
Fesaonga ta Fatu (the Story of the Stone): Archaeological Survey of Futuna, Vanuatu

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Résumé

Preliminary archaeological survey was undertaken on Futuna (West Futuna) Island in 2017, a small (13 km²) ‘Polynesian Outlier’ in South Vanuatu. Futuna is linguistically and culturally distinct from its closest and much larger ‘Melanesian’ neighbours. Futuna’s physiographic variation, limited area of land lacking alluvial plains or valleys, and physical isolation located 80km east of Tanna Island, resulted in massive landscape alteration and innovative agronomy in the form of irrigated and dry land agricultural development. In contrast to other Oceanic societies, where monumental stonework is often associated with religious architecture and political power as well as activities of economic nature, on Futuna it appears to be almost entirely associated with food production and land management with little investment in ritual and political spaces. What can such large-scale, apparently secular stonework, tell us about Futunese sociopolitical organisation, religious investment and adaptation to Futuna’s environment? Additionally, does the archaeology reveal cultural parallels between Futuna and its neighbours Tanna, Aneityum and Aniwa? Here we present excavation and mapping data from the initial field season, as well as the first radiocarbon dates for Futuna’s agricultural systems. This new information will be assessed against orthodox models concerning transformative histories and socio-political complexity in Oceanic societies. This study represents the first extensive archaeological research on Futuna since pioneering work conducted by the Shutler’s in the 1960s and will contribute important information concerning the settlement histories of Polynesian speaking groups, long-distance exchange, and cross-cultural interaction in the region.

Mots-Clés: monumentality, Pacific, agriculture, intensification, innovation, irrigation, landscape, economy, sociopolitical, religion

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