

## A PREHISTORY OF THE MANGAIAN CHIEFDOM

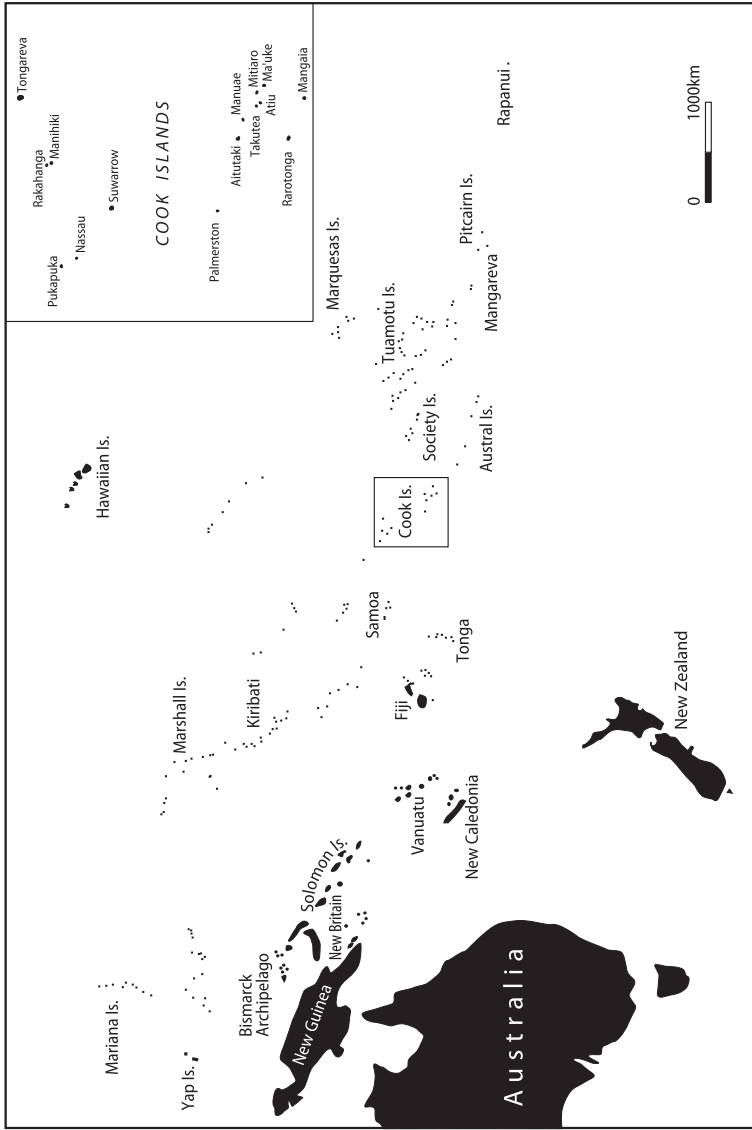
RICHARD WALTER and MICHAEL REILLY

*University of Otago*

Polynesian societies share many common features of socio-political and economic organisation. At the time of European contact the several cultures of the southern Cook Islands were Polynesian chiefdoms, sharing much in common with each other and with the nearby societies of central East Polynesia (Fig. 1). This article examines the development of one of these societies, the chiefdom of Mangaia, drawing on the evidence of archaeology and indigenous historical writings. These two endeavours are both intent upon revealing and understanding the history of social change but they draw on different sources of data, and have very different ways of thinking about the past. Archaeology operates at a broad scale and low resolution. Social complexity and changes therein must be inferred by studies of such things as mortuary practice or settlement patterns (Tainter and Cordy 1977). Archaeological explanations of change are generally framed in processual terms with an emphasis on evolutionary processes. In Polynesia these frequently revolve around human-environmental interactions: the intensification of production and exchange systems, and demographic growth. In contrast, for eastern Polynesian islands like Mangaia, indigenous explanations of the past are typically organised around detailed genealogical sequences, with corresponding narratives and poetry, referring to particular ancestors in a kinship group. The focus is personal, even subjective, being oriented around the ancestors of the indigenous narrator who relates their achievements or failings as part of a kinship network that spans generations. *Mana* is the organising principle in Mangaian history: cataloguing how the actions of an ancestor enhanced the *mana* of the group, or in the case of defeats or deaths, remembering their opponents so that compensatory acts were undertaken to restore the group's *mana*.

A landmark study in the use of archaeology and history in Mangaian scholarship was a multi-disciplinary investigation of the *longue durée* of production and polity led by the archaeologist Patrick Kirch (Ellison 1994, Hather and Kirch 1991, Kirch and Ellison 1994, Kirch, Flenley and Steadman 1991, Kirch *et al.* 1992, Kirch *et al.* 1995, Steadman and Kirch 1990). Kirch's 1994 study of the development of the Mangaian chiefdom took as its starting point, a model of Mangaian society at the end of prehistory derived from the writings of Te Rangi Hiroa (1934) and the missionary W.W. Gill (1876, 1884 [1894]). Kirch saw in these rich and detailed accounts a description of

Figure 1. Map of the Pacific showing the location of the Cook Islands.



a society facing ecological crisis, an island where high population densities coupled with environmental degradation had led to a situation where life was dominated by warfare and rivalry for the irrigated field systems. Mंगाians, he wrote, "...had their backs up against an ecological wall marked by scarcity of resources and intense competition" (Kirch 1997: 165). Kirch contended that warfare, ecological stress and competition had transformed Mंगाian ideological and social structures and led to the emergence of the political system described by the early ethnographers. He sought evidence for these trajectories of ecological collapse, stress and demographic growth in the archaeological and palaeoenvironmental record.

We share Kirch's view that a combination of local history and archaeology greatly enriches our understanding of Mंगाia's past. But where Kirch's approach has been to read the local historical record through the frame of a processual archaeology paradigm, in this article we argue that archaeology and history are distinct discourses that should be read side by side, not collapsed into the same discipline. We also develop an argument that indigenous history's main contribution is in providing us with the "personal signatures" of chiefly lives in relation to their control and use of power (Denning 1980: 93). Further, we suggest that a more nuanced reading of the Mंगाian oral histories portrays a society that, far from facing an ecological or social crisis, was remarkably stable in the centuries before the arrival of the Christian mission. In commenting on how this different reading of the island's history affects an interpretation of the archaeological record we note the importance of understanding how different these two historical disciplines are in their treatment of the past. While the pictures these two disciplines paint of Mंगाian society may be complementary, the relationship between them is not a simple correlation requiring cross-checking (see Wylie 1989). Each discipline presents a distinctive discourse about the past. When read together these discourses provide a more nuanced, multi-layered representation of Mंगाia's political history than either does on its own.

We proceed as follows. First, we discuss Polynesian chiefdoms, and the principles of their social organisation. We identify five principal means that Polynesian chiefs used in their pursuit and exercise of power and which inform our discussions of the archaeology and history. Second, we review the archaeology and show that it is possible to identify the genesis of the late period chiefdom in a series of changes that appear in the archaeological record from the early 16th century AD. But we also argue that the record is not fine grained enough in its resolution to pick up more than the broad sweep of change. Third, we then look at the ancestor-focused, *mana*-oriented indigenous history of Mंगाia, which documents the ways in which Mंगाian

chiefs operated in their pursuit of *mana* and power. Finally and in conclusion, we compare the broad, processual cast of archaeology with the detailed historicism of Mangaian history.

#### POLYNESIAN CHIEFDOMS

As political systems Polynesian chiefdoms are characterised by social complexity, hierarchy and differentiation of rank. There is great diversity in the expression of these features but numerous reviews have pointed to the underlying conformity in basic political and ideological structures (Goldman 1970, Goodenough 1955, Kirch 1984, Kirch and Green 2001, Sahlins 1958). There is sometimes a tension in Polynesian societies between the ideological basis of social organisation on the one hand and the opposing force of individual choice and action on the other. This tension underlies all aspects of social organisation: group membership and residence patterns, the operation of rank and status systems, the acquisition and use of chiefly power.

The primary unit of social formation in Polynesia is the descent group, which Firth (1951) classically defined as a kinship based social unit whose members share descent from a common ancestor. In practice cognatic principles allow individuals to affiliate with a number of different descent groups and to privilege selected genealogical connections or ancestral lines in different contexts. But such claims must always be supplemented with appropriate social action (Howard and Kirkpatrick 1989: 59) and one of the most important of these acts is residence. For members with weak kinship based claims, descent group membership will lapse quickly with absence. Indeed genealogically based claims must always be validated by social action.

The Polynesian descent group is sometimes referred to as a “conical clan”, a term which recognises that membership is ranked along genealogical lines (Kirchhoff 1955, Peebles and Kus 1977: 422). Conical clans are inclined to segment and come to exhibit ramified or branching structures with a senior male as the head of each branch and with the chief of the original senior branch, or his descendant, as the head of the conical clan (Kirch 1984: 31). The branching structure of the conical clan also had territorial implications as each descent group would occupy lands within the larger landholding unit of the tribe. As Goldman (1970: 545) observed, “... territorial organization [in Polynesia] is the political expression of the segmentary organization in its more developed form”.

Genealogically based rules of social evaluation primarily derived from recognition of lineage seniority give rise to, and structure, principles of rank and hierarchy. But the operation of these systems is flexible enough to allow individuals with exceptional qualities to acquire status and rank independent of genealogy. Thus status could be gained through paths of

ascription or achievement; the former involved inheritance and the latter the exercise of prowess in temporal affairs (Goldman 1970). Usually both processes were involved, so that while power and authority was monopolised by an aristocracy, in many societies those elites were effectively self-created (Douglas 1979: 23). In some societies, such as Tonga, Hawai‘i and the Society Islands, a high degree of stratification and rules of endogamy resulted in the emergence of a class division where the elite were genealogically distanced from the rest of society. In those societies, there was less potential to achieve rank outside narrowly defined genealogical parameters since the elite enjoyed divine status by virtue of their descent from the gods. But sacred and secular authority was often separated, leaving room for astute political players of sufficient pedigree to achieve authority and power by virtue of their achievements (Douglas 1979: 21).

