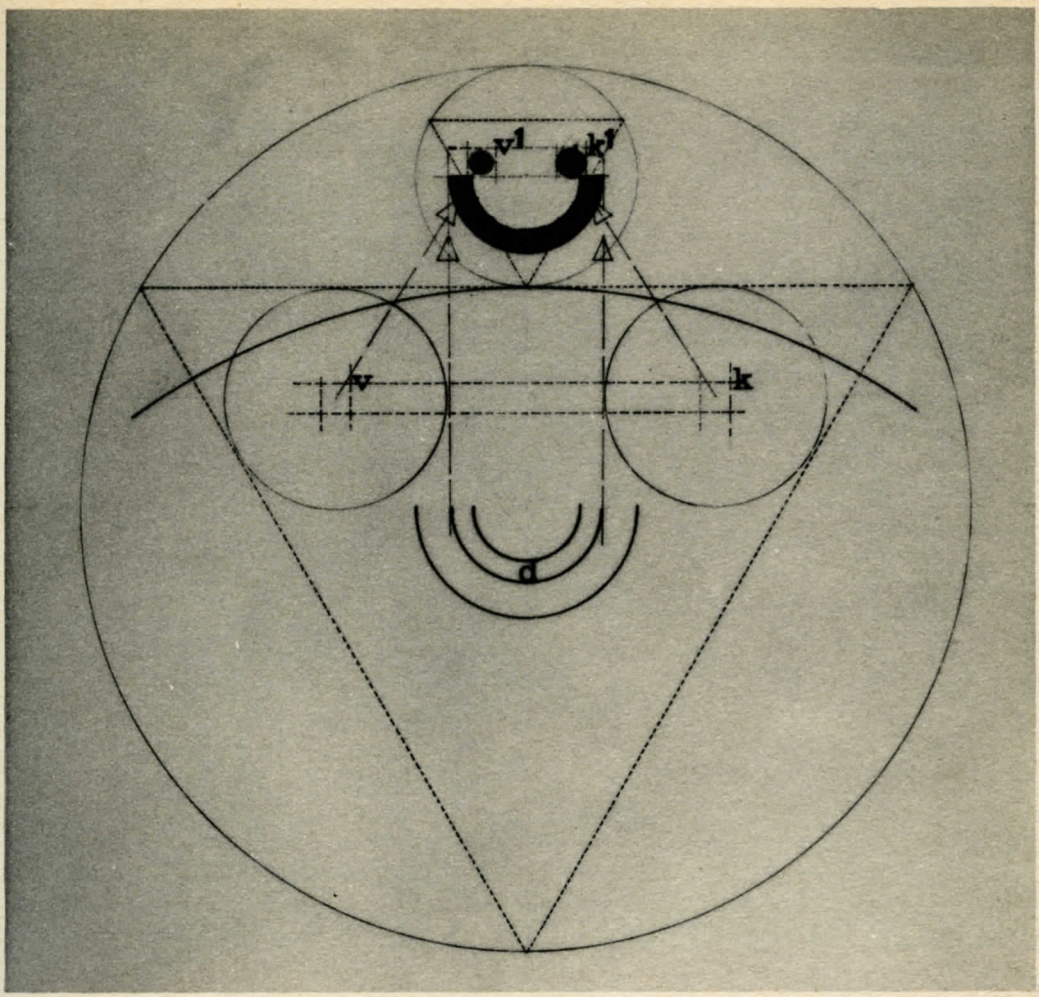

Fig. I. - Iconological reconstruction of the lagim's probable visual meaning. The letters v^1, k^1, and d^1 show the shift of the S.syms. weku, karawa, kwaisaru, and dudwa.

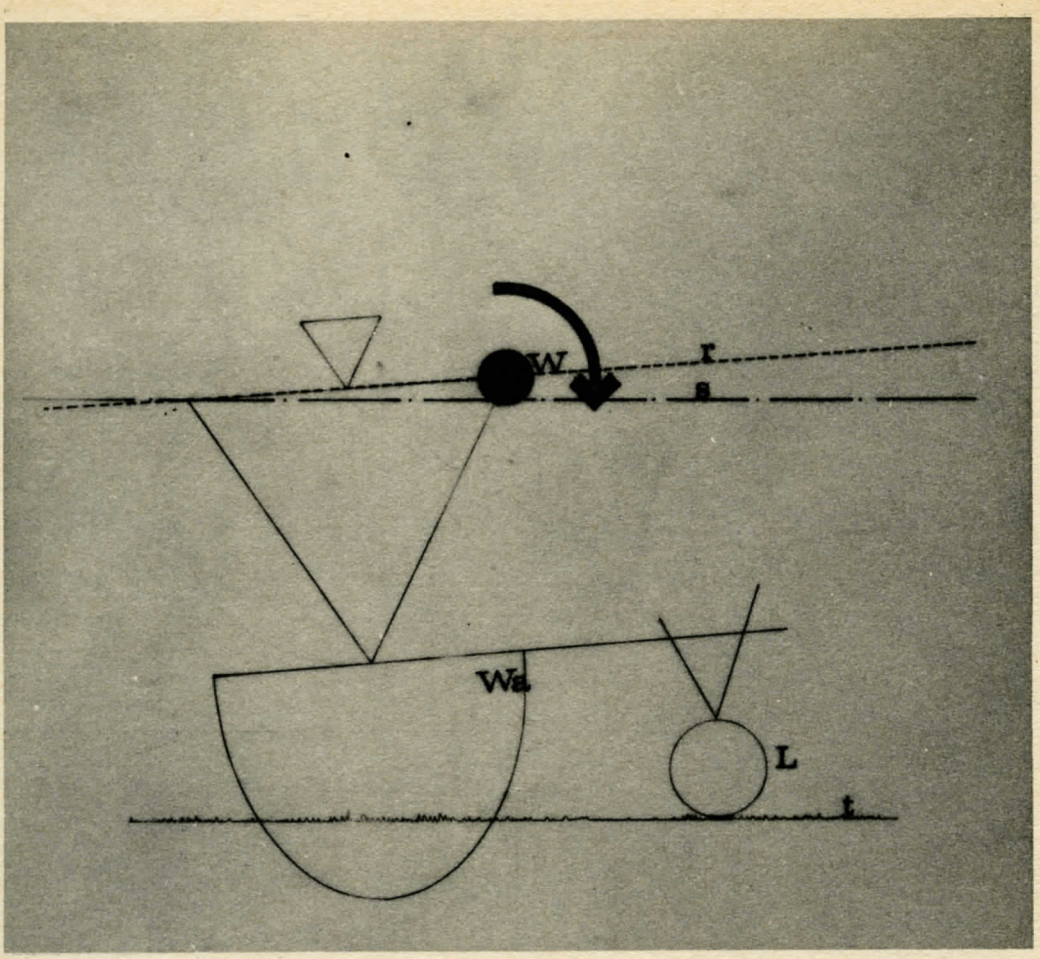

Fig. L. - Visual balance of the canoe (Wa) achieved through the placement of the symbols kwaisaru and rekoreko (W). The outrigger side of the canoe actually stands farther out of the water, but the positioning of kwaisaru and rekoreko adds visual weight to that side. Thus the whole canoe is perceived in balance (s), despite the actual imbalance (r). L = outrigger; t = waterline.