

History in Prehistory

The Oral Traditions of the Rarotongan Land Court Records

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LIKE ARCHAEOLOGY, ETHNOHISTORY IS A MEANS OF ILLUMINATING THE PRE-DOCUMENTARY past, and the two disciplines are often used in conjunction, with greater or less success. In this paper, I examine the ethnohistoric record of the Polynesian island of Rarotonga from an archaeological point of view. My primary interest is in contextualising the archaeological record — using the ethnographic texts to provide a wider scope for interpretation and understanding of the pre-contact period than archaeology alone can provide.¹ The investigation follows two main paths. It first examines society and social change in the early historic period. I show how, although European contact had profound implications for the Rarotongan social order, it by no means entirely overthrew the pre-contact order. On the contrary, missionary and colonial influence was restricted to changing the workings of power without destroying the social and political system, and Rarotongans throughout the 19th century retained considerable control. This line of inquiry is followed through to the establishment of the land courts in 1903, since it is from the oral traditions recorded in the land court records that the pre-contact social order is examined. While this seems to be out of order, the later period is examined before the earlier because it is only after the social changes brought about by contact are understood that the land court records can be read with confidence. They represent a reflection of the Rarotongan self-image of the early 20th century as much as a historical record of the 18th. Once this overburden is stripped away a picture of a fluid and flexible pre-contact social order emerges, one in which historical change is evident. It is this aspect of the investigation in particular that contextualises the archaeological record, which otherwise within a time frame as short as that covered by the oral traditions tends to condense continuous processes into static structures, where change is rarely evident. There are a number of threads running through this history from pre-contact to contact times,² but the one that is stressed here is the chiefly aggrandisement of power. In this story, neither cultural replacement nor cultural change as a result of contact is given precedence, and the missionary intervention, though perhaps the most important, is only one episode of many.

¹ Matthew Campbell, 'Settlement and landscape on late prehistoric Rarotonga, Southern Cook Islands', PhD thesis, University of Sydney (Sydney 2001).

² The term 'pre-contact' is preferred to the more usual archaeological 'prehistoric', since this period does indeed have a history. By 'contact' is meant not only initial contact but the following period when the changes due to European influences were at their most rapid and far-reaching. To extend this period, as I do, beyond the early missionary era to the early colonial era is a stretch of the definition, but a useful convenience.

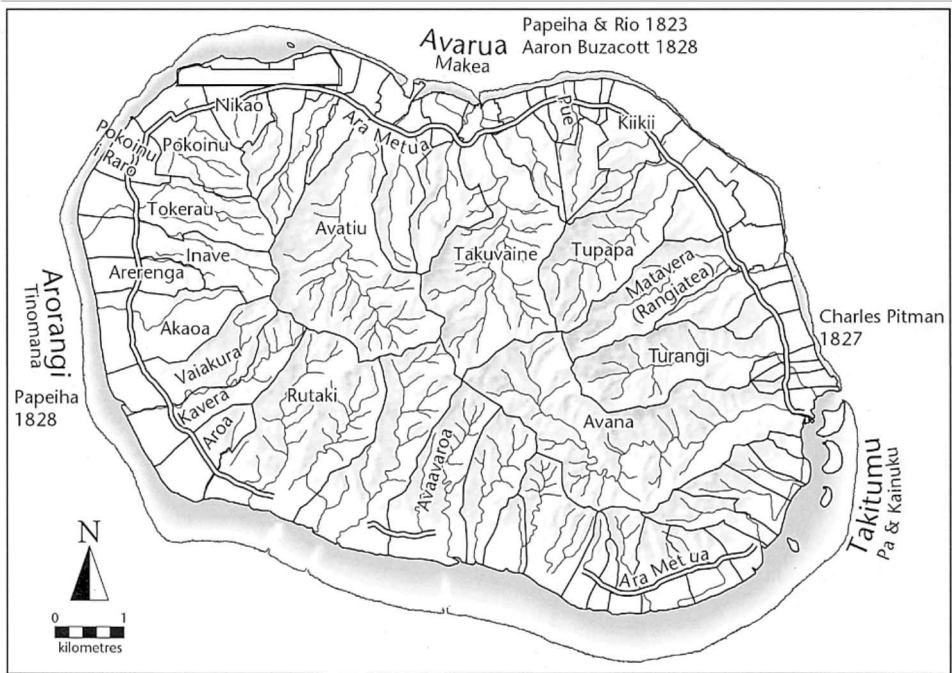


FIGURE 1: Rarotonga, showing the *tapere* mentioned in the text, the areas of *ariki* influence and the names and dates of the earliest missionaries.

Rarotonga is the seat of government of the Cook Islands and is the largest and most populous island in the group. It is a typical volcanic high island, with a mountainous interior cut by a radial pattern of deeply dissected valleys. Each valley was the centre of a *tapere*, a territorial unit that formed the basis of the political and economic system. The *tapere* were inhabited by the *matakeinanga*, who constituted the local corporate group, the core of which were the *ngāti*, a descent group. *Tapere* and *matakeinanga* were governed by one of two grades of chief, *mata'iapo* or *ariki*, who was the (usually) senior (usually) male member of the *ngāti*, and the man genealogically closest to the founding ancestor. The chiefs' power (*mana*) was represented by the *marae*, a place that served as both a ritual focus and the house of the gods.³ The *ariki*, though never true paramounts, retained more status and power than the *mata'iapo*, and were the heads of cross-*tapere* alliances. The history recounted here is largely the history of power relations between the *ariki* and other chiefs.

The Rarotongan Land Court Records

Analysis of the records could be undertaken from many points of view. Within the context of colonial discourse the courts were a novel, but eminently suitable, forum for Rarotongan expression. An understanding of how traditional discourse was adapted to the courts, among other aspects of a legal anthropology, awaits examin-

³ Matthew Campbell, 'Sites and site types in Rarotonga, Cook Islands', *New Zealand Journal of Archaeology*, 22 (2000), 49.

ation but would facilitate a more subtle interpretation. Time, genealogy, relation, narrative and cause are not well understood in Polynesian historiography, or at least lack a coherent overview. Again, subtleties may be lost through lack of a clear understanding. Although genealogy is the organising principle of Rarotongan tradition and land holding, this has been played down in the courts, as evidence was tailored to European understandings and expectations. Genealogy is a complex study in its own right, and little attempt is made here to understand it beyond the most basic level.

