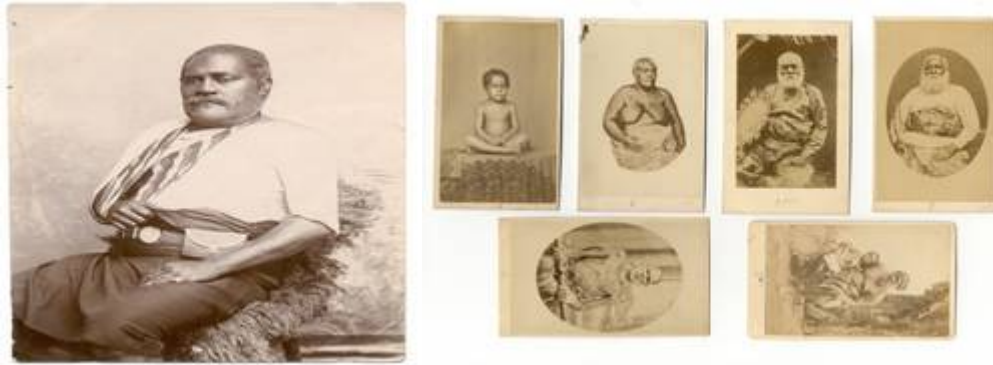


Fiji Photos

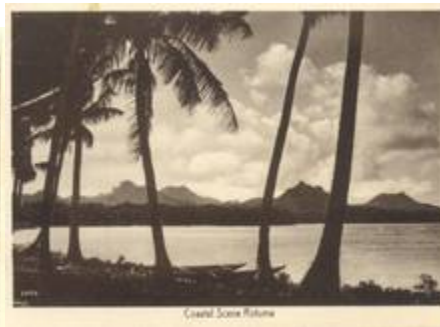


Topography

8% of the total photo collection show picturesque scenes of Fiji and Rotuma.



Kadavu



Rotuma

They would have given the European viewers a picturesque glimpse of the land and ocean.

Analysis and Observations

Accountability is probably a reason why photographs were taken in those days, plus they were an effective medium to teach others of the life, people and their mission work. These photos were taken almost five decades after the first arrival so the missionaries had had time to introduce many things and change the attitude and culture of the local people, hence that is why the group pictures show that the students, catechists and families are all well groomed, wearing a standard dress code and they look as though they have a great deal of respect for the priest or sisters that they are photographed with. One must remember that most of the missionaries came from middle or lower class backgrounds yet they were accorded a great deal of respect by the locals, including the chiefs. Apart from a few labelled photos, it would be difficult for a European person to identify a person of chiefly rank in a group photo. A few Fijian people today will be able to recognise these chiefly or warrior characteristics by way the size of the pig tooth worn around the neck, the breast plates or the way the *masi* or mat is wrapped around a person. Interestingly enough we see that as the photos unfold, the preferred colour or standard uniform for the mission students and catechists is white.



Change in clothes over the years from the simple sulu to a proper standard white uniform

By the 1930s a good number of large stone or coral churches were built by the locals under the guidance of the priest or brother. The pictures show some similar features in the interior wall designs and the building structure. Only one photo in the Missionary (religious) category shows the SMSM sisters working in their garden in Makogai; other pictures show the religious in a supervisory or leadership role.

The photographs also helped the missionaries returning to Europe for their holidays or Marists on tour when presenting a talk to share on their mission in Oceania. These photos helped to enlighten the minds of their audience and even fuel their imagination as many had only but dreamed of working or living in the tropics. Fr Greiler mentioned that the people in Europe like the families, parishes, confreres and fundraising organisations were curious to know more about the work in Oceania and that photos were sent to “help raise consciousness and funds”; donors could see the faces, landscape and lifestyle and the way that their money was used to help in the mission. The photos helped to give a human face to the work of the mission; they helped to create a sense of solidarity and encouraged more fundraising drives. Fr Greiler added that soon enough there was a shift in motivation, from curiosity to camaraderie, so the monetary assistance would have helped the mission in strengthening the universal church.

Many of these pictures were never seen by its subjects; it is quite evident that the labelled pictures in this collection were identified years later or perhaps many of them were not labelled with great detail because they were postcard pictures taken by other people.¹⁵ Some of the pictures were incorrectly labelled, while other labels were vague or generalised. The Europeans may have been fascinated, curious to see what the “other” looked like and how they lived but when assessing these pictures today, our main question is determining who is in the picture and where was it taken. I think the Fijians and Rotuman people today would now be curious about the identity and location of these photos. This is because there are many interesting features in the photos, of the people, their dress, hairstyles, their homes and ceremonies. And people are curious to see if any of their ancestors are identified in these old photos. There is not enough information to determine who or what is in the picture or when it was taken. Hence it would have been easy to assume that all the people in Fiji were the same in terms of physical qualities and dress, customs, houses, dances, handicraft and more.

The unique hairstyles that were captured in some of these photos are another story. One can see that change in time, history and chapter via the hairdo of the people, especially the men. In the older photos we see how the men wear their big Fijian hairstyle, the Fijian *buiniga*, while some wore longer tresses or locks. But after the pre-contact period and the arrival of the missionaries, we can see the shortened hairstyles, starting with the chiefs and then later in the schools or with catechists. By the time most of these photos were taken, a lot of the men had shorter hair.

¹⁵ The photo in the Missionaries – Fiji – Religious # Fiji4,8,56 show Fiji’s first Indo-Fijian priest and sister who are siblings while photo # Fiji-VII-facing p. 28a shows Fiji’s first Fijian priest, Fr Tito Daurewa with Fr Lahaye in Cawaci.

