

description of *Topileta*, as depicted on the war shields, his presence is denied and invisible in the home; yet, he is a danger to life on the field of battle. The "holes" or "houses," *bwala*, of emergence of the first couples who founded the local lineages, *dala* – "a sister as the head of the family and the brother as her guardian" – are often marked by grottoes, springs, and heads of creeks (Malinowski 1926: 36).

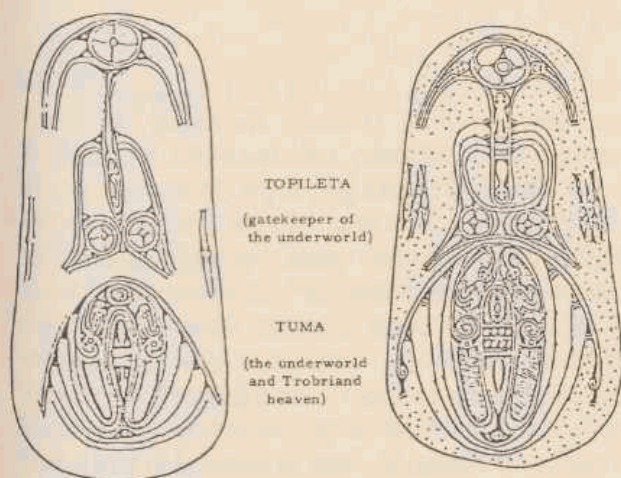


Fig. 9: A further interpretation of designs on the Trobriand shields: the Trobriand code.

The Trobrianders had no kinship term to express the physical relationship between a father and his child; there was no term to express agnation or consanguinity (Malinowski 1916b: 407–410). There is only the generic term for kinship, *veiola* or *veyola*, and this means kinship in the maternal line. But there is considerable ambiguity in this term: in fact, patrilineal as well as matrilineal kin may be *veyola*, for the term denotes kin of origin (Weiner 1976: 53–55). This may be seen as a pointer to explain the terms used for the decorated shields where origins are depicted: *vai ova* (Haddon 1894), *vaiaúlo/vayoulo/va'yaúlo*¹¹ (Malinowski

1915, 1918, 1919), *vayoula/vayola* (Baldwin 1936–67). These terms may be seen as a pun on *veiola/veyola*, the generic term for kinship. For the ovoid shield makes the inexpressible kinship relationship – fatherhood – and the joint fertility explicit. Interestingly, Malinowski relates in his field notes that: "the child is often addressed by the father as 'my egg'" (1915: 1167). And the largest male egg in Trobriand society – the war shield – expresses the relationship graphically. On one level, fatherhood is banished to the supernatural realm and is locked into the process of reincarnation in the spirit world of *Tuma*. *Topileta* is both God, the Ancestor Spirit, the master of the spirit world; but he is also – for those who can recognize him – a part of every man and woman. He is the spirit who sent forth everything there is in the upper world, the Trobrianders: people, animals, food, magic, and so on, but he stayed behind to determine who is to enter and leave *Tuma* – who is to be and not to be (Seligman 1910: 679, 733). He is the ruler of the underworld, the chthonic god or spirit. *Topileta* is symbolized in the upper half of the war shield design and *Tuma*, a cowrie shell, is depicted in the lower (Fig. 9).

If the symbolism of the war shield design is to be taken seriously, and here, as in all matters of symbolism, we have no alternative, then the design suggests a quantum leap for our understanding of the traditional society. *Tuma*, the world below, is said to be a mirror of the world above, *Boyowa* (Malinowski 1926: 36). On the shield design *Tuma* is drawn to equal *Topileta* in length (Fig. 9). If a cowrie represents an island, *Tuma*, then the other reproductive organs depicted on the shield design may also symbolize islands (*Boyowa* or *Kiriwina*). There are, in fact, symbolic transformations of *Topileta* and *Tuma* on the main Island, *Boyowa*, which support geographical sexual polarities which appear to have orientated the traditional social order (Glass n.d. a and b). While it is beyond the brief of this article to go into these transformations, they must be noted before discussing the symbolic parallels between the shield design and those of the principal rite of the Islanders, the *milamala*.

But, first, to return to the war shield

¹¹ While Malinowski never refers to the decorated shield by any native term in his published writings, elsewhere he refers to them as *vaiaúlo* (1915: 912), *vayoulo* (June 1918), and *va'yaúlo* (December 1919). For the last reference see note to Figure 6.