These investigations are limited to those records dating to before the mid-1930s, Books I to X. As time goes on, more and more of the court's time is taken up with other business and, where later cases are contested, they tend to refer to previous cases rather than the pre-contact period.⁴ It is mainly in the initial investigation of title hearings that the pre-European history of the land and of *ngāti* is given as evidence. Deciding who was the owner of the land was the chief concern of the court, and the more specific and direct the evidence relating to this, the more likely it is to be biased. However, the incidental evidence that this analysis relies on, outlining general patterns and trends in social relations and historical processes, is generally more reliable.

The land court records have the great advantage of recording an authentic Rarotongan voice, as opposed to the better known traditions of nearby Mangaia, for instance, which have been filtered through the editorship of the missionary W.W. Gill. Gill was a curious and conscientious man, but he inevitably reinterpreted what he recorded in a Christian light, finding improving morals for both local and metropolitan consumption. While lacking any heavy handed editorialising, the Rarotongan land court records have their own built in biases. They are, after all, a record of the advocacy of interested parties. While the recital of tradition would always have had a competitive edge, this takes on a new and complex character when the forum is a European court, governed by European notions of evidence and oaths.

Credibility and authenticity are the first two crucial tests that any historical document must pass before it can be subject to further analysis. Oral traditions must pass these tests twice — not only must the documents be authentic (which as the official court records they are) and credible, they must also be part of an authentic tradition before they can be accepted as credible as traditions. As an example that encapsulates much of this, Raea tells the court that 'After Tapaeru married a ship came whose Capt. was Tute',⁵ which is to say, Captain Cook. Cook never visited Rarotonga, so it certainly seems that this evidence is not credible. In fact, the story that follows is that of the visit of the *Cumberland* in 1814, whose

⁴ Jock MacCauley, retired Cook Island Land Court Judge, pers. comm., 1997.

⁵ Raea [Rupe], *Te Tupou a Mou 74*, Minute Book (hereinafter MB) I (1905), 347. References to evidence from the Rarotongan land court records take the form: Witness, *Land section name[s]* and *number[s]*, Minute book (year), page quoted. All references to land court material are to microfilmed copies of typescripts of the minute books. The typescripts were made in the 1950s when the originals began to deteriorate. Typists' errors are common, and I have taken the liberty of correcting any spelling mistakes and replacing any obviously wrong words, but otherwise left the grammar untouched. The originals and typescripts are held at the Cook Islands Department of Justice, Avarua, Rarotonga.

captain was Goodenough. The evidence seems barely authentic, except that the missionary Charles Pitman records that 'They thought that all ships belonged to Captn. Cook. A Canoe with Natives on board some Years since drifted down to these Islands from Tahiti who informed them of the circumstance of that Navigators visit to that groupe.'⁶ Raea's evidence is consistent with Rarotongan tradition, entirely authentic and, once the nature of the historical knowledge is understood, quite credible. Cook was the captain of all ships, and so the evidence is true, but the apparent meaning and the culturally constituted, intended meaning are not the same.

This is not the first scholarly analysis of the land court records. Ron Crocombe used them in his examination of pre-contact land tenure and social structures.⁷ His analysis formulated an excessively rigid and hierarchical model of society, with numerous social levels arrayed beneath the paramount *ariki* in a semi-feudal structure. This paper will be concerned to provide an alternative view. James Baltaxe was the first to critically examine Crocombe's model.⁸ He studied the role of the *rangatira*, showing it to be a personal rather than corporate title, a chief appointed as an administrative deputy to the *mata'iapo*. As chiefly roles changed during the missionary and early colonial periods, so the *rangatira* became a corporate title, a status that was enshrined in the land courts.

Disentangling 19th century social and political change from pre-contact history and social structure in the land court records requires understanding the historical context of the courts themselves. The records reflect the social structure of their time, as Baltaxe showed, the result of 75 years of colonialism and accompanying changes in social and power relations. In order to avoid projecting the social structure of the early 20th century back into the pre-contact period, I will briefly outline a social history of the missionary and early colonial periods leading up to the establishment of the courts.

The Contact and Missionary Periods

Although there is strong evidence in tradition that the *Bounty* visited the island in May 1789 after the famous mutiny,⁹ the first certain European contact was with the *Seringapatam*, a British whaler that sighted Rarotonga on 23 May 1814. The first landing was that of the *Cumberland*, a colonial trading schooner from New South Wales under Captain Goodenough, which anchored at Ngatangia harbour in August 1814. Captain and crew traded with the locals, employed them to harvest tropical woods, and finally fought them with loss of life on both sides.¹⁰ The story

⁶ Charles Pitman, Journal 1827–1845, MS, 6 vols, Sydney, State Library of New South Wales, I, 19.

⁷ R.G. Crocombe, *Land Tenure in the Cook Islands* (Melbourne 1964).

⁸ James Bernard Baltaxe, 'The transformation of the Rangatira: a case of the European reinterpretation of Rarotongan social organisation', PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Urbana 1975).

⁹ Ralph W. G. Gosset, 'Notes on the discovery of Rarotonga', *Australian Geographer*, 3 (1940), 9; Maretu (trans. Marjorie Crocombe), *Cannibals and Converts: radical change in the Cook Islands* (Suva 1985), 46.

¹⁰ Gosset, 'Notes on the discovery of Rarotonga', 13; Maretu, *Cannibals and Converts*, 42; H.E. Maude and Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, 'Rarotongan sandalwood: the visit of Goodenough to Rarotonga in 1814', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 71 (1962), 43; H.E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men: studies in Pacific History* (Melbourne 1968), 22.

of the *Cumberland* is also important in pre-missionary history, and will be returned to later.

In 1823 John Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived, initiating the missionary era. The initial Christian conversion had profound effects on Rarotongan society, and was central to the process of social change in the remainder of the 19th century, but missionary control was always more limited than they supposed (or at least reported) and Rarotongan culture continued to prosper. Two Raiatean converts, Papeiha and Rio, were set ashore in 1823 as native teachers, though not as consecrated missionaries. A permanent European presence was not established until 1827 when Charles Pitman with his wife Elizabeth established a mission station at Ngatangia. The next year Aaron Buzacott and his family did likewise at Avarua. Papeiha then ran the Arorangi station (Rio having disgraced himself committing the ‘common sin’ of fornication).

While the missionaries’ primary motivation was the salvation of souls, they were generally situated within the worldly framework of colonialism and empire.¹¹ They were concerned with imposing their spiritual values on the natives, but this meant also imposing their cultural values, since Christianity and European civilisation were inextricably linked in the minds of most Europeans.¹² Rarotongans were themselves active participants in the colonial process,¹³ and not merely the passive victims of fatal impact. Certainly contact was fatal for large numbers, who died from a variety of introduced diseases in the first two or three decades of the mission period,¹⁴ but the impact was far from fatal to Rarotongan culture and society. Missionaries, and Europeans and their ideas in general, provided an ongoing catalyst to change, but they were not the agents of that change — Rarotongans were. They appropriated European beliefs and institutions in much the same way as they appropriated European technology and literacy, accepting and integrating, or rejecting, them as they saw fit.