Fiji Photos



Unidentified men wearing masi and unique hairstyles



with the common traditional hairstyle



Chiefs seated with shorter hair



catechists

The women, like the men, took great pride in their hair and they could spend days, weeks preparing and pampering their hair so that it would be outstanding. Today, a lot of young Fijians are oblivious to the fact that their ancestors used natural locally available products such as the *makita* and *sikeci* seeds mixed with coloured soil to straighten or fashion their hair. There were other seeds used as hair dye. Young people today may think that hair straightening and dye are imported practises but the old people had their own unique version and ways to create and maintain their hairstyle. Again, over time we see that the women all had a standard hairstyle like their dress.



Young girls hairstyles



Two ladies in the middle with white hair



Young girls and ladies with groomed, shorter hair.

The photos above show the influence of western fashion for we see the young ladies on the left above wearing cotton, western styled tops and traditional woven or grass like skirts. The bottom left picture in the previous page shows one of the chiefs (third from the right) wearing a pair of long trousers and boots; he is sitting with his legs crossed to show this off. Another chief is wearing a matching checked shirt and *sulu*. There was interest in the way that the people in these old photos dress, how they wore the masi and the way they draped it over their heads as in the picture from the Yasawas.¹⁶

Cultural practises are displayed in this collection. To see the giant heap of dalo and yam and the number of giant turtles or the rich supply of fish for a presentation depicts the abundance in resources here in Fiji and Rotuma in the early days. There is a lot of controversy today about the killing of turtles but the photo shows that turtles were an important part of the traditional presentations and feasts. What is most captivating is the photo record of an old traditional Rotuma ceremony, the *koua puha*,¹⁷ mentioned in the ethnographic section. Most of the young Rotumans that I had shown these pictures to were deeply fascinated because some had heard of the ceremony but had never witnessed it till they saw these pictures. Others were not aware of this ritual.



Dalo, yams and turtles



abundant fish supply

¹⁶ Today, we can see the use of masi wrapped around the head in a few provinces during an important ceremony such as the death or installation of a chief.

¹⁷ This is labeled as “C er monie du kuah” in the collection.

Fiji Photos



The Koua puha ceremony in Rotuma.

The few photos of other races such as the Indo-Fijians, Micronesians and Solomon Islanders are generally labelled as they were part of a postcard collection.¹⁸ So it is hard to determine which part of the Solomon Islands did they originate from or where in Fiji were the photos taken.



Indian girls



St Augustin warriors



Solomon Islanders & Fijians

Finally, the photos of the missionaries allow us to see what their experiences were like and the community that they worked with. Despite the difference in temperature and climate from their places of origin, these religious people still wore the standard customary habits of their different religious groups. Many of the photos do not label the priests and nuns and their students so there are a lot of unanswered questions. Elizabeth Mario mentions that some of the pictures of the Rotuman students pictured with the sisters show them with serious faces; it could have been to do with the length of time it took to take a photograph. She remembers stories of how young children were sent to the mission school in Sumi to be educated and be trained by the strict sisters.¹⁹ Local Cluny sister, Sr. Lusi, said that the pictures of the religious people in past were interesting because they showed what could have been the challenges that they had faced in terms of resources, isolation and cultural integration but that they also gave her hope in her work as a missionary to do her best to help other people.²⁰ She was disappointed that most of the catechist photos were not labelled for she wanted to see if her grandfather was in one of them.

¹⁸ Many Solomon Islanders came to Fiji to work as plantation labourers. Their ancestors have remained and have established their settlements and communities around Fiji. The Indians arrived in 1881-1920 to work as indentured labourers.

¹⁹ Interview. Elizabeth Mario, teacher. Suva. Friday 28th May 2010.

²⁰ Interview. Sr Lusi sjc. Suva. Tuesday 25th May 2010.

Conclusion

This collection gives us a glimpse into Fiji's past through the eyes of the missionaries and early European settlers but at the same time it raises a lot of questions. The reasons why these photos were taken, collected and sent to Europe by the early missionaries are varied. They would have sent them to their families, societies, parishes and schools to show them what life and their mission was like in these distant lands. By the time these photos were taken, some of those in Europe had never seen dark skinned people, palm and breadfruit trees, tropical island scenery or the ocean. For some, the photos may be part of their report or by way of accountability for their work and mission. The photos of the large churches and bells, marble statues and altars, clock towers, stained glasses and the mission schools were their proof of the growth of the universal church in Oceania. Hence, these photos were used to generate financial support in order to continue the work of the mission. They allowed the people in Europe to put a face to the people and to know and see how their contribution to the funds has created an impact on the lives of the religious and the indigenous people that they work and live with. The missionaries were obviously proud of their achievements. Evidently, these photos have been stored in personal collections and republished in other articles and books.

For a modern day viewer of this collection, there are many unanswered questions that come to mind; for while the photos show us many different aspects of the culture, people, the environment and life changing experiences due to the arrival of the missionaries and early settlers, there are a lot of silences in these pictures, a lot of untold, unrecorded stories. These photographs were taken just over half a century after the arrival of the first missionaries in Fiji but their influence is quite evident in these photos. One wonders just what the first missionaries had witnessed of the land, people and their Fijian culture then. These photos express the intention of white people to show their importance. At the same time, they preserve for us images of a culture of which we otherwise would not have today.²¹

Nevertheless, this collection takes one into a journey of history despite the not-too detailed captions and it encourages people to try and find more details about these people and their stories.

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²¹ This is the thesis of Claire Laux: missionaries did not only destroy much of pre-Christian cultures, they also were often the only ones to keep a record of these cultures: texts, objects, and here photos; Claire Laux, *Les missionnaires et la mémoire des civilisations polynésiennes*, in *Revue d'Histoire de l'Église de France* 89 (2003) 69 – 80.