The tendency to link genealogical rank with sacredness has resulted in what Marcus (1989: 176) described as two recurring images of chiefs in the anthropological treatment of Polynesia: chiefs as sacred beings and chiefs as exemplary beings. In the former, chieftomship attaches to a special quality, a sanctity that renders the bearer a separate being with a mystified status. This situation is embodied in Marshall Sahlins' (1981) concept of the stranger-king. Here the source of power—the founder of the ruling lineage—originates outside society and descendant chiefs are, as a result, partly distanced from the masses and so become powerful aliens in their own society. In the second image the chief is "...an exemplary being, respected and admired by his people for embodying the ideals of personhood that they all share and approximate in varying degrees" (Marcus 1989: 176). These are not different approaches to chieftomship distributed through the Polynesian world. Rather they are simultaneous sides to chieftomship which everywhere combines both kingly and populist characteristics. So chieftomship evoked both the discontinuity of the stranger-king who was alienated from common humanity and the continuity of routine leadership involving evaluations of appropriate behaviour in daily life (Marcus 1989: 189). Again, the stress is on negotiating an efficacious middle ground between alien or sacred power and the ability to exercise quotidian leadership.

In this negotiation a further factor comes into play and that is the role of the people in social and political decision making. While the focus is sometimes on the ability of a potential leader to claim his or her inheritance rights or to demonstrate prowess in ways that otherwise result in the acquisition of power, these processes were always contingent to some degree upon popular support. Chiefs are fundamentally collective creations in that the people participate decisively in the successful outcome of all their actions and managed performances. In Tikopia the clan chief-priest, who was the

most senior person in his lineage, was elevated to office by an act of popular will. Despite his right to power through “agnatic primogeniture”, he was in effect an elected leader with responsibilities to the people (Douglas 1979: 21, Firth 1970: 40). A similar situation in Rotuma leads to a tension between the claims of the people to empower the chief, and the alien and divinely conceived source of chiefly power (Howard and Kirkpatrick 1989: 59). In Aotearoa, *rangatiratanga* ‘chiefly leadership’ was bestowed by the people. Here a *rangatira* had to possess not just the appropriate descent lines and evidence of leadership ability but, most importantly, had to be confirmed and accepted into that role by the people themselves (Waitangi Tribunal 1996: 187-88). In the words of the 19th century scholar John White (1999 [1861]: 221), “any influence that may be exercised by an *ariki* or chief is allowed by the people and not assumed by right of birth.” Angela Ballara (1998: 263-64) argued along the same lines that “*ariki* cum ruling chiefs” were “pre-eminent personages” through “inherited rank and *mana*”, but they only remained “first among equals”: “independence and reciprocity marked the relationship between the people and their recognised chiefs”. Chiefs did not rule their tribe but rather voiced the wishes of all the people based on consensus.

Ultimately, the rules of seniority within the political system were like the rules of descent group membership; they set out a framework within which personal actions and decisions took place. Political success required the adept manipulation of social relationships and “for rank to be translated into effective political and economic action..., a chief had to be able, lucky and successful” (Douglas 1979: 20). So it was through the dynamic balancing of inherited rank against adept social manipulation, rather than through the imposition of static rules, that real political power was acquired and exercised (Howard and Kirkpatrick 1989: 65). But the question arises: what were the strategic and tactical means employed by chiefs and would-be chiefs in their quest for status and power?

Earle (1997) argued that there were three principal sources of power that could be drawn upon by individuals who sought to enhance their status as chiefs. The first was economic and it was acquired when individuals were able to manipulate events to enable themselves or their kin group to exercise direct control over critical sectors of a production system. The second was ideology and its successful exploitation as a source of power arose when symbolically codified worldviews were used to maintain or enhance a group’s power relations. Ideology could be drawn upon to unite different interest groups in a concern to preserve a social order that served the needs of an elite. The third was military and it was implicated in the rise of chiefly power when institutionalised warrior classes were able to bring other groups and territories

under central control by virtue of force. To Earle's three main sources of power we add two more. Religious power is the power wielded by chiefs who either align themselves with, or are themselves, visionary priests with the ability to channel the will of ancient or newly discovered gods. Religion is distinguished here from ideology as a source of power by its emphasis on the dynamics of cult practice, and on the energies of charismatic cult leaders who can, sometimes for only short periods, mobilise and concentrate extraordinary power. Strategic marriage is another means that is used by chiefs and would-be chiefs in the pursuit of political power. Marriage alliances can neutralise or co-opt potential opposition and be used to accumulate rights, obligations or material wealth. Such alliance can have as its goal the unification of senior descent lines to create an aristocracy, as in the Tongan case. Or it can have more short term and immediate strategic goals. In the following sections of this paper we will show how these means of accessing power were used in the political history of the island of Mangaia.

#### PREHISTORIC MANGAIAN SOCIETY

The eight southern Cook Islands lie on the western border of East Polynesia and comprise five uplifted coral reef (*makatea*) islands, an atoll, a near atoll and a high volcanic island (Fig. 2). Mangaia, a *makatea* island, is the southernmost island in the group and at 52 km<sup>2</sup> is second only to the capital, Rarotonga, in size. The languages of these islands make up a single dialect chain of mutual intelligibility.

The social and political organisation of Mangaia is well described in the anthropological literature and the island has featured as a case study in the influential neo-evolutionary accounts of Polynesian social structure by Sahlins (1958) and Goldman (1970). The starting point for this anthropological attention was a series of documents produced in the mid-19th century by the mission writer William Wyatt Gill drawing on the work of local historians, principally Mamae (see below). Mamae's narratives were organised around a series of battles fought by contenders for the coveted title of *mangaia*—or Temporal Overlord (Gill 1984 [1894]). European mission writers like Gill highlighted the violence and ruses of war by chiefs and warriors as signs of their savagery, irrationality and lack of compassion, in contrast to the Christian behaviour of their convert descendants. All subsequent accounts of Mangaian society have drawn heavily on the works of Gill and Mamae and have adopted and emphasised the themes of violence and warfare that were central to the organisation of the early historical narratives.

Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck) worked on Mangaia in the early decades of the 20th century and in *Mangaian Society* (1934) he described Mangaian

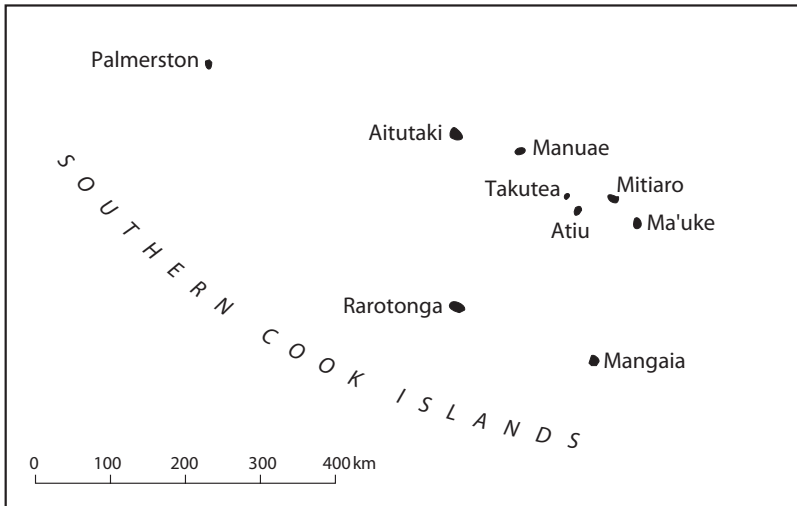


Figure 2. Map of the southern Cook Islands.

social organisation as comprising two status groups, chiefs and commoners. The chiefly class conceived of itself as a class apart. Members of this class were separated from the production system, although they controlled the accumulation and distribution of food and other goods. This class included high priests (*ariki*), high chiefs (*mangaia, kai*), chiefs of districts (*pava*), chiefs of sub-districts (*kairanga nuku*), and priest-chiefs or mediums (*pi'a atua*) who serviced the numerous spiritual beings (*atua*) worshipped by the different tribal groups. The *ivi* was the largest political grouping on Mangaia but tended to have a rather amorphous existence. The next level, the *kōpū*, was the principal unit in daily life and was composed of groupings of *'ānau*, or household units. At the head of each of these descent groups were the chiefly leaders who held authority over the horticultural lands. The land tenure system was based on a common high-island pattern involving the division of the island into wedge-shaped tribal districts. There are six such districts (*puna*) on Mangaia, each containing a strip of each of the major production zones (Fig. 3). Within the *puna* the *pava* was the supreme steward over all resources. The *pava* was responsible for overseeing the construction and maintenance of the irrigation systems, and for controlling access to those systems (Allen 1971). *Pava* also distributed land rights to supporters



who became the *kairanga nuku* of the various *tapere*, or sub-districts, into which each *puna* was divided. Along with descriptions of the structure and organisation of social life, Hiroa's *Mangaian Society* (1934) painted a picture of Mangaian politics as a prolonged struggle for control of the chiefly title of *mangaia* and for control of the taro plantations which were the lifeblood of the Mangaian economy.

In his influential 1958 comparative study of stratification in Polynesia Marshall Sahlins classified Mangaia as an example of a Group IIa society displaying the second highest level of social stratification within Polynesia. Characteristic features of societies at this level were the use of formal insignia of rank and the ability of high-ranked individuals to directly control land and people, including the power of dispossession, and the right to punish individuals for violations of economic, spiritual or social codes. Goldman's 1970 comparative study of Polynesian social systems took as its starting point the notion that Polynesian societies are founded upon principles of social inequality. With both an "aristocratic doctrine of hereditary rank" (Goldman 1955: 680) and individual competition for position, Polynesian societies were differentiated by the manner in which "status rivalry" was managed. In Goldman's schema pre-European Mangaia was an example of an "Open" society. "Open" societies were characterised by intense status rivalry and fell midway along a continuum of socio-political development between "Traditional" societies where kinship and seniority rules were paramount and "Stratified" societies where status differentiation was institutionalised and a hereditary ruling class controlled the land and economy. Taking these accounts and characterisations of pre-mission Mangaian society as a starting point, we turn now to the archaeological record. We review the archaeological data with a view to determining how and when the chiefdom system emerged in order to trace aspects of its development over the centuries before the arrival of the Christian mission.

#### THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Mangaia has had the most comprehensive archaeological attention of any island in the Cook Group but the coverage is still somewhat patchy. Since the broad trajectories of change appear to be relatively consistent across the archipelago (see Walter 1996a), the following review of Mangaian prehistory draws heavily on the wider southern Cook Island record.