The 19th-century history of Rarotonga is one of increasing *ariki* power. Missionary perceptions of the Rarotongan social order were an important initial factor in this process. The LMS base in east Polynesia was at Tahiti, where they were in contact with a more highly ranked society than that of Rarotonga. In their time the Society Islands had become politically unified under Pomare II, a process the missionaries had abetted.¹⁵ When they first came to Rarotonga, they mistook Makea Ariki for the king when they landed in his district, a position that Makea was naturally quick to exploit, though they soon enough realised their mistake. Expecting to find, and preferring to deal with, centralised power structures, they attributed

¹¹ Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in 19th-Century England* (Stanford 1999).

¹² Brian Cosgrove, ‘Christianity and colonialism in Melanesia and Polynesia: hand in glove?’, *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies*, 1 (1989), 12; Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: evangelical missionaries in the South Seas, 1797–1860* (Melbourne 1978), 269.

¹³ Cf. Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: anthropology, travel and government* (Cambridge 1994), 15; Samuel M. Wilson and J. Daniel Rogers, ‘Historical dynamics in the contact era’, in J. Daniel Rogers and Samuel M. Wilson (eds), *Ethnohistory and Archaeology: approaches to postcontact change in the Americas* (New York 1993), 4.

¹⁴ Raeburn T. Lange, ‘A history of health and ill-health in the Cook Islands’, PhD thesis, University of Otago (Dunedin 1982), 148.

¹⁵ K. R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: a new South Sea Islands history from first settlement to colonial rule* (Sydney 1984).

power to the *ariki* at the expense of the *mata'iaho* who, although a lesser grade of chief, had been largely independent. They saw Rarotongan society as feudal, and titles as personal rather than corporate, a misunderstanding that the *ariki* were happy to take advantage of. 'Church and state' had not been separate prior to the gospel, and did not become separate after it. Traditionally, the *ariki* embodied both, and the missionaries constantly interfered in political matters. The *ariki* gained privileged access to European ideas and beliefs, and were quick to exploit this position to consolidate their dominance in society.

Some of the changes that resulted from contact were beyond the power of either chiefs or missionaries to control. The population plummeted from perhaps 7,000 at contact to below 2,000 by 1870,¹⁶ mainly from exotic diseases, before beginning to recover. As population fell, tenure and control of land reverted to the chiefs, landholding became increasingly concentrated in chiefly hands, and the social and economic obligations due from commoners to chiefs fell on increasingly fewer people.¹⁷

While mission control and chiefly aggrandisement tended to look inward, the forces of commerce, particularly trading with whalers, opened Rarotongan eyes to the wider world.¹⁸ *Ariki* access to the land and its resources meant that they were in a unique position to use and abuse their customary rights to control this trade. In pre-contact times, chiefs and commoners had largely been mutually dependent and shared common interests, but with the introduction of a cash economy, these interests diverged. The complaint of Pitimani that the *ariki* 'held both mana ariki and mana ture [law] and took this land by force and without reason'¹⁹ is a common one in the land court records. Missionary misunderstanding of Rarotongan social structures, falling population and commercial pressures combined to concentrate land and power in *ariki* hands throughout the 19th century.

The Early Colonial Period

Though chiefs and missionaries between them created an extraordinary semi-theocratic police state²⁰ this could not, and did not, last. Following the proposal to build the Panama Canal, Britain realised the importance of establishing a coaling station in the Central Pacific and in 1888 the Cook Islands was made a protectorate. The first Resident, from 1890 to 1898, was Frederick Moss.²¹ Initially the power of the *ariki* continued to grow under the new regime, and although Moss was keen to

¹⁶ Norma McArthur, *Island Populations of the Pacific* (Canberra 1967), 183.

¹⁷ Crocombe, *Land Tenure in the Cook Islands*, 71.

¹⁸ Ernest Beaglehole, *Social Change in the South Pacific: Rarotonga and Aitutaki* (London 1957), 67.

¹⁹ *Anikitau Nui 199, Nauaparatoa 201 & Te Paii 87, MB IV* (1908), 346. *Mana* is a complex concept referring to the status and power of chiefs and of the gods, and the relationship between the two. *Tapu* is a quality of chiefs and things that controls and directs the forces of *mana*. See Bradd Shore, 'Mana and tapu', in Alan Howard and Robert Borofsky (eds), *Developments in Polynesian Ethnology* (Honolulu 1989). Here Pitimani means, essentially, political power.

²⁰ At one stage, there was one policeman for every 10 people in Avarua, who were 'incessantly spied upon and harassed [by police] under no direct control [for whom fines] formed their sole pay.' Frederick J. Moss, 'The Maori polity in the island of Rarotonga', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 3 (1894), 22.

²¹ Dick Scott, *Years of the Pooh-Bah; a Cook Islands history* (Rarotonga 1991), 29.

reform abuses of power he was not supported by the *ariki* and missionaries whose entrenched positions he was attacking. The *ariki* successfully petitioned the Governor of New Zealand for his removal, and he was replaced by Colonel Walter Gudgeon. Gudgeon had two objectives — to prepare the ground for annexation to New Zealand and to defeat the power of the *ariki*. After annexation in 1901 he, as Resident, was the real power in the Cook Islands. The Resident was also the land court judge. The courts were established in 1903 because both Gudgeon and the New Zealand government wanted to increase production by granting security of tenure to native producers, and the courts were one of the tools by which Gudgeon suppressed *ariki* power.

Pre-contact History

I now turn to the history and historical processes of the pre-contact era that can be read in the land court records, beginning some 200 or 250 years prior to the establishment of the courts. Jan Vansina claims that this is generally as far back as oral traditions can be read as credible histories,²² and this seems to be the case here. Very few records refer to an earlier time in any detail, and these are beginning to take on a mythic character. An analysis of pre-contact social and power relationships — between chiefs, between chiefs and *matakeinanga*, and relationships to land — is as important as the historical narrative, but because the latter presents the more coherent story the analysis is organised around it, with a couple of necessary digressions.

Most Rarotongans trace their ancestry to the Tahitian voyager Tangi'ia.²³ When Tangi'ia arrived on Rarotonga he found the island already settled by people from Iva, the ancestors of Kainuku and the Avana people. Tangi'ia appointed his high-status adopted son Pa as *ariki*, and the Kainuku and Pa lines came to an accommodation and ruled jointly.²⁴ The other two *ariki* on Rarotonga at contact also trace their origins to the time of Tangi'ia. Tinomana was descended from Motoro, Tangi'ia's son, while Makea was descended from Karika, Tangi'ia's Samoan ally. However, the number of *ariki* was variable. Te Rei says that at one time there were seven *ariki* in Avarua, at another time none.²⁵

Tangi'ia established the system of *tapere*, *marae* and *mata'iapo*, and to be able to demonstrate to the court an unbroken descent from these *mata'iapo* and an unbroken occupation of the *marae* and land is about as good as a claim to land and status can get. Others make as strong a claim, tracing their descent from ancestors whose canoes arrived after Tangi'ia's. One such family are the Ngati Uritaua. Te Ura Uritaua's evidence is worth quoting at length, since it demonstrates nearly all

²² Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison 1985), 23.

²³ A number of versions of the Tangi'ia story exist, and it is neither useful nor possible to try and force them together into a single coherent account. Here I follow the well known account of Te Ariki Tara 'Are, originally published in 20 parts in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* between 1899 and 1921, and recently re-issued by the Society as Te Ariki Tara 'Are, *History and Traditions of Rarotonga*, Richard Walter and Rangi Moeka'a, eds (Auckland 2000).

²⁴ Crocombe, *Land Tenure in the Cook Islands*, 8.

²⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 25.

the most important ways of laying a historical claim to land.²⁶ He begins with an extensive genealogy, not only tracing his family from the voyaging ancestor Te Pou a Rongo, but going back seven generations to the homeland of 'Avaiki. Then

Te Pou a Rongo made his canoe at Avaiki and launched her and the followers of the Potiki went on board ...

When he went on board the canoe the wind came from the south and brought him here. He entered the harbour. He landed and made a *marae*, Arekura. He called a piece of land Tongatai and another piece he called Kaitokitoki and another place he called Kaikuruai ... He built his house at Aretere and above there. Karika was at Arai Te Tonga when he heard that Te Pou a Rongo had landed. And a messenger came from thence. Pou a Rongo left Ongatea in charge of the land and also Angauri. He went to Arai Te Tonga. And there Karika gave him land, Ngatutairupe, he lived there.

Subsequently there was trouble from the fact that he was said to have [-?-] Makea's daughter, that brought them all back to Avatiu where they had first landed. He found an Ariki there. (viz.) Tutarangi. Uritaua said, who put you here? Tutarangi said, the land is mine. Uritaua said, rise and depart. And Uritaua killed some of that people. The chasm is still to be seen where they were pushed into. From that time Uritaua lived on the land ... Uritaua is a rangatira on his own land ...

When I landed there was no one at Avatiu. I can give the meaning of that name. When Pou a Rongo got into the harbour the wind went round to the point called Tiu, a bad wind.

Here Te Ura has demonstrated a knowledge of the *marae* and of the land, its history, its names and their meanings. Te Pou a Rongo claimed the land by naming it and building his *marae*, but it was not until Karika gave him land that his occupation was formalised, and not until he defeated Tutarangi in battle that it was consolidated.

These early traditions contain much that is mythical. Whether Tangi'ia was a real person or not, the story is the ultimate validation of the Rarotongan political order. Relating these mythical beginnings establishes the relationships between people and land in particular, since that is the focus of the court hearings, but also between people and their *marae* and ancestors, the ritual and social resources as well as the physical. However, myths are not credible histories. These do not begin until roughly 150 years before contact, or somewhat more than 200 years before the establishment of the courts.

Tinomana in Vaiakura

The bulk of the historical evidence deals with Tinomana, the *ariki* of Arorangi, and it is here that our story begins. It is this story that best exemplifies the changing nature of social relations in pre-contact times. Originally, Tinomana 'was an ariki of Takitumu, and as he affronted the people of that tribe he had to flee during the night'.²⁷ Tangiao gives the name of this man as Te Mutu, but Rere claims the first Tinomana in Arorangi was Napa the grandfather of Te Mutu.²⁸ Tangiao gives a

²⁶ Te Ura Uritaua, *Avatiu Angaipuaka 80*, MB II (1905), 37.

²⁷ Tangiao, *Maungaroa 102*, MB VI (1913), 256.

²⁸ Taira Rere, *Genealogy of the Tinomana Family* (Rarotonga 1975), 6.

genealogy that shows himself to be the senior male descendant of Te Paii, and it is likely that many of the discrepancies between Tangiao's account and others arise from his desire to inflate his status before the court and the other chiefs present.

Despite the dangers inherent in attempting to construct a single coherent narrative from disparate oral sources, this account follows Tangiao's story but uses other sources in the records to fill in the gaps and 'correct' some probable errors.²⁹ My account may be as much in error as the sources, but they are generally consistent in telling the same story. What is important is not so much the exact sequence of events as the historical processes that can be observed.

Napa fled to Arorangi, where the story is picked up by his descendant — 'Tangiia is the stone on which the arikis stand. On Maungaroa Vaiakura is a land of mataiapos. And they led Tinomana into the house Pekapeka Arangi and made him ariki and gave him the tapere.'³⁰ It is this genealogically derived status of descent from Tangiia that sets the *ariki* apart, that is the source and validation of their *mana*.

Atua and 'ātinga

Two important aspects of the *ariki's* *mana* help explain the mechanisms by which they grabbed power in the 19th century. Since they are so closely related to *ariki* power and landholding, they were highly contested in the courts, and the evidence regarding them cannot be addressed with the same degree of confidence as other topics examined in this paper.

These two topics are *atua* and 'ātinga — the gods and the food of the gods. When Tangiia established the *mata'iafo* on their *marae*, he did the same for the *ariki* — 'Another *marae* of Tangiia's over which he appointed an ariki (viz.) Pa te Upokotini and he gave him his gods, Tangaroa, Tutavake, Tane, Taakura. Paita was the *marae*.³¹ Tangaroa and Tane were among the great pan-Polynesian gods, Tangaroa in particular was the principle god of Rarotonga. The *ariki's* role was to enact or legitimise the rituals of the great gods and to mediate between them and humanity. The *mata'iafo* of Vaiakura could not do this themselves so they made Tinomana their *ariki*.

In contrast, the gods of the *mata'iafo*, and by extension of the *ngāti* or *matakeinanga*, were of a different, lesser order. For instance, 'Urumoa had to take charge of the pig of Te Au, to Arai te Tonga. The god of Te Au hid the pig after it was cut up. Paapa Turei was the god.³² Paapa Turei is mentioned more than once in the minute books as the god of Te Au.³³ These *atua* were also associated with specific places — 'The names on the island are Motutapu (Toutiki the *atua* lived there,

²⁹ Rongomauri Kiu, *Tangiao Keu 89L*, MB II (1906), 209; Tinomana, *Pokoīnu i Raro 87B*, MB II (1906), 213; Timona, *ibid.*, 214; Tauei, *Maraeara 90E*, MB II (1906), 234; Io, *Vaireva 90I*, MB II (1906), 240; Tangiao, *Onemaru 83E*, MB III (1906), 10; Keu, *Vaipapa 92F*, MB III (1906), 32.