Direct archaeological evidence for human colonisation of the southern Cook Islands occurs in the first centuries of the second millennium AD. The earliest known site is Tangatatau Rockshelter on Mangaia where the lowest level (Zone 1) has produced a single date in the range cal AD 1020-1170 at

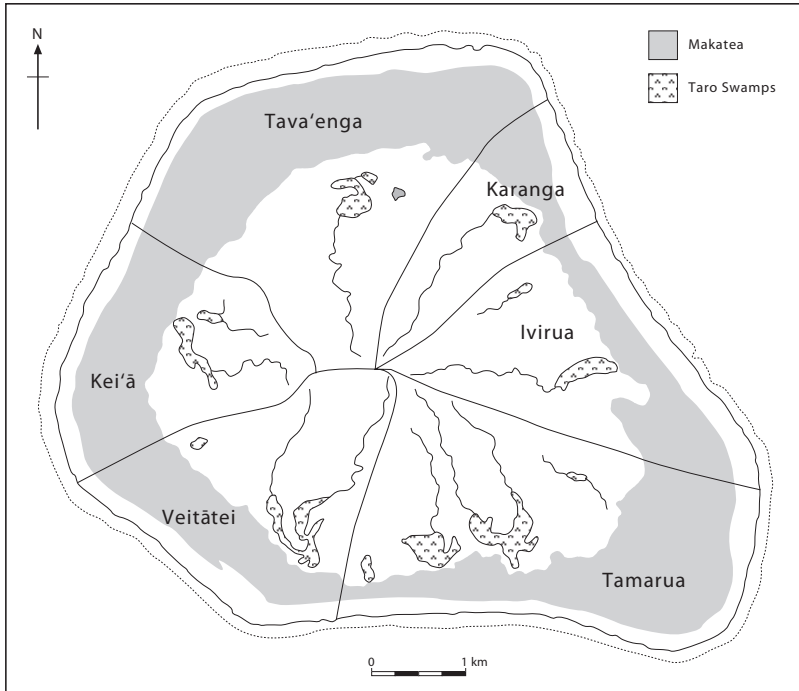


Figure 3. The districts or *puna* of Mangaia.

1sd; Zone 2 has produced two dates in the range cal AD 1040-1220 at 1sd (Kirch *et al.* 1995). Problematically, other samples from the basal zones have produced dates suggesting that the rockshelter may have been first used several hundred years later (Allen and Wallace 2007: 1175, Table 5; Kirch *et al.* 1995). Nevertheless, the lowest levels of Tangatatau display the characteristic signals of colonisation phase events including an avian faunal assemblage dominated by extinct and extirpated land birds (Allen and Wallace 2007: 1175, Anderson 1994: 847, Steadman 1989: 220). That Tangatatau sits at the beginning of the occupation sequence is consistent with evidence from elsewhere in the southern Cook Islands where the earliest direct signals of human arrival fall in the period AD 1000- 200 although, as Allen and Wallace (2007: 1175) point out in a recent review of the radiocarbon evidence, the argument for occupation at the early end of that range is quite tenuous.

An alternative early colonisation model for Mangaia has been advanced by Patrick Kirch and his colleagues based on the palaeoenvironmental record. They have suggested that changes in sedimentation rates, charcoal deposition and vegetation dating from as early as 2500 BP (later revised to 1600 BP [Kirch 1997]) may be a proxy signal of human impact on the Mangaian landscape (Ellison 1994) and similar data has been cited from the sedimentary record of Ātiu dating to around 350 BP (Parkes 1994, 1997). Unfortunately, the nature of these signals is ambiguous and their relationship to human events contested (Anderson 1994, 1995). Whether these palaeoenvironmental signals represent an early phase of human activity remains uncertain, but this issue is not critical to the current discussion. We are concerned here with understanding the archaeological evidence pertaining to the development of the Mangaian chiefdom. The beginning point of the continuous archaeological record for the southern Cook Islands predates the emergence of that polity and on present evidence is marked by first occupation of the Tangatatau site. Indeed Tangatatau has many of the hallmarks of a colonisation phase site and may turn out to represent the first occupation of the island by the ancestors of the current Mangaian people. In the following discussions we divide the known record into early (before AD 1500) and late data sets. This division recognises some fundamental changes in the archaeology that appear from about the end of the 15th century and which are also reflected, as we discuss below, in the indigenous accounts recorded by Mamae.

#### *Early Period (before AD 1500)*

The early period of Mangaian prehistory represents the ancestral society from which the Mangaian chiefdom emerged. The archaeological record, while incomplete, portrays a society quite different to that portrayed in Mamae's account of the Mangaian chiefdom and to that described in the ethnohistorical record. The archaeology of the first centuries defines a society strongly connected to a pan-central East Polynesian cultural complex with shared traditions of material culture, settlement patterns, and modes of long distance communication and exchange. This contrasts with the more inwardly focused and physically isolated polity of late prehistory.

Two main site classes have been described for the southern Cooks from the early period: open settlements located on the sheltered leeward coasts adjacent to reef passages, and smaller camp sites in both coastal and inland locations. The larger open settlements appear to be non-specialist residential zones—small nucleated villages—and at least one example has been located on each of the inhabited islands of the southern group (Walter 1996a). The single known example from Mangaia is Ōrongo, adjacent to the most sheltered

natural passage on the leeward coast. Ōrongo was excavated by Kazumichi Katayama of Kyoto University (pers. comm.) but unfortunately is not yet fully reported. Areal excavations on other sites provide some insight into site form and function. On Ma'uke, the Anai'o site dating to the mid-14th century contained several household clusters consisting of a dwelling and a cooking structure with associated food preparation zones, plus shell and stone tool manufacturing areas (Walter 1998). Excavations at Ngāti Tiare on Rarotonga (Bellwood 1978) revealed sets of ovens and postholes plus a wide range of faunal and artefactual remains suggesting the site fulfilled a similar function. Other sites have received less expansive excavation but have produced a similar diverse faunal assemblage and wide range of stone and shell tools (Walter 1996b). Based on the general models of Polynesian kinship reviewed above, it is likely that each of these sites was the permanent residential area of a small sedentary community and was occupied by a descent-based group comprising individual household units recognising leaders from senior descent lines.

The smaller sites from this period include coastal fishing camps such as Paraoa on Mitiaro (Walter and Campbell 1996) and Moturakau on Aitutaki (Allen and Schubel 1990). These sites contained fishbone midden and shell fishhooks; Moturakau also produced evidence of stone tool working. Both sites were located in isolated positions some distance from the horticultural zones and can be regarded as specialist camps. On Mangaia the Tangatatau site is located on the inner edge of the *makatea* beds close to the taro swamps of Veitātei District. It contains abundant terrestrial bird bones in the lower, colonisation phase, strata, suggesting forest hunting as the primary activity at the site. But it also contains the bones of seabirds and a comprehensive array of material culture, including fishing gear, stone adzes and tools for the manufacture of shell and bone artefacts (Kirch *et al.* 1991; Kirch *et al.* 1992; Kirch *et al.* 1995). It seems likely that Tangatatau was an inland camp used for hunting or horticulture by a community whose main residential zone was located elsewhere, perhaps at Ōrongo. But there is likely to have been permanent inland occupation also, since Kirch (1997) reports at least one inland terrace dated to this period which contained what was probably the remains of a small household cluster.

The subsistence economy of the early period was based on horticulture, arboriculture, animal husbandry, hunting and fishing. Tree and root crop production is implied by shell vegetable peelers and coconut scrapers found in a number of the sites. Tangatatau also contained a range of plant remains including sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), pandanus, candlenut, coconut, *Cordyline terminalis*, banana and taro (both *Colocasia* sp and *Cyrtosperma chamissonis*) (Hather and Kirch 1991, Kirch 1997, Kirch *et al.* 1995). The

bones of pig, dog, rat and chicken have been identified in most of the excavated sites, although not all islands appear to have had the full complement of domesticates. Sea and land birds were hunted for a short period after first settlement but a wave of extinction quickly followed, presumably exacerbated by deforestation and predation on the ground dwelling species by dogs and rats (Allen and Schubel 1990, Allen and Steadman 1990, Steadman and Kirch 1990: 225). The chronology of extinction is still not clear but sites in Mangaia are virtually devoid of bird bone by AD 1600 (Steadman 2006: 217), although there are historical accounts that suggest hunting activities continued into the 19th century. Gill (1984 [1894]: 26), for example, mentioned hunting *titi* (a petrel, *Pterodroma nigripennis*) for food and *tavake* (red-tailed tropic bird, *Phaethon rubricauda*) for feathers (Gill 1984 [1894]: 228). He also noted that while some clans ate some birds, others saw them as *tapu* and did not eat them though they would catch them for their feathers (Gill 1984 [1894]: 228). The native fruit bat (*Pteropus tonganus*) was another target of early hunting; it survived on Mangaia and Rarotonga but on Ma'uke it appears in the early period middens but is now extirpated (Walter 1998). The early fishing adaptation emphasised the use of one-piece pearlshell bait hooks to target benthic and reef-edge carnivores and pearlshell trolling lures to catch pelagic predators.

The early artefact sets fall within the range of the "archaic" East Polynesian assemblages which occur in the earliest horizons from the Marquesas, Tuamotu and Austral Islands, Mangareva, Society Islands and New Zealand. These artefacts are different enough from those of West Polynesia to imply a phase of independent local development. They include a variety of quadrangular, triangular, reverse triangular and trapezoidal adze types, as well as various shell and tooth tools and ornaments, and a diverse set of one-piece fishhooks and trolling lures (Allen 1996; Allen 1992; Bellwood 1970; Kirch *et al.* 1991; Kirch *et al.* 1992; Kirch *et al.* 1995; Walter 1988, 1996b; Walter and Campbell 1996; Walter 1991). Many artefacts in the early period of Cook Island prehistory were made of non-local materials implying high levels of mobility, perhaps even the presence of exchange networks. Pearlshell artefacts have been found in all early sites throughout the archipelago and the source of the shell is likely to lie in the atolls several hundred kilometres north. Basalt adzes and flake debitage originating from the Tataga Matau source on Tutu'ila in American Sāmoa have been identified in early period sites on Aitutaki (Allen and Johnson 1997), Mangaia (Weisler and Kirch 1996), Ma'uke (Walter 1998) and Rarotonga (Walter and Sheppard 1996). Two undated, but typologically early, adzes found on Mangaia and Rarotonga source to Ra'iatea in the Society group to the east (Sheppard, Walter and Parker 1997) and a few sherds of plainware pottery from Anai'o, on Ma'uke,

have been geochemically sourced to Tonga (Walter and Dickinson 1989: 468). Another sherd from Vairakaia on Ātiu was manufactured in Fiji (Altonn 1988). The evidence for the movement of artefacts and raw industrial materials into the archipelago is complemented by evidence for internal exchange. Basalt from the northern Rarotongan valleys has been identified in early sites on Mangaia, Aitutaki and Mitiaro, and Ātivan stone was used on Ma'uke and Mitiaro (Walter and Sheppard 1996).