³⁰ Tinomana, *Vaireva 90I*, 245.

³¹ Te Pa, *Pokoīnu 107, Areeanu 104, Nikao 106, Puapuaatu 105A & B*, MB II (1905), 54.

³² Rangipiri, *Reve Iii*, MB II (1906), 164.

³³ Moana, *Vaititoko 91A & Toireva 91B*, MB II (1906), 348.

hence name)³⁴. These lesser *atua* were personal gods, and they interacted with the people in much more personal ways.

The difference between the great gods of the *ariki* and the family gods of the *mata'iapo* was not only one of degree, it was also one of kind. 'Manavanui Taunga was the taunga of the Kaena family. He officiated before the gods and looked after Kaena's god Tongaiti Mutarau. This was ... an *atua* that used no food.'³⁵ If Tongaiti Mutarau and the other family gods of the *mata'iapo* ate no food, Tangaroa did, and that food was supplied in the form of *'ātinga*.

For the *ariki* of the early 20th century *'ātinga* was rent, pure and simple. But as Parakoti was well aware, in pre-contact times 'the rules of atinga were quite different to those of the present day',³⁶ but what these rules were is not particularly clear. The witnesses in the courts were mostly of the chiefly class, and their evidence as it regards their own privileges must be treated with the greatest caution, even scepticism. Establishing what *'ātinga* was due on a particular block of land was to establish the nature of tenure, so that *'ātinga* became a particularly contested issue.

Makea Daniela describes how he and his 19th-century predecessors received the *'ātinga* from land that 'was our portion in Nikao and was left to Tiori and Vaka and the atinga came to Tiori. Vakaatini ate of it till he died. And in due time Te Pou became *ariki* and Te Ara his rangatira. Te Pou ate the atinga. Then Manarangi was Vakaatini and ... ate all of the atinga from the land.'³⁷ Eating the *'ātinga* was part of the chief's privilege, but it was not his food that he was eating, it was the god's — 'Io became a toa [warrior]. And consequently a custodian of the marae of Potikitaua ... when the Potikitaua took the head of the pig to the marae Io ate it. Io kai ki te *atua*',³⁸ that is, Io ate the food of, or for, the god.

Given the corporate nature of land holding and that titles were corporate rather than personal titles, *'ātinga* was as much a community obligation as a personal obligation to the titleholder. Chiefly management easily becomes chiefly appropriation, and it is easy to see how this obligation became generalised into a personal obligation to the titleholder as the corporate structure of society broke down during the 19th century. Of course, the *'ātinga* described here is the ideal, and it would always have been appropriated, to a greater or lesser extent, by élites for their own ends.

The Expansion of the Tinomana Family

Returning to our story, the next Tinomana after Napa was his son Ru. Evidently Ru had been at war with the Takitumu people because, although this war is not mentioned directly in the minute books, Io tells that he had long been at their home

³⁴ Parakoti, *Karii Motu 5*, MB I (1905), 270.

³⁵ Moana, *Onemaru 83E*, 186.

³⁶ *Anikitau Nui 199*, 331.

³⁷ *Pokoinu 107* ... , 70.

³⁸ Io, *Vaineva 90I*, 240.

in Ngatangiaa endeavouring to make peace.³⁹ While he was away Io Potoro was proclaimed *ariki* in his place. Io Potoro was of the Vakapora Mata'iaipo family of Tupapa. He was born in Takuvaine, where he was made an *ariki*,⁴⁰ but was driven out by the conquering *rangatira* of Karika,⁴¹ and went to Vaiakura Tapere. Having no lands of his own, he 'then came to Arerenga to take land and in Akaoa from Tootu. The mataiapos in Arerenga did not know this kind of war ... They killed everyone on the land.'⁴² Up to this time Tinomana had been *ariki* only in Vaiakura. The conquests of Io were the beginning of the expansion of the Tinomana family. Upon Ru's return, Io gave up the *ariki*-ship and Ru resumed it,⁴³ with the width of his political influence greatly increased by his new alliance with Io. In the next generation Te Mutu, the son of Ru, befriended Kaena and

for some time Te Mutu lived with Kaena, they continually drank kava. Te Mutu then wanted the wife of Kaena and told the latter she was no good. Then Kaena divided his goods with his wife. She did not understand this. Her name was Tamariki, a daughter of Maoate, and she cried when sent away but she left with her property. Word of this was sent to Te Mutu at Vaiakura, and he sent someone after the woman to bring her back. When Kaena saw that Tinomana had taken his discarded wife he knew Te Mutu had lied to him, and prepared for war, and sent messages to Aroa, Kavera and Rutaki.⁴⁴

Te Mutu was threatened with being killed and eaten by the *mata'iaipo* allied to Kaena, and he fled to Makea's lands, where his son Te Paii was born. When he became a man, Te Paii returned to Arorangi with 40 men (a number probably showing a biblical influence). 'They killed a man and anyone they met on the road they killed. At Pokoinu they killed the inhabitants. At Akaoa they were joined by 40 others. Te Paii stopped at Puaikura [Arorangi].' Te Paii proceeded to conquer the nine *tapere* between Pokoinu and Akaoa.⁴⁵ These conquests established the district of Arorangi under Tinomana Ariki, the situation that was in place at contact a further two generations later.

After the conquest Tinomana set about increasing his political control at the expense of the previously independent *mata'iaipo*, while giving land to others who were dependent on him. Puri was previously *mata'iaipo tūtara*⁴⁶ in Pokoinu i Raro Tapere, but he and the other *mata'iaipo* of Pokoinu would not fight alongside Te Paii and so were driven off.⁴⁷ Allies of Tinomana were put on to some of Puri's lands.⁴⁸ Puri was put back on lands between the mountains and the Ara Metua as a *rangatira*, but on the lands seaward of the Ara Metua he had to pay *'ātinga*.⁴⁹ He had

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 242.

⁴¹ Tumu, *Te Piri* 73, MB I, II (1905), 368; Pitimani, *Anikitau Nūi* 199 ... , 333.

⁴² Io, *Vaireva* 90I, 242.

⁴³ Tinomana, *ibid.*, 245.

⁴⁴ Tangiao, *Maungaroa* 102, 257.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 258, 259.