As well as producing faunal extinctions, humans impacted on the Manganian landscape in other ways. Swamp cores from Veitātei and other drainages document the conversion of the upper slopes of Mangaia from forest to degraded fernlands, a process that has been interpreted as resulting from an early phase of shifting cultivation on the interior uplands (Ellison 1994, Kirch 1996, Kirch and Ellison 1994, Kirch *et al.* 1991, Kirch *et al.* 1992). Kirch and his colleagues have argued that this conversion occurred by 1600 BP, if not earlier. But this predates the avian extinction band in the Tangatatau sequence by 600 to 800 years. To reiterate, the swamp sequences are not clear cut and Anderson (1994, 1995) has already cited difficulties in relating dates to particular environmental events or processes. While it is possible that forest decline commenced earlier than the earliest direct evidence for human settlement in the 11th century AD, the main phase of forest to fernland conversion is likely to have followed rapidly upon the introduction of swidden agriculture and would have coincided with the extinction of many of the forest species, i.e., sometime in the first centuries of the second millennium AD.

In short, while evidence in the palaeoenvironmental record raises the possibility of human settlement many centuries earlier, current archaeological evidence places the commencement of a continuous occupation record in the 11th century AD, with population centres well established on most of the islands of the southern Cook group by the early 14th century. The earliest known site, Tangatatau, contains abundant extinct fauna but by the late 13th to early 14th century sites such as Urei'a (Allen and Steadman 1990, Allen and Wallace 2007) and Anai'o (Walter 1998) have far fewer extinct species and clearly post-date the main extinction phase. By this time island environments were showing other signs of human impact. On Mangaia the clearance of inland forest for gardening had created extensive fernlands and erosion rates would have been increasing. Settlement patterns were predominantly coastal; small nucleated villages forming the main residential zones, with outlier camps used for fishing, gardening and hunting. On present evidence it seems that most islands only had one or perhaps a couple of coastal villages at any one time. Horticulture, animal husbandry and fishing formed the mainstays of the subsistence economy, to which terrestrial and coastal hunting and foraging also contributed. The absence of *marae*, the main marker of chiefly power,

suggests that the politico-religious systems operated differently than they did later and there is no evidence for large-scale or intensive irrigated agriculture. This was a period of high mobility with networks facilitating the movement of raw materials such as basalt and pearlshell between islands. These internal networks seemed to articulate occasionally with similar networks operating in West Polynesia and perhaps the Society Islands (most likely via the Austral chain) (Walter 1998: Fig. 11.1). The societies described here have few of the hallmarks of the chiefdoms of the early 19th century and while they are clearly the societies out of which these chiefdoms emerged, they are not the same as the societies described in the historical accounts.

#### *The Late Period (AD 1500 to 1800)*

From around AD 1500 new sites appear in the archaeological landscape and changes occur in settlement patterns and material culture, signalling the emergence of a new political and social order. The two site types that relate most directly to the development of chiefly power are *marae* and irrigated field-systems.

*Marae* are religious or ceremonial structures found throughout much of East Polynesia (Emory 1970); in Mangaia they are connected with rituals associated with seasons and production, warfare and political investiture (Gill 1885, 1984 [1894]). Although the concept of a sacred precinct was present in East Polynesia from the period of first settlement (Kirch and Green 2001: 276), the appearance of *marae* introduces a new symbolic dimension to the landscape; they reflect the increasing power of the chiefs and of the religious infrastructure from which they drew support. Southern Cook Island *marae* are smaller and less complex than those found in some other parts of East Polynesia, but they contain the same structural elements and are part of a shared politico-religious tradition (Bellwood 1971: 147). The *marae* of Mangaia vary in size and construction methods but display greater homogeneity than *marae* elsewhere in the Cook Islands. They are generally rectangular in form and are often enclosed with coral slabs or blocks. Many contain raised courts constructed by filling coral-lined enclosures with soil and uprights of coral or stalactite are placed around the peripheries (Yamaguchi 2000: 206). Mangaian *marae* are almost all located on low artificial terraces cut into the slopes above the taro beds. One notable exception is the coastal *marae* of Ōrongo—arguably the most important *marae* on the island. An unknown time after the abandonment of the coastal village at Ōrongo a *marae* was constructed there and dedicated to the god Rongo, the island's pre-eminent deity. The *marae* was still in use in the 19th century and the official residence of the *ariki pa tai*, the second-ranking high priest of Rongo, was located nearby.

The radiocarbon record is not compelling, but current evidence suggests that *marae* construction commenced no earlier than the 16th century on Rarotonga (Yamaguchi 2000: Table 4.1.1) and it is unlikely that *marae* construction commenced earlier anywhere else in the southern Cook Islands. This is consistent with local stories; all Mangaian *marae* have historical narratives connected with them, and most are associated with founding ancestors of lineages that were still extant at the time of European contact. By the early 19th century some of these lineages were no longer as powerful as they once were (e.g., Tonga'iti in Tamarua) but they still existed, and the *atua* and the *tapu* associated with them and their *marae* still remained in force and obliged non-worshippers to show the appropriate respect.

The irrigated taro fields of the southern Cook Islands vary according to topography and hydrology. In the valleys of Rarotonga and Mangaia they reached their greatest extent and complexity. These systems included artificial channelling in the upper watersheds that fed water through flights of terraces parallel to the stream beds. In the mid-valleys low earthen embankments crossed the valley floors to create a series of wet-field beds (Allen 1971). Dating the development of these systems is problematic. In Mangaia the spatial association between irrigation complexes and *marae* is close enough to suggest that *marae* construction and the expansion of the taro field complexes occurred at about the same time (Yamaguchi 2000: 171). This is consistent with the radiocarbon dates from Rarotongan *marae* (above) and with evidence that suggests a phase of major land clearance at the foot of the Rarotongan valleys from early in the 16th century (Wilkes 1974: 52).

The expansion of irrigated agriculture and the construction of *marae* was part of a major reorganisation of settlement patterns. By AD 1500 nucleated coastal villages such as Ure'ia, Ōrongo, Anai'o and Ngāti Tiare had disappeared from the archaeological record entirely and a new settlement pattern was emerging based on scattered, low density settlement around the swamps and river valleys of the island interiors (Bellwood 1971; Walter 1996a, 1998: 24). Late period settlement zones are represented archaeologically by wide surface scatters of oven stones and other cultural refuse exposed in the modern gardening zones, living terraces cut into the slopes above the swamplands, and by formal sites such as *marae*, stone lined house floors (*paepae*) and agricultural terracing. The late period social landscape and settlement patterns of Mangaia have been described by Taomia (nee Endicott) (Endicott 2000; Taomia 2000, 2002). According to Taomia, the inland valleys cut off from the sea by the *makatea* were the centre of late prehistoric Mangaian life. The residential zone was no longer nucleated, as it was in the earlier coastal villages. Instead it comprised all



the flat and gently sloping land around the taro swamps where terraces cut into the adjacent slopes supported the scattered residences of individual household units. Excavations on a number of these terraces has revealed earth ovens and coral gravel from house floors (Kirch 1997: 161), and several separate household clusters, represented by dwelling structures associated with cooking areas and debris from the working of stone tools, have also been identified (Taomia 2002: 184). On the periphery of the residential zone, burial caves were located along the *makatea* edge (Taomia 2002: 184). The emergence of the new settlement patterns were the precursors of the development of the land tenure systems and kinship organisation described by the first European visitors which were centred around the concept of territoriality, that is, the division of the landscape into bounded units associated with equally bounded social categories.

Along with changes in settlement pattern, there were also changes in material culture. The most marked of these was the decline in the use of exotic materials. Pearlshell drops from the archaeological record along with one-piece fishhooks (Walter 1998: 100); by the historic period pearlshell was not in common use anywhere in the southern Cook Islands. The basalt sourcing data summarised in Sheppard *et al.* (1997) also demonstrates a decline in the distribution of exotic basalts with Sāmoan stone dropping out of the record entirely. By the late period Ngāputoru (Ma'uke, Ātiu and Mitiaro) relied on a single Ātiu source, although some Mangaian stone has been identified on both Ātiu and Aitutaki. Rarotongan stone has not been identified in any late period context outside of Rarotonga. Nor has any outside source been identified on Rarotonga. All this negative evidence raises the possibility that the islands were all in a state of near-isolation for the last few centuries of prehistory (Walter 1998: 11.3). With a loss in the variety of stone there was also a decline in the range of adze types with one form, the tanged triangular adze with face wider than back, coming to dominate throughout the archipelago.

#### *The archaeological evidence for the growth of the Mangaian chiefdom*

The archaeological record taken alone does not provide a particularly detailed account of the development of the Mangaian chiefdom. Instead, change is represented by a simple transition between early and late life ways. An early period settlement pattern included small, nucleated villages located on the coast. The occupants of these villages shared a common East Polynesian artefact assemblage and accessed wide-area networks that gave them access to imported raw materials. These communities would certainly have shared core elements of Polynesian ideology (see Kirch and Green 2001) but the

apparent absence of monumental ritual structures indicates that political and ideological systems were differently aligned and materialised than at later times. About AD 1500 changes occurred in settlement patterns and site types. Exotic raw materials disappeared from the record suggesting a collapse in the long-distance networks and, together with changes in settlement pattern and the growth of the *marae* complex, a more inwardly focused society and the development of a more bounded social and physical environment.

Although there is archaeological evidence for a transition in the 16th century which saw the emergence of conditions that supported the development of the Manganian chieftdom, the details of social change over the last 400 years of prehistory are not well reflected in the record to date. Kirch's model of political change pictures Manganian society during this period coming under increasing ecological stress and various lines of archaeological evidence are cited in support of this scenario. The disappearance of pig at around 500 BP, for example, is one such indicator (Kirch 1994: 294). Pigs were lost on Tikopia too (Kirch and Yen 1982: 352). In both cases it has been hypothesised that increasing population density pushed the islands towards a point beyond which it was no longer economically viable for humans to compete with pigs for the outputs of the production system and so the pigs were eliminated. Another apparent signal of stress was the abundance of rats in the human diet. Historical accounts (for example, Gill 1984 [1894]: 124-26) mention the importance of rats as a food source and rat bones, many of which were burnt, occur in high relative numbers in the Tangatatau sequence, particularly towards the upper levels (Kirch 1994: 285, 1997: 159). Of more potential significance is the matter of cannibalism. In Tangatatau, Ana Mamuka and other rockshelter sites a number of human bones and bone fragments were recovered that showed evidence of burning or fracturing consistent with their use as food (Kirch 1994: 285, 1997: 159; Steadman, Antón and Kirch 2000). Kirch suggested that the bone in these sites testified to the "...pervasive intervalley and intertribal strife and warfare that characterized Mangaia in the last few centuries prior to European intrusion... [a] grim testimony to the ecological stress within which Manganian society was operating within the last few centuries" (Kirch 1994: 285). Although there is no direct evidence of warfare in the archaeological record, Mamae's accounts refer to refuge caves on the *makatea* used in times of warfare and a number of such caves do contain archaeological material, such as the cave of Tautua used by the Tonga'iti people. This cave contains some high walling and a number of habitation platforms, graves, cooking areas and midden zones that date to the late prehistoric and historic era and could possibly relate to its use in war (Kirch 1997: 161).

In general, the dietary evidence cited above does not paint a compelling picture of ecological crisis. Rats are not uncommon in Polynesian middens and it cannot be assumed that their consumption relates to ecological crisis, as opposed to cultural choice or simply to the fact that they were a plentiful and easily won source of protein. Rats produce about as much meat as many forest birds that were in shorter supply and more difficult to obtain. Yet birds were hunted from the earliest settlement period without any implication of dietary stress. Similarly, the frequency of human bone is not high enough to suggest it was a common food source, nor is the context of the burning and processing of human bone clear. Given the widespread reference to ritual cannibalism in Polynesian historical narratives it is difficult to see in the Manganian record of burnt human bone deriving from a very small number of individuals any strong evidence for “pervasive intertribal warfare”.

In fact, there is actually very little archaeological evidence of any sort that details the nature of social, political or economic change in the critical last 400 years of Manganian prehistory. There have been no archaeological studies of the irrigation systems and no excavations in the *marae* sites which might provide invaluable information on the chronology of agricultural expansion and *marae* development (Kirch 1994: 286, 1997: 162). Instead the archaeology provides a useful, but low resolution, picture of the emergence of conditions which would provide resourceful players with access to new sources of power that could be drawn on to build a chiefly power base. The expansion of irrigated agriculture may have been linked to population growth, but it also provided potential access to economic power for those who could exercise control over the gardens. At the same time the construction and use of *marae* documents the growing importance of a materialised ideology—another potential source of power for would-be chiefs. Indeed, the growth of warfare is not directly indicated in the Manganian landscape; there are no fortifications as in New Zealand or Rapa, no overt signals of increasing warfare in the material culture, although the local histories do suggest the use of temporary defensive features (see below).

In the following section we review the oral history and show how it adds a different, but complementary, dimension to the study of the Manganian chiefdom. Where archaeology shows how conditions suitable for the development of high ranking chiefdoms developed, oral history records the everyday actions of individuals which actually drove socio-political change. History complements the processual perspective of archaeology by providing the “personal signatures” of chiefly lives in relation to their control and use of ideology, military power, strategic resources, religious and spiritual power, and of inter-family alliances and marriages (Denning 1980: 93).

## LATE PERIOD MANGAIAN CHIEFDOM: AN HISTORICAL CASE STUDY

At the core of our knowledge of Mangaian early history is the remarkable collaboration of two historians: the tribal scholar, Mamae of Ngāti Vara (c.1800/1810-1889) and the missionary ethnographer, William Wyatt Gill (1828-1896). Mamae was educated in tribal knowledge as a child by his grandfather, Koroa, a famous poet and the *mangaia* titleholder. Mamae in time became a deacon then pastor in the London Missionary Society and taught generations of English missionaries to speak the local language. Foremost among them was Gill whose subsequent publications are the basis of the island's history (for example, Gill 1876, 1984 [1894]). But Gill's key works were drawn from Mamae's writings, probably written specifically for him, and supplemented by material from other Mangaian of his day, including oral testimony. Te Rangi Hiroa assimilated his predecessors' body of work as part of the salvage anthropology undertaken throughout the Pacific by the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. Hiroa also had access to oral information from knowledgeable locals, notably Mamae's son 'Aiteina (Hiroa 1934).

Mamae and his anonymous contemporaries wrote *tara ta 'ito* 'stories about olden times' which are in essence local, particular and personal histories, describing actions by individuals or groups. They are located within a timeframe organised around successive generations connected through kinship and friendship networks with each other. Among Mamae's old stories are a cluster of accounts about the political struggles between the various leaders who aspired to become the *mangaia* over the land and its people (Reilly 2003). These stories form the basis of this case study.

*Origins and chronology*

Mamae's stories first recount the foundation of Mangaian society by ancestors who were descended from the spirit powers, most particularly by Rangi and his brothers whose descendants formed the Ngāriki people, a descent group recognisable in Mamae's own day. Other groups in this era came to the island as guests who landed off ocean-going ships (*no te pa 'i*) from other islands such as Ātiu, Aitutaki or Rarotonga. All these stories are very brief in length and relate only essential historical information such as ancestral names.

The addition of mythical elements reflects the age of these narratives as well as the significance and sanctity of these ancestors in the formation of later Mangaian society, most notably in the dominance of the Ngāriki descent group (see Tau 2003: 134).

Mamae's political history then moves out of this sparsely remembered period into denser, longer narratives where the descent groups contending for the *mangaia* title all belong to the land. The history also assumes an island

already organised according to 19th century geo-political structures, such as the six districts (*puna*) (Reilly 2003: 36).

Whereas archaeology established the existence of an earlier period of settlement before about 1500 AD, Mangaia's indigenous origin histories have no obvious memory of that era. Instead, they construct a strongly mythological narrative suggestive of prestige and sanctity as forming the basis of later society. If there were older stories about long disappeared ancestors and descent groups then these *tara ta'ito* themselves have been dropped or reworked by later generations. As Judith Binney (2004 [1987]: 212) has explained: "The purposes of the oral narrative tradition are to establish meaning for events, and to give a validation for the family's and the group's particular claims to *mana* and knowledge." The pattern of Mamae's early history fits within a standard template for other Polynesian histories as Harry Maude (1971: 9) noted:

[A]t the best [oral tradition] can only serve to illuminate the immediately pre-contact period for a few centuries, with the exception of occasional probably historical but chronologically isolated facts concerning migrations which appear to be remembered after the detail of local history has been forgotten.

However, this indigenous history does support the archaeological dating of the late period social order in Mangaia, with a number of genealogies having estimated start dates around the 16th to early 17th century (Reilly 2003: 89-90, 107-110).

#### *Ideological structure of chiefly government*

The *mangaia* are the heroes of Mamae's political history: they are individuals of great *mana*. These leaders—called *te mangaia* or *te 'au*—formed the apex of the island's elite (Reilly 2003: 30). The Mangaian term '*au* is a cognate of the Tongan *hau* 'secular ruler' who formed one part of a "system of dual chieftainship" beside a "hereditary sacred king" (*ariki*) (Gunson 1979: 31-32), thus aligning the Mangaian system with that more common in West Polynesia. In periods of crisis some *mangaia* appointed a junior colleague as the *kai*, who often acted autonomously (Reilly 2009: 132-35), and older *mangaia* might associate with themselves "in the government of the island" a son or younger kinsman who subsequently inherited the title (Gill 1876: 206, Reilly 2003: 46, 76).

The *ariki* served as the mediums for the pre-eminent spirit power, Rongo. The most powerful of these sacred kings was the *ariki pā uta* 'inland high priest' supported by the *ariki pā tai* 'seaward high priest' and the *ariki nō te tāpora kai* 'high priest presiding at head of food baskets'. They were selected and

trained from among the Ngāriki people, who were considered the descendants of Rangi and his brothers. These *ariki* presided over important rituals held on the major *marae* dedicated to Rongo, the father of Rangi: ‘Ōrongo on the coast and ‘Aka‘oro in the interior. These and other tribal *marae* mark the late period elaboration of chiefly power. The *mangaia*, *kai* and multiple *ariki* titles show how complex the Mangaian system of power became.

The *ariki* were men and women of great *tapu*, marked by their intimate relationship with Rongo, even *mangaia* had to prostrate themselves before them (Gill 1984 [1894]: 317). Their *tapu* state made them dangerous for others. To take things that belonged to them or even to say disparaging things about them resulted in the violent deaths of the perpetrators, acts enforced by the *ariki*’s descent group (Gill 1984 [1894]: 18-21, Reilly 2003: 30-31).

The secular and sacred rulers of Mangaia society played key roles in Mamae’s story of the *mangaia*. They both had to recognise the claim of an aspirant to the *mangaia* title. This they did in a complex of *marae*-based rituals, involving both the *ariki* and all the chiefs, undertaken for the inauguration of a *mangaia*’s reign.

An even more influential role was played by the medium for the spirit power, Mōtoro, who was worshipped by the Ngāriki people. This medium was selected from Mamae’s own descent group, Ngāti Vara. In an inspired state these mediums would identify the battlefield for the contest between the *mangaia* and his warrior challengers (Reilly 2003: 27). The mediums attached to the opposing armies at these battles would perform *karakia* ‘incantations’ to their respective spirit powers during the fighting in the hope that their side would prevail with the aid of their gods (Gill 1984 [1894]: 19, 335)

#### *Military power of chiefs*

The aspirant *mangaia* normally demonstrated their potential capacity to reign over society by winning a decisive victory over other challengers in battles that Mamae called *te au vai tamaki mama‘ata* ‘the big battlefields’. In total there were 40 such fights for the *mangaia* (sometimes two massacres of descent groups killed and cooked in earth ovens are added). The defeated opponents recognised the victor’s *mana* over all others. Conversely, for an incumbent to lose a battle was to lose hold of the title. Thus contenders for the *mangaia* while possessing inherited *mana* as chiefs could achieve or lose *mana* in these struggles.

For Mamae the major battles for the *mangaia* title were the crucial events around which he organised his political history. They were named for the place where the battle occurred. These contests included set-piece engagements on prepared ground between opposing armies who had performed all the necessary rituals and whose leaders had had time to arrange their forces (see

Hiroa 1934: 159). Fights between warrior challengers sometimes took place before the general engagement (Reilly 2001: 32-33). However, a number of these 40 battles were actually little more than massacres or treacherous killings during the night while key victims slept, or in the day time during a feast when people generally were unarmed. Mamae called such deeds '*e tūta 'i i te pō* 'a surprise attack at night' and '*e tūta 'i i te ao* 'a surprise attack by day' (Reilly 2003: 59-60). Sometimes very few people died in battle, yet in one battle Mamae says 80 *tangata* 'people' died while during another he states that 100 *toa* 'warriors' perished (Reilly 2003: 47, 58).