⁴⁶ The *tūtara* was a chief *mata'iaipo*, often elected by his fellows, whose responsibility was to protect the people of a wider alliance, rather than to hold land or eat *'ātinga*.

⁴⁷ Timona, *Pokoinu i Raro* 87B, 214.

⁴⁸ Ati, *ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁹ Vaimotu, *ibid.*, 167; Tinomana, *ibid.*, 213.

considerable obligations placed on him as well as being put into a subservient position, while Tinomana avoided the problem of the dispossessed *mata'iapo* returning to reclaim his lands by force in the future.

Tinomana also increased his status by taking various titles upon himself. For instance, when Te Paii went on the land of Te Au at Akaoa, Te Au insulted him, so Te Paii wiped out the Te Au and cooked them. Only one child escaped to Matavera.⁵⁰ Eventually he returned and married into a *mata'iapo* family, and his descendants regained the title of Te Au,⁵¹ but 'Te Au was the tutara, that is Tinomana'.⁵² In other words Tinomana took the Te Au title, and its prerogatives, for himself, and while the descendants of Te Au regained a portion of the land they only resumed a diminished title.

Although Te Paii was the conqueror, he was not the *ariki* — that title was retained by his father. The *toa* could not justify retaining the title if a man of purer descent and higher status was available. Io and Te Paii were the leading men of Arorangi in their generation. They would have held considerable effective power, and female descendants of both married *ariki* from the Tinomana family. These alliances would have strengthened the positions of both families, and incorporated the *mana* of the *toa* into the *ariki* line.

Obtaining Land by Gift

Conquest or descent from the founding ancestor were not the only ways of obtaining or laying claim to land. It is worth making a brief aside here to examine the ways in which land could be gifted, since the process of gifting runs counter to the main theme of conquest.

When Te Mutu returned to Arorangi, or was driven out of Avarua depending on who is telling the story, he took five *mata'iapo* of Takuvaine with him to Vaiakura.⁵³ As they crossed Tokerau, one of the conquered *tapere*, Autopa Mata'iapo, asked that the five *mata'iapo* be handed over to him, because there was no place for them at Vaiakura. Autopa then established them, 'each of them his share', that is according to their rank, on his own lands.⁵⁴ Not only did Autopa save their lives, but he gained some powerful allies in the process. It is unlikely that the gift of Autopa was absolute — after all this was the land on which he was established by Tangi'ia, and most probably he would not have been able to give it away entirely even if he had wanted to.

Land could be gifted as a reward for services rendered. Moumoutoa Mata'iapo went up to the mountains to steal *'utu* (plantains) 'and as thieves do he came to grief and fell down the mountain [breaking his leg]. His family would not look after him

⁵⁰ The device of only one person surviving is a surprisingly common one in the records, a metaphor for conquest, loss of status and diminishment of *mana*, rather than a historical fact, e.g., Iotia, *Vaiakura 127S*, MB II (1906), 297; Maiva, *Tereora 106B*, MB V (1912), 217.

⁵¹ Aniteroa, *Akooa seaward*, MB I (1903), 153.

⁵² Puai, *ibid.*, 57.

⁵³ Te Vaimotu, *Te Rua o te Marama 88J*, 292.

⁵⁴ Te Kii, *ibid.*, 268.

but Mata did.⁵⁵ When Moumoutoa died of his wounds, he gave land to Mata for as long as he and his descendants lived. The line of Mata died out 150 years prior to the court case, and the land then reverted to Moumoutoa.⁵⁶

A frequent service for which land was given was aid in battle, particularly to those who shielded the *ariki*. Putu was rewarded with 10 blocks of land in Pue and Tapae for his courage and for saving the life of Makea Tinirau in battle.⁵⁷ Even Makea's supporters were ashamed of the attempt to despoil Putu's descendants of this land in the court, and this is one of the few occasions when the court took notice of the comments and behaviour of spectators, rather than only of sworn witnesses in the stand.⁵⁸

The Expansion of the Makea Family

Although it is Tinomana who is most clearly seen increasing his power at the expense of the *mata'iaho*, the same process was under way elsewhere, and warfare was not confined to Arorangi. Although the Makea family trace their descent from Karika the first Makea Ariki in Avarua would seem to have been Te Pa Atua Kino, only three generations before contact. Te Pa Atua Kino's eldest sons by each of his three wives then became the progenitors of the modern Makea titles — Pini became Makea Nui, Keu became Makea Karika and Vakaatini became Makea Vakaatini. The Makea were not the only *ariki* family in Avarua, a situation they set about remedying.

This land was obtained by conquest ... and because of this conquest there is no overlord on this land. It was owing to our courage in war we obtained this land. Arauira Ariki and his people were conquered, he was a toa ... They surrounded his hiding place. He tried to spear them and they to spear him. And finally they killed him ... They cut him up and ate him. Then they seized the land. Tautu was in the centre, Kao on one side and Tumu on the other side ... Tautu left the land and went to Arai te Tonga, but the other brothers remained on the land. The news of what they had done was conveyed to Makea Keu, the elder brother. And he asked, where is the land? Tautu said, it has been divided. Makea Keu said, have I none? Tautu replied, your piece is in the centre (62 on plan). That is what I know of this land as taught me by my ancestors.⁵⁹

The *rangatira*, although they acted in concert during the conquest, were as likely to act independently of each other at other times. As members of the Makea family, the conquerors remained independent on their lands, though Tautu had been obliged to hand over some of his conquered land to his elder brother, the *ariki*.

⁵⁵ Te Kura, *Marae-pure 189C*, MB IV (1908), 259.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 260; Moumoutoa, *ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁷ Purua, *Vaiamuri 191K*, MB IV (1908), 77.

⁵⁸ Judge Walter Gudgeon, *ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁹ Anautoa, *Vaitapu 187I & Te Kou 126*, MB V (1912), 313.

Conquest in Takitumu

Another conquest was the expulsion of Tama Ariki from Avaavaroa by the *mata'iapo* of Takitumu, in the last generation of the pre-contact period. The *mata'iapo* divided the newly conquered land, setting aside portions for the *ariki*, Kainuku included. Kainuku took no military role in the conquest, and it seems likely that he received a portion of the land for two reasons, firstly out of respect for his position as *ariki*, and secondly the *mata'iapo* wished him to take the important position of *tūlara* in Avaavaroa. Kainuku's place and power was not in Avaavaroa but in Avana.⁶⁰ Teairo says 'I was one of those who made Kainuku our chief here. I own my own land.'⁶¹ The *mata'iapo* retained their independence on their own lands, and their relationship to the *ariki* was a voluntary alliance or partnership between senior and junior, rather than an obligation of inferior to superior. It seems that Pa and Kainuku, having a more secure claim to status through uninterrupted occupation of land and title, were less active in extinguishing *mata'iapo* independence than the expansionist Tinomana. But as we shall see in the next section, their success in war meant that they too gained in power.

It is not at all clear why this action was carried out against Tama, and what part he and his people had played in events up to this time. It is probable that the Tama line was one of a number of contending, and at one time equal, lines and that the story in the court records recalls their final extirpation a generation before contact. His history has not been recorded except where it forms part of the history of his conquerors. Two causes are given for this action on the part of the *mata'iapo* of Takitumu, one that 'Tinomana asked More and Tangiao to put an end to the rule of Tamaariki in Avaavaroa'⁶² and that 'Avaavaroa was valuable on a/c of its taro and the mataiapos wanted it'.⁶³ These two statements are not mutually exclusive. This is typical of the evidence in the minute books, where a proximate cause for an action is often given, but the chains of cause and effect that are used to construct European historical narratives are not.

Oral Tradition Regarding Contact

Rarotonga's isolation came to an end in mid-1814 when the *Cumberland* under Captain Goodenough anchored in Ngatangiaa harbour. H.E. Maude and Marjorie Crocombe in particular examine the story in some detail.⁶⁴ The political situation at this time is not clear, but what happened during the *Cumberland's* visit and its aftermath are well documented. The Europeans 'were friendly with Takitumu. They took the Europeans and their guns to [Arorangi] and when they got there they showed the toas of Arorangi to the Europeans, who shot them. They killed many of them. Tinomana made peace with Ngatangiaa, for he said they would all

⁶⁰ Samuela Te Rei, *Avaavaroa 17*, MB I (1904), 116.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶³ Maoate, *Taapake 9*, MB VII, VIII (1916), 37.

⁶⁴ Maude and Crocombe, 'Rarotongan sandalwood'.

be slain.⁶⁵ The Rarotongans, according to Maretu, encouraged the crew to steal food and the Rarotongan women lusted for the European men.⁶⁶ Vakapora also relates that the Europeans, who up till that time had been taking the food of commoners, stole Makea's coconuts, and in revenge two Europeans were killed. Maretu attributes this deed to Rupe, a younger brother of Makea.⁶⁷ Other Europeans, including Anne Butcher, Goodenough's mistress, and two New Zealand Maori crew, were also killed. When the crew of the *Cumberland* came on shore they killed one local man, and the others fled into the mountains. The *Cumberland* could not sail immediately, because her rudder was being repaired on shore.⁶⁸ Peace was restored a few days later, and the *Cumberland* soon departed. The *Sydney Gazette* of 22 October 1814 relates much the same story, except that the attack by Rupe, preceded by 'friendly intercourse' and 'much kindness', occurred 'instantaneously and unexpectedly'.⁶⁹

The superiority of the Europeans and their *mana* was only temporary, and it is not clear whether the advantage they brought to Pa and Kainuku lasted any longer. Nonetheless the two *ariki* were clearly victorious in the years of war that followed, besieging both Makea and Tinomana on the slopes of Maungaroa. The proximate cause of this war was that Makea Pori, son of Makea Tinirau Ariki, took Kainuku's wife and refused to give her up.⁷⁰ Fighting soon followed. Tinirau, realising he was outnumbered, enlisted the aid of Tinomana, and when the two war parties met, the *toa* of Takitumu were triumphant. Rupe, who Pa and Kainuku doubtless recalled had initiated hostilities with the *Cumberland* to their eventual disadvantage,⁷¹ was killed, the incident by which this war is most often characterised. Makea went into exile for seven years on Maungaroa.

There were incessant wars and about 730 people died during them. Breadfruit and coconuts were cut down and the land was devastated as a result of these wars. Makea remained at Arorangi. After a long time, Pa, Kainuku and the lesser chiefs relented. They felt sorry saying, 'Let us make peace. We'll get Makea to go back on to his own portion of the island'.⁷²

Tinomana remained besieged and under very real threat of extinction until rescued by the arrival of Christianity. It is not really clear why Makea was brought back. 'They felt sorry' is the rhetorical expression of the Christian convert Maretu, but nowhere is a more satisfactory explanation to be found. Perhaps Pa and Kainuku lacked sufficient strength finally to defeat both Makea and Tinomana, and they preferred to finish off the latter while placing the former in a subservient role.

Certainly these wars continued to strengthen the *ariki* position on Rarotonga and the loss of *mata'iaפו* independence. When Te Païi had conquered the nine *tapere* of

⁶⁵ Vakapora, *Te Aroa 127A*, MB IV (1908), 283.

⁶⁶ Maretu, *Cannibals and Converts*, 42.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁸ Vakapora, *Te Aroa 127A*, 284.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Gosset, 'Notes on the discovery of Rarotonga', 13.

⁷⁰ Te Pa, *Pokoinu 107* ... , 57; Maretu, *Cannibals and Converts*, 44.

⁷¹ Maude and Crocombe, 'Rarotongan sandalwood', 44.

⁷² Maretu, *Cannibals and Converts*, 51.

Arorangi, he had also expelled the *mata'iaho* from the *tapere* to the north of Arorangi, an area known as Nikao. These *mata'iaho* removed to Rangiatea Tapere (modern Matavera) on the east side of the island. Tamarua makes it clear that his right to land in Nikao came from Tangi'ia — 'Concerning this land of Pokoinu it was given to the first Tamarua by Tangiia when the land was first divided'.⁷³ It is not clear by what right or conquest the *mata'iaho* obtained land in Rangiatea, but after the fight in which Rupe was killed they re-occupied their former lands in Nikao. When Makea returned from exile the *mata'iaho* of Rangiatea were again driven from their land by Makea with the aid of Pa and Kainuku.⁷⁴ Thus the *ariki* continued to strengthen their position at the expense of the previously independent *mata'iaho*, as the Rangiatea *mata'iaho* became subject to Pa and Kainuku.

There is one final and telling incident that occurred between the landing of Papeiha and Rio in 1823 and the arrival of Charles Pitman in 1827. When the first church was being built at Avarua, all the people of the island took a part in its construction.