Normally, rules surrounded the conduct of these battles. A challenger was supposed to *motu* 'sever' the previous *mangaia*'s reign, usually by an act of violence construed by people as a deliberate challenge to the incumbent *mangaia*. Mamae called this the '*ara* 'offence, violation, fault, crime' which required the initial violence against the *mangaia* to be balanced by his giving battle. However, not all the battles followed such processes.

Victory was claimed when the enemy broke ('*ati*) and ran from the field. On occasion the retreating party might be pursued, pausing for brief fights as some warriors made a stand, until the defeated survivors found refuge (see Reilly 2003: 28). Other times, battles were not so decisive and a victor was faced with intermittent challenges from the enemy who would sally forth from their hiding places and attack members of the victorious party. In such circumstances the island descended into a period of instability where no one's life was safe. Only the deaths of key leaders of the defeated party, or the wholesale destruction of that entire group, enabled a victor to claim the *mangaia* title in a formal sense, with the appropriate rituals. Victors went to great lengths to hunt out these opponents and to destroy them; in one case, an opposing party was caught out in the open collecting food and almost all of them killed (Reilly 2003: 63-64). There were also periods of intermittent fighting among different descent group leaders as all grasped for the *mangaia* title but none could prevail over the others in battle. Mamae called such times an '*are puruki* 'house of battle' (Reilly 2003: 70-71). Such periods of on and off warfare only ended when one chief decisively beat everyone else and was able to claim the *mangaia* title.

Before battle the contending armies would occupy separate encampments, sometimes surrounded by a temporary wall of bamboo (*te pā ko 'e*) to prevent surprise attacks (Reilly 2003: 28, 74). Even in peacetime different '*ānau* would build their houses close to each other for "mutual protection" (Gill 1984 [1894]: 123-24). In the unruly times when there was no *mangaia*, descent groups stayed together in encampments, while those defeated in battle or being hunted by their enemies, sought refuge in the many caves of the *makatea*, some of which could easily accommodate large numbers. Each

descent group used a particular cave in their district (Gill 1984 [1894]: 75, 173-75, 193-94, 268; Reilly 2003: 41). The caves were difficult to access and therefore easily defended. At some, piles of rounded stones were placed at entrances to throw at anyone who might climb up the cliff face and warriors took turns guarding the entrances (Gill 1984 [1894]: 173, 267-78). When planning the disposition of their forces in battle chiefs orientated their lines so that they could quickly retreat to the *makatea* (Gill 1984 [1894]: 47, 167). The opposing army would besiege their enemy's cave and try to starve them out by denying them access to food, even erecting palisades in front of the entrance to prevent egress (Gill 1984 [1894]: 75, 283).

Once a member of the elite became *mangaia*, then the weapons of warfare were put away; the reign (‘*au*’) was a synonym for peace and tranquillity. This was reinforced by the complex of ritual acts to inaugurate a *mangaia*; the concluding incantation to Rongo called for peace to begin and for the clearing out of any anger (Reilly 2009: 258-59). The *mangaia* was the guarantor of growth and fertility, of a time to indulge in the arts, dance festivals, poetry and kite flying. Just as Rongo feasted on the spirits of the dead in battle, so he sponsored the arts in peace. The *mangaia* and his mediums were his human representatives, following the precedent established by Rangi.

The authority of a *mangaia* could be weakened by incessant fighting among ambitious chiefs. Mamae explicitly excluded from his list of the great battles for the *mangaia* title what he called *te au tamaki’anga rikiriki* ‘the smaller fights’ (Reilly 2003: 27). Hiroa (1934: 115) referred to them as *tā rikiriki* or *tāriki* ‘little killings’. While some were considered legal if the victim had broken “the laws and customs of society”, others were judged “indiscriminate killings” when they were the result of the perpetrator’s ambition, passions or personal grudges. These required retributive acts by the victims’ families and could lead to a spiral of killings that threatened to undermine the *mangaia*’s authority and hence destabilise his reign.

A *mangaia* had various strategies to deal with these disruptive situations. When his supporting chiefs became restive he could through oratory attempt to persuade them to “Prop up my rule, not with rotten sticks, but with ironwood” (Gill 1984 [1894]: 376). The ironwood tree (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) was used for weapons and known locally as *toa*, and alluded to the *mangaia*’s *toa* ‘warriors’. These warrior leaders were his *toko* ‘supporters’ (Reilly 2009: 78-79). When they bickered they became *tokotoko pē* ‘rotten sticks’ and weakened his reign. Leaders of kin groups who fought or plotted against a *mangaia* might also be punished by being expelled from their lands or exiled from the island (Reilly 2003: 45-46, 50-51, 54). War was, however, always a last resort. Mediums particularly sought to avoid the social dislocation of conflict. On two occasions they chose a new *mangaia* without resort to arms; the sanction



of the spirit powers was evidently stronger than that of the warriors (Reilly 2003: 67, 69, 78, 80-81). On a third occasion, the ruling descent group chose another *mangaia* from among their chiefly family after low level fighting was seen to have undermined the incumbent *mangaia*'s authority (Reilly 2003: 74, 76-77). By such means a dominant descent group might try to retain power without the risk of losing it to another through battle.

Successful *mangaia* were always supported by a strong muster of warriors. *Mangaia* sustained their support by awarding the warrior leaders with lands and positions as district chiefs and sub-district chiefs. Giving the junior *kai* title to a supporting chief was another means by which a threatened *mangaia* might secure that leader's own warriors. When the fighting force that put a *mangaia* in place fractured then the latter was vulnerable to challenge. Mamae describes how the final Tonga'iti *mangaia*, Ngāuta, learned this hard lesson after he expelled and then defeated in battle the chief of one of the three Tonga'iti clans who had tried to challenge Ngāuta's authority. This action however split the Tonga'iti people down the middle. Mamae described the leader of the defeated Ngārīki laughing in his refuge when he realised what an opportunity Ngāuta had inadvertently created for a successful challenge. Mamae likened Ngāuta's act to plucking the feathers off a bird's wing; without them it could not fly. Similarly, without sufficient warriors Ngāuta would lose to his opponents and be killed. Mamae's concluded that the force that fielded the most warriors would win, those with fewer would be slain (Reilly 2009: 194-95).

Ngāuta is the exemplar of those *mangaia* who chose the way of the warrior as their guiding principle. He held the *mangaia* title an unparalleled seven times, indicative of his abilities, but his reigns were by all accounts tempestuous, filled with challenges to his authority, with intrigue and the murder of his opponents. When he succeeded his senior colleague as *mangaia*, he quickly moved to eliminate various Ngārīki leaders, some of whom had been allies of his Tonga'iti predecessors. He ordered subordinates to murder two mediums of the *atua* Mōtoro, in order to undermine the Ngārīki's access to their spirit power (Reilly 2003: 45-50). So heinous were these acts considered that the daughter of one of the priest killers continued to fear retribution, and only avoided it by marrying an *ariki* and coming under his protection (Reilly 2003: 64). Mamae recounted how in killing these mediums Ngāuta ignored his own tribal medium who had warned him that harming these priests would lead to his own people's demise, but he would not listen (Reilly 2009: 194-95). Ngāuta was equally forceful in his internal management of Tonga'iti's own clan leaders. Not only did he expel one from the lands he had awarded him, but he went on to slay him in battle, and then had his daughter killed (Reilly 2009: 180-85). Ultimately, Ngāuta lived and died by the sword, being murdered in the uprising of Ngārīki led

by his successor, another capable, aggressive *mangaia* who held the title five times. He too would be murdered by a challenger.

*The chiefly control of strategic resources: lands, seas, people*

Mamae's political history does not explain the economic relationship between the competing leaders and the lands they controlled, nor does it describe in detail the development of irrigated taro plantations. However, his story of a challenge makes clear that a subordinate chief's control of lands could be revoked by a *mangaia* if he did not sustain support for the high chief.

The *mangaia* did not directly control or manage any more land than other chiefs, but he had the power to award lands and chiefly titles to leading supporters. Victorious chiefs and their kin group could expect to gain access to the resources of Mangaia's districts, even those mostly inhabited by their former opponents, by becoming the chiefs of these areas. Thus ruling descent groups frequently settled in several districts outside their homelands. Alternatively, chiefs connected to defeated groups but supportive of the ruling party would be installed.

District chiefs selected their sub-district chiefs. These lesser leaders had the responsibility for awarding lands to various individuals and their families within their sub-districts. Gill's stories show that sub-districts might comprise different *'ānau* and *kōpū*. Some came from opposing descent groups, but once peace was established, they too would be confirmed in lands by the ruling chiefs, and would retain at least some of their properties provided they supported the local chief and gave him food, goods and military service. Gill (1984 [1894]: 99-102) recounted how a defeated clansman failed to provide a fishing hook when asked by his chief who belonged to the ruling descent group. Interpreting this as a deliberate snub against the ruling party, the chief had the man and his family evicted from the lands he had allocated to them. Such was the chief's authority that he simply sent his young son with the eviction notice; the distraught family immediately left.

The old name for sub-district chiefs, *kairanga nuku* 'land eaters', emphasises how control of lands enabled these leaders to consume the lands' produce (Hiroa 1934: 124). District and sub-district chiefs frequently lived in the settlements of their mediums in order to gain some portion of the offerings given to the priests' families. Gill wrote: "The best kinds of food were sacred to the priests and chiefs" (Gill 1876: 35).

Chiefs also extended protection to those with specialist knowledge, even to foreigners, and provided them with suitable lands to subsist on. Those with important specialist knowledge from a defeated group might still retain all their lands provided they gave service to their sub-district chief. The district chiefs, who usually controlled a sub-district, and their sub-district chiefs,

were especially involved in all aspects of resource management, notably maintaining the all-important waterways for irrigating the staple crop, the *māmio* (taro, *Colocasia esculenta*), declaring *rā'ui* 'closed seasons' over land and sea resources and adjudicating over various kinds of land and family disputes. The maintenance of waterways, a function chiefs still discharge today, highlights how closely connected were late period chiefs with the development of these irrigated plantations. The food from these lands sustained the entire hierarchy of chiefs, priests and warriors.

The *marae* of an *'ānau* or *kōpū* was built on the lands over which they had authority. These structures, sanctioned by the spirit powers, legitimised a group's claim to the area's resources. Similarly, chiefly authority extended to the seas beyond Mangaia's shores. Mamae recounted how the leader of one descent group imposed a *rā'ui* over the sea beyond their lands. This made the seas *tapu* and barred to fishers. Groups of women acted as guardians of the *rā'ui* to prevent people from breaching the chief's ban (Reilly 2009: 139). Gill (1984 [1894]: 290-94) told how a man from a defeated kin group managed to paddle by canoe around the island, keeping well beyond the reef, until he reached the seas "opposite to the boundary-line" of his brother-in-law's district who had agreed to extend him protection. Here he was safe from pursuit or attack.

Mamae's political history is careful to identify each *mangaia* with their appropriate descent group. For these leaders were, first and foremost, heads of a community centred upon an *'ānau*, *kōpū* or even *ivi* with various non-kin friends, many of them married into the core group. Each community was located in particular parts of Mangaia's productive lands. Some of the larger *ivi* dominated large areas of the island. Smaller *kōpū* might be restricted to particular sub-districts, although control of the *mangaia* title allowed such groups to expand across the island in order to consume more of its food and other resources.

Two narratives about Ngāuta's preparation for a feast provide an insight into how chiefs organised their people. Ngāuta first gathered together all the people who lived in his district, including his subordinate chiefs, and the commoner men, women and children. He divided them up into work groups, each one allotted a specific task, such as going fishing, climbing coconut trees to retrieve nuts, cutting bananas, making the *poke* pudding (a mixture of vegetables and fruit in coconut milk) or lighting the fire (for the earth oven). When all was readied, Ngāuta wrapped and distributed the foods into piles for groups of two for the feast. He then called the people to sit and eat (Reilly 2009: 180-81, 187-88). The account clearly portrays how everyone listened to Ngāuta's instructions and expeditiously carried the tasks out, without any questioning or slacking.

*Spiritual and religious power*

The authority of the chiefs over their peoples ultimately rested upon their inherited *mana* as descendants from the senior lines of the core descent groups in their communities, as well as their achieved *mana* as leaders. These leaders, as much as the *ariki*, inherited their rank from the spiritual domain. This explains the alacrity with which people responded to their chiefs' instructions: they recognised the spiritual source of their authority.

Judith Binney (2004 [1987]: 205) has written that New Zealand Māori history "is defined by family and by whakapapa [genealogy] and is concerned with the holding and the transference of mana by successive generations". Māmae's succession of *mangaia* reflects this same concern. When the founding ancestor, Rangī, fought the island's first battle he was clearly an ancestor of great *mana* since he took part in 12 successive combats with opponents, including one fight with two warriors at the same time. He won all these contests and thereby established the *mana* of his own people, the Ngāriki. His success also explained why they controlled the *mangaia* title for generations to come.

When other competing descent groups, such as Tonga'iti, defeated the Ngāriki people they were not only taking control of the *mangaia* title, and its power to control the distribution of resources, but also raising their *mana* over others. *Mana* was at the heart of these conflicts and the aspirations of the competing leaders and their descent groups. Just so, the two dominant descent groups today, the Ngāti Tāne and Ngāti Mana'une, defeated the previous *mangaia* holders, the Ngāti Vara, in battle and took control of the island and so established their *mana* over the people and the land. By adopting Christianity they further cemented their authority. In subsequent generations, everyone else joined this religion and married into these now dominant descent groups.

Christianity's role in the new regime underscores the intimate relationship between the spiritual domain and the chiefs and their communities. The defeated leader and medium of the non-Christian opposing party explained that he lost the final battle because his god lacked "power" whereas the triumphant Christians of Ngāti Tāne and Ngāti Mana'une had a "strong God". He converted and became a church deacon (Gill 1984 [1894]: 335 n.1, 336). The chiefs and their people required spirit powers and mediums to safeguard a community from threats and to ensure productivity and success in war. If they failed, they were replaced.

The chief-priest, Mautara, was the hereditary medium for the spirit power, Mōtoro, worshipped by the Ngāriki descent group. Rangī had chosen Mautara's Ngāti Vara ancestors for this position. Mautara serves as the model for mediums who also became *mangaia*. While backed by the military power of his

older sons, all famous warriors, as well as warrior worshippers of Mōtoro, he preferred to govern through long term alliances and relationships with leaders of other descent groups. His greatest political crisis occurred after his two eldest sons had already been killed, weakening his warrior support base. He faced defeat by a larger, experienced army. However, several opposing leaders, two of whom worshipped Mōtoro, decided to support that spirit power's medium. They turned against their allies and gave victory to Mautara, who became *mangaia*. He rewarded these supporters by granting them extensive lands and in one case providing the chief with Ngāti Vara wives. He also supported the elevation of another Ngāriki leader to an *ariki* title. Mautara himself actively protected various individuals and groups. For example, he adopted into Ngāti Vara a young warrior, Mana'une, the eponymous ancestor of today's Ngāti Mana'une. Being himself a worshipper of the spirit power Tāne, Mautara protected that god's medium and his family enabling the Ngāti Tāne *kōpū* to gradually revive. Buttressed by so many allies and friends, Mautara's reign proved the longest and most peaceful one prior to the arrival of Christianity. He died of old age (Reilly 2003: 65-67, 2009: Ch 8).

#### *Alliances, marriages and families*

Winning the *mangaia* title in battle, then holding on to it from one generation to the next, ensured that the high chief's family attracted favourable marriages with people from other descent groups, as well as numerous friends eager to obtain the benefits which came to the processor of this title, namely, a share in the island's resources. Mautara is probably the supreme practitioner of these techniques for attracting people to a leader's group. He knew how they helped strengthen his clan's authority over the island.

Demographically, a successful group prospered even more from the prestigious offspring of intermarriage who was spiritually strengthened through accretions of *mana* from its high ranking parent of other descent groups. Mautara realised that connections to other groups provided the mechanism for various relationships to be developed between the parties, such as alliances to control the *mangaia* title. Mamae's elaborate genealogy of his ancestors illustrates the process in action, as the ruling lines in his descent group (by then named Ngāti Mautara) married into the leading families from the larger Ngāriki and Tonga'iti (Reilly 2003: 65-67). Several chiefly descendants of Ngāti Mautara women, although affiliated to their fathers' descent groups, remained loyal to Ngāti Mautara leaders over two to three generations. On occasion, chiefs with this dual heritage led armies comprising warriors from both descent groups, or gave their political support to Ngāti Mautara (Reilly 2003: 70-72, 79-80). Adultery threatened relationships, especially among chiefs, as the aggrieved husband might attack the offending

man: one *mangaia* was assassinated after having such an affair, nearly ending his clan's hold on power (Reilly 2003: 65).

When a descent group began being defeated it risked fragmentation or complete disappearance, when people who had supported it started to seek shelter and protection with relations in other groups. In such cases, their descendants would gradually be absorbed into the stronger group in terms of their tribal identity (see Hiroa 1934: 105-6). This was the situation faced by one descent group who fought for the *mangaia* title several times and were eventually destroyed as a coherent force; their women were taken by the victors (Gill 1984 [1894]: 47, Reilly 2003: 44-45).

The defeat and death of chiefs might also mean loss of their titles to eligible relations in a victorious descent group. By such means, the latter group ended up in control of significant parts of the island. A key mechanism in such transfers was the custom of *tu'a tamariki* 'allotting children to the parental descent groups'. Usually, the first born child went to the father's group, the second born to the mother's and so on. These divisions could be manipulated either to protect children or to obtain more boys for one side, probably to boost future warrior numbers.

Families were both a help and a hindrance to chiefly ambitions for the *mangaia* title. On the positive side, supportive in-laws might warn of the murderous designs of their own natal group (Reilly 2003: 60-61). In-marrying warriors might choose to support their affines in battle (Reilly 2003: 76). On the negative side, intermarriage between descent groups could sunder family ties when offspring took one parent's side against the other (Reilly 2003: 54-55, 2009: 198-200). Intra-family squabbles could undermine tribal coherence and leave them open to defeat by other groups. Ngāti Mautara broke into two 'ānau descended from senior and junior lines respectively, who came to blows as one side took high ranking wives from the other—a common cause of conflict between chiefs. Control of these women and their offspring ensured greater *mana* for those who held on to them. Ultimately, these fights weakened the whole *kōpū*, paving the way for another descent group to wrest the *mangaia* title from them (Reilly 2003: 70-72, 77-80).

#### *Indigenous history's insights into the nature of the Mangaian chieftdom*

This overview of Mangaia's early history, derived from the collaboration of Gill, Mamae and other knowledgeable Mangaian in the mid-19th century, highlights how individual chiefs pursued different strategies reflective of personality and political and economic circumstances. The warlike Ngāuta led an *ivi* (comprising three *kōpū*) which controlled a large part of the island. He dominated subordinate chiefs and other descent groups through the naked use of force based on his own inherited *mana* from a senior line, his undoubted

military abilities and his access to a large number of warriors. He only lost power when his *ivi*, and therefore his military force, was fragmented by intra-tribal competition from subordinate leaders of individual *kōpū* who chafed under his control. By contrast, the spirit medium, Mautara, headed a small *kōpū* occupying only two sub-districts. After defeating his enemies with help from supporters in the Ngāriki *ivi* he concentrated on building up a tight web of relationships and alliances that bound various leaders from other descent groups to him and his family, thereby sustaining his authority until he died of old age. These two successful leaders manipulated different sources of power in order to maintain or enhance their authority. Their decisions were clearly influenced by the size of their descent group and land-holdings, especially of the irrigated taro-producing gardens. Ngāuta had sufficient food resources and personnel to ensure that military power was enough to hold the *mangaia*, although not without constant challenge. By contrast, Mautara headed a small group of warriors based on a relatively smaller land-base; hence he needed marriage and friendship alliances with others to hold power. The vocations and personalities of such leaders were also factors. Ngāuta was known for his warrior skills and did not shrink from using violence, whereas Mautara was from his youth a priest who was distinguished by the sagacity of his political advice rather than military skills and preferred to develop long-term alliances and relationships of political and military value to his people. Being the medium for Mōtoro was a trump card for Mautara since he received support from key leaders of the large Ngāriki *ivi* who worshipped that spirit power. Certainly, descent from chiefly lines linked to the spirit powers gave the *mangaia* and other leaders inherited *mana*, but the effective use of priestly knowledge, the management of resources and people, military skills or oratory were what demonstrated they had achieved *mana*. Effective government also required a leader to maintain positive relationships among the competing chiefs, and with the island's *ariki* who mediated relations with the spiritual world. If the spirit powers, mediums, people and subordinate leaders did not accept a *mangaia* then any claim to power was short-lived.