The mataiapos of Takitumu above named (living at Tupapa) had theirs done before the others came from Takitumu. When the rest of Takitumu came they found parts of their share were finished. Takao, a leading mataiaho of Pa, asked who did this work. These Tupapa mataiapos said 'Pa and Kainuku', because they were the *ariki*s of these 9 Tupapa mataiapos. Their reply was repeated. The question was repeated a third time, with a similar reply. Takao then got up on the house and tore down the thatching. These 9 mataiapos then left Takitumu and joined Makea. Prior to that they were under Pa and Kainuku, and not under Makea in any sense.⁷⁵

The Tupapa *mata'iaho* were probably the last sufficiently independent group on the island capable of changing their allegiance with relative impunity. The Rangiatea *mata'iaho* had been humbled, those of Avarua were losing their status and the *mata'iaho* of Arorangi were increasingly subservient to Tinomana, their conqueror of two generations previously. The *mata'iaho* were never entirely dependant on the *ariki* — even during the 19th century they retained a certain degree of independence on their own lands — but the balance of power had shifted.

Social Fluidity and Flexibility

A man from Matavera Tapere named Taakua stole some fish from Anga Mata'iaho's *pā ika* (fish trap) and had to flee. Temaiva took him in and gave him land in neighbouring Tupapa Tapere, renaming him Te Pa in memory of the cause of his expulsion.⁷⁶ Taakua was a *mata'iaho* in Matavera, though he became a *komono* (equivalent to a *rangatira*) of Temaiva in Tupapa, and in Matavera Temaiva was a *komono* of Te Pa. Temaiva's generosity greatly strengthened both his and Te Pa's positions, and the two were considered to be of one family by the time this evidence

⁷³ *Pokoimu* 107, 52.

⁷⁴ Raea [Rupe], *ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁵ Maoate, *Makea succession*, MB IX (1923), 358.

⁷⁶ Temaiva, *Taranga te Uru*, MB I (1905), 359.

was given to the court.⁷⁷ This is not the sort of relationship that would be expected in the highly hierarchical society that has been described for pre-contact Rarotonga,⁷⁸ and other parts of Polynesia.

This review of the oral traditions of the land court records has included other, similar examples. For instance the *rangatira* who conquered Arauira Ariki came to an accommodation with the *ariki* (their brother, Keu) by giving him a share of the conquered land, while the conquerors of Tama Ariki in Avaavaroa made Kainuku their *tūtara*. Each situation was negotiated between *ariki*, *mata'iapo*, *rangatira* and commoner as the need arose, and unique relationships were the response to unique situations.

Fluidity and flexibility of this kind characterise the social structure of pre-contact Rarotonga. Land holdings were divided or consolidated, social relations were created, renewed or discarded, and obligations were imposed or upheld as the occasion demanded. Traditional power relationships were not monolithic structures predicated on invariable laws of genealogical precedence. Before contact the *mata'iapo* enjoyed a greater independence than subsequently, power was less centralised and power structures less codified. Obligations were reciprocal. The relationships between *mata'iapo* or *rangatira*, and between them and the *ariki*, were negotiated and renegotiated on a case by case basis. How else can the positions of Temaiva and Te Pa be understood? This is a unique accommodation between two *mata'iapo*, and by extension between their two families.

The claim that society was characterised by fluidity, that social formations were governed by contingency as much as by structure, is not a new one for Polynesia, though the 35 years since Rarotongan social structure was examined by Crocombe⁷⁹ throws the contrast into sharper relief. Social fluidity has been demonstrated by archaeologists and others in New Zealand⁸⁰ and the Marquesas,⁸¹ for instance. Glenn Petersen examined the ramage system in the Caroline Islands.⁸² Two competing sources of seniority, genealogical descent and age (birth order), mean that there may be competing claims to any title, and that this ambiguity renders the socio-political 'system flexible and, therefore, viable and valuable'.⁸³ This would seem to be an inherent characteristic of the ramage system, which Petersen sees as an organising principle of not just the descent group, but an entire political system. This implies the existence of factions, conflict and power politics, all of which must be carried on within a system flexible enough to accommodate them and survive. An organising principle is not a practical reality, and any political

⁷⁷ Te Pa, *ibid.*, 352; Poroaki, *ibid.*, 355.

⁷⁸ Crocombe, *Land Tenure in the Cook Islands*, 27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Harry Allen, 'Horde and *Hapū*: the reification of kinship and residence in prehistoric Aboriginal and Māori settlement organisation', in Janet Davidson, Geoffrey Irwin, Foss Leach, Andrew Pawley and Dorothy Brown (eds), *Oceanic Culture History: essays in honour of Roger Green* (Dunedin 1996); Angela Ballara, *Iwi: the dynamics of Maori tribal organisation from c. 1769 to c. 1945* (Wellington 1998); Geoffrey Irwin, 'Land, pā and polity', *New Zealand Archaeological Association Monograph*, 15 (1985).

⁸¹ Nicholas Thomas, *Marquesan Societies: inequality and political transformation in Eastern Polynesia* (Oxford 1990).

⁸² Glenn Petersen, 'Sociopolitical rank and conical clanship in the Caroline Islands', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 108 (1999).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 387.

system must retain a degree of flexibility if it is to remain viable. Social variation and fluidity arise out of the numerous contradictions and ambiguities in all levels of social structure. Variation in turn gives rise to a flexibility of actions and interpretations, a loose set of socially possible responses that can accommodate unforeseen contingency in ways that a series of automatic, culturally sanctioned reflexes cannot. The Rarotongan system was able to cope with and absorb the missionary project without being any the less Rarotongan for the experience.

THIS REVIEW HAS shown that the nature of social relationships was changing in pre-contact times. During a period of constant, if intermittent, warfare the *ariki* were able to take advantage of their already pre-eminent position in society to increase their power and influence at the expense of the independent *mata'iaho*. This process is accentuated in the 19th century, when the missionary presence meant that the mechanics of power changed, but in pre-contact time the process was already under way. If Pa and Kainuku had been unable to press home their advantage over Tinomana and Makea, and had instead allowed Makea to return to his lands, then perhaps the *ariki* aggrandisement of power and drive to establish hegemony had gone as far as it could, without the unforeseen intervention of history in the form of the London Missionary Society. The *ariki* are the successors of Tangi'ia, who delegated political power to the *mata'iaho*, his crew members and companions, when he established the *tapere* system. The history of Rarotonga in the 250 or so years prior to the land courts is the history of the *ariki* reclaiming that power.

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ABSTRACT

The records of the early 20th century Rarotongan land courts are an invaluable source of ethnohistoric information regarding pre-contact land tenure, social and political relations, and historical processes affecting tenure and relations. They are analysed here from the point of view of contextualising the archaeological record of the island. Pre-contact Rarotongan society is shown to have been fluid and flexible, although one notable trend is the gradual aggrandisement of *ariki* power. This trend continues into the missionary and early colonial periods, where political unity and *ariki* hegemony become established. European intervention was a single, though defining, episode in a long history. Although it transformed the political order, Rarotonga remained resolutely Rarotongan.

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