#### A LAYERED PAST

Archaeology and history are complementary opposites. Both are concerned with explaining the past, but their methods, sources and forms of representation are different, although they retain the capacity to inform and to enlarge one another as “dialogic disciplines” (Denning 2004: 267). Archaeology interprets material objects associated with human activity in the layered context of the land itself. It can occasionally glimpse an instant in time, but it generally records change in units of centuries or millennia (Denning 1980: 93). By contrast, indigenous local histories records the “personal signatures on life”

made by individual people (Dening 1980: 93). They may transmit their history orally, perhaps as a narrative, chant or song, or in a physical object, such as a carving, or as a written document. Dening (1998: 207) calls these forms of history “the texts made of living experience”. In this paper we recognise the value of both ways of representing the past. In our study of Mangaia we have shown how, at one scale, archaeology can identify in the cultural landscape some of the long-term processes of change leading to the emergence of the Late Period Mangaian polity. At another scale, the indigenous historical narratives reveal these processes as the sum result of “the cumulative decisions of chiefs engaged strategically and tactically in a continual game of honor and power” (Howard 1972: 819).

The archaeology of Mangaia, like that of other islands in the southern Cook Islands, identifies two distinctive societies, one evolving from the other, but both different in significant ways from the other. The first and earlier society is that of the original founders and begins about the 11th century AD. It is a small-scale society probably based at a single coastal settlement located in the environs of what later became the site of the major *marae*: Ōrongo, on Mangaia’s leeward western shore, situated near one of the main reef channels, Avarua, providing access to the land from the sea. Like other “archaic” East Polynesian societies, the people would have formed a discrete descent group headed by individuals from its chiefly line or family. These characters would have undertaken both an executive chiefly function and that of service as a medium to the people’s spirit powers. These roles may have been combined into one leader or have been undertaken by two different individuals belonging to the same family, with the senior member acting as chief and the priestly role falling to a junior relative, perhaps a younger brother, or possibly vice versa. This community accessed the various resources of the island, making use of temporary camps dotted about the coast and inland. Here they would have initiated shifting agriculture, gradually clearing the interior forests, and hunted the profusion of sea and land animals, including birds, which appear in the archaeological sites until the 16th century. Various plants and animals would have been introduced with the original migrants, including the taro, the sweet potato, the pig and the chicken. The people’s artefacts indicate their close relationship with a wider East Polynesian network, with a number of objects sourced from different islands back towards the older ancestral home islands, such as Sāmoa.

The second and later society starts to appear in the archaeological record from about AD 1500-1600. Having been established in the land for several centuries, this society had become disconnected from any ancestral or trading ties to other lands and had turned inwards to exploit the resources found about the island, epitomised by the shift from a mainly coastal residential orientation



to one centred around the taro plantations of the inland valleys. The forested interior would have been transformed into hillsides of fern, the valley floors now a patchwork quilt of irrigated taro plantations, their banks a profusion of bananas and other plants, with residential areas spread around the surrounding terraces. The loss of the forests and associated fauna went hand in hand with the profusion of gardens and arboriculture throughout these populated valley landscapes. So the island was able to support the much larger population, especially with the mass production of taro. The first settler community of the early phase would have long ago fragmented into distinctive descent groups each with their own leaders, and perhaps joined by occasional arrivals from other islands alluded to in the indigenous historical record. After several centuries of population increase there were now a number of descent groups, each marked by a rich history of ancestral achievements and defeats, and among which successive generations had intermarried with other groups, or come to blows, as they jockeyed for control of lands for their people. Each group would have had its own spiritual powers and priesthood, with its own *marae* to mark their claims to their part of the island. The number of *marae* in each district points to this larger, more diverse society, one which had also become a more stratified one with a hierarchy of chiefs and priests needed in order to manage access by different descent groups to the diverse array of spiritual powers and to the land's fertility.

Mamae's political history concentrates on the transfer of *mana* between the *mangaia* who had secular authority in this society after AD 1500. Their power, like that of lesser chiefs, was clearly premised on control of the key resources, such as the waterways, taro plantations and seas, as well as subordinate people as workers and warriors, and women as producers of future generations. A correct relationship with the spiritual domain, mediated by priests and particular spirit powers, was vital to these leaders since this was the origin of their *mana* and determined the well-being of the world. Famine and conflict were signs that the intimate relationship between the secular and spiritual domains was not working. The leaders of Mangaian society acted quickly to put this right. Having the proper balance between these domains, as reflected in abundant food, as well as in harmonious relationships among the leaders and people, determined the actions of the chiefs, mediums and their people.

Mamae's interpretation of the succession of the *mangaia* titleholders mirrors other Polynesian tribal histories. People lie at the heart of such histories. The spirit powers are the powerful ancestors of Mangaian society whose presence was felt on a daily basis and mediated regularly by orders of priests given the task of managing this complex and vital relationship. The living relied on maintaining good relations with these significant ancestral

beings. Mamae's society is one ordered according to rank: from the mostly lowly workers who tended the fires, fished at sea or worked in the taro gardens, to the warriors and leaders of communities who provided leadership in economic activities, in dealing with disputes, and in war, and to the *tapu* priests who spoke for their spiritual powers. Mangaia was not as sharply differentiated between chiefs and commoners as were the larger eastern Polynesian societies. The chiefly elite were leaders of descent groups and drawn from their senior leading family. Everyone else was related, however remotely, to a descent group's eponymous ancestor. Ironically, holding on to power as *mangaia* required these leaders to show skill in sustaining alliances and relationships with other leaders. The title was competitive and the consequences of loss or defeat were often severe both for the aspirant and their descent group, but the authority over the distribution of resources that went with it meant that the title was always worth striving for.

Kirch's case for an economic and demographic crisis in late Mangaian prehistory seems to receive some support from the revolving door nature of the *mangaia* title, with a number of its titleholders not apparently retaining power for more than a few years at most. Nevertheless, an analysis of the titleholders during the last century or so before the coming of Christianity in 1824, and of the island's political leadership during the early years of that new order, suggest a more nuanced interpretation of the historical record is needed. Based on Mamae's political history, all the *mangaia* from Mautara to the penultimate titleholder supported and enhanced the *mana* of Mautara's own descent group over the island. There was effectively a continuous government by the same party of interests. The last *mangaia* led a new alliance of descent groups and these people retained power through the conversion to Christianity and up to the present day. Hence Mamae's narrative suggests political continuity rather than instability. If there were late period ecological pressures then these were being effectively managed by Mangaia's senior leaders

Two final points concerning Mamae's history connect this micro-study of precontact political change to the larger themes of our paper. The first concerns the chronological information derived from genealogies and other oral narratives. These suggest that the island's history, beginning from the earliest human ancestors until the arrival of Christianity, spans about 11 generations. This would locate the founding society of Rangi and others, complete with its political order centred on chiefs and *marae*, somewhere around AD 1500. In seeming opposition to this view, the archaeological record clearly indicates a continuous occupation of the island commencing at least 500 years earlier. This apparent inconsistency is resolved if the origin narratives recounted here are not concerned with the actual beginnings of Mangaian history, with the time when the ancestors first dragged their canoes

across the reefs, cleared land and built villages. Instead, they are to do with the origins of the chiefly political system in which Mamae, the tribal historian, was born and raised and in which his ancestors played a formative role. Thus the inferred dates are well in accord with the archaeological evidence for major reorientations of socio-political and economic life in the 16th century. By Mamae's day there was no one who needed to invoke Mangaia's ancient settler community as part of their own identity and so its story had disappeared or been reworked beyond recognition in later memories of the remoter past. We note an interesting parallel here with contemporary popular histories of the Cook Islands. In modern Cook Islands parlance history is sometimes divided into two periods, the post-mission period and the time of the *'etene* 'heathen'. In these accounts the earlier period is compressed into a timeless space where myth and even relatively recent history merge. Here too the accounts are of the establishment of a contemporary socio-political order and in establishing its foundation and legitimacy, earlier events lose their significance and are, in a sense, suppressed.

A second point concerns a recurrent theme in Cook Island accounts of the ancient times: the references to a period of interaction with outside peoples, predating the establishment of contemporary social orders. As elsewhere in the Cook Islands the several Mangaian accounts of earliest times tell of arrivals from nearby Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Ātiu. Others are more geographically vague and many of the Mangaian texts simply describe people as being "off the *pa 'i*", or ocean-going canoe. A further observation on the history of voyaging is that while it figures significantly in southern Cook Island histories, accounts of long-distance voyaging are always situated in the far past, never in the time of the orator's immediate forbears. There is a strong connection with the archaeological record here which similarly records, via the sourcing of material culture, a period of widespread voyaging which declined from around AD 1500 to the point where, outside of Ngāpūtoru, island communities received little or no contact with other islands.

Finally, we link Mangaia's indigenous history back to Earle's identification of the role of ideological, military and economic power in the growth of chiefdoms. In the examples cited by Earle one or other of these sources of power was paramount in the formation of a highly ranked society. In the Mangaian case, Mamae's narratives show that for chiefly aspirants to the office of *mangaia*, all three of these sources of power were replicated in an intricate web stressing access to the gods and chiefly marriage partners, an ability to fight and the control of productive lands. As we move through the Mamae's political histories we see that warring chiefs deliberately attempted to alienate foes from access to these power bases through military defeat, assassinations of priests and banishment of enemies and potential enemies

from their horticultural systems.

The ideology of chiefly authority both formed and sustained the social order of Mangaian society and much of the recorded history of the island is focused around the actions and motivations of the chiefly leaders whose power was underpinned by the *atua* ancestors represented in daily life by the *marae* and worshipped by priestly mediums. The gods, priests and chiefs, it might be said, formed the structure of Mangaia's society from its very foundations. These leaders may have adopted Christianity in place of the old spirit powers, but in many other respects this leadership structure has continued largely unchanged. Today's district and sub-district chiefs retain their customary authority over the planting lands, remain responsible for resolving disputes and for ensuring the effective irrigation of the wetland taro growing areas. Modern Mangaian society has simply entered a new chapter in a much older political history.

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#### ABSTRACT:

This essay examines the history of the Manganian polity drawing on the fields of archaeology and indigenous history. Both disciplines are concerned with explaining the past, but they operate at different scales, and their methods, sources and forms of representation are different. We argue that the strength of a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding Mangaia's history lies in recognising disciplinary differences rather than cross-checking one against the other, or using the paradigms of one to interpret the other. When read together the two discourses provide a more nuanced, multi-layered representation of Mangaia's political history than either does on its own.

*Keywords:* Cook Islands, chiefdoms, Mangaia, archaeology, history

