

# A View from the West: Samoa in the Culture History of `Uvea (Wallis) and Futuna (Western Polynesia)

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## Abstract

The traditional connections between Samoa in Western Polynesia and the neighbouring archipelagos of Fiji, Tonga and the Cook islands have long been recognized, through a series of in-depth studies. But surprisingly little has been compiled about the influence of Samoa on some of its closest neighbours to the west, the small islands of 'Uvea (Wallis) and Futuna. This paper proposes to highlight some of the Samoan connections that appear in the oral accounts of the two islands, but also through the archaeological data and linguistics. These information(s) help to disentangle the long influence of Samoa over the northern part of Western Polynesia, before the late-prehistoric influence of the Tongan maritime chiefdom on the region.

**KEYWORDS:** West Polynesia, Fiji, Cikobia, `Uvea, Lapita, interaction, language, monumental architecture, oral traditions

A chief was living in Samoa, named *Raho*...*Raho* had a daughter whose name was *Vaimarasi*, who was married to a high chief in Samoa named *Tuitoga*. *Tuitoga*, moreover, had a Samoan wife [as well]. And the Samoan wife became pregnant first, and was approaching the time of confinement, before the fact that *Vaimarasi* [also] was with child became noticeable. And the Samoans started to make preparations for the feast that would be held in honour of the Samoan woman's baby, without considering *Vaimarasi's* baby. *Raho* did not like this...[and] wanted *Vaimarasi* to be delivered before the Samoan woman [This is what happened]. Now *Vaimarasi's* baby was a girl, her name being Maiva...and after a while [the Samoan woman] gave birth to a boy, to whom they gave the name *Fumaru*.... *Raho*...[said that] he wanted to make a home for his granddaughter, which should be far away from Samoa. Thereupon...twins [children of *Raho*], filled two baskets with earth - a presentation basket and an ordinary basket.... The twins then put these two baskets on board a canoe of *aftea* wood, and they, together with *Raho* and his household, got onto the canoe and came to found this island of Rotuma.... So the twins emptied the presentation basket of earth on [a] rock, [thus] forming an island. This done, the twins left *Raho* and his company on the island, and took the [other] basket of earth and flew off [with it] towards Futuna. On and on the two girls flew till they got there, and then they emptied out the basket of earth and formed the island known as 'Arofi.

Churchward 1937:113-114.

## Introduction

This origin tale of the island of Rotuma in northern Fiji, refers to the link between Samoa and the island of Futuna (with its small neighbouring island Alofi), stepping-stone and gateway to Melanesia. Futuna is the western-most archipelago of Western Polynesia. Located about 350 km north-east of Fiji, it is composed of the long mountainous island of Futuna, 15 km by five km and reaching 500 m in altitude, and the island of 'Alofi, about eight km long. Futuna, of volcanic origin and lacking a protective reef on most of its coastline, is the last archipelago on the western side of the Andesite line (Nunn 1994). About 240 km to the north-east lies 'Uvea (Wallis Island), 15 km long, a flattened island of recent

geological appearance, pierced by a number of volcanic craters and totally surrounded by a barrier reef. The two archipelagos, geologically and ecologically very dissimilar, lie respectively 415 km and 270 km to the west of Savai'i (Figure 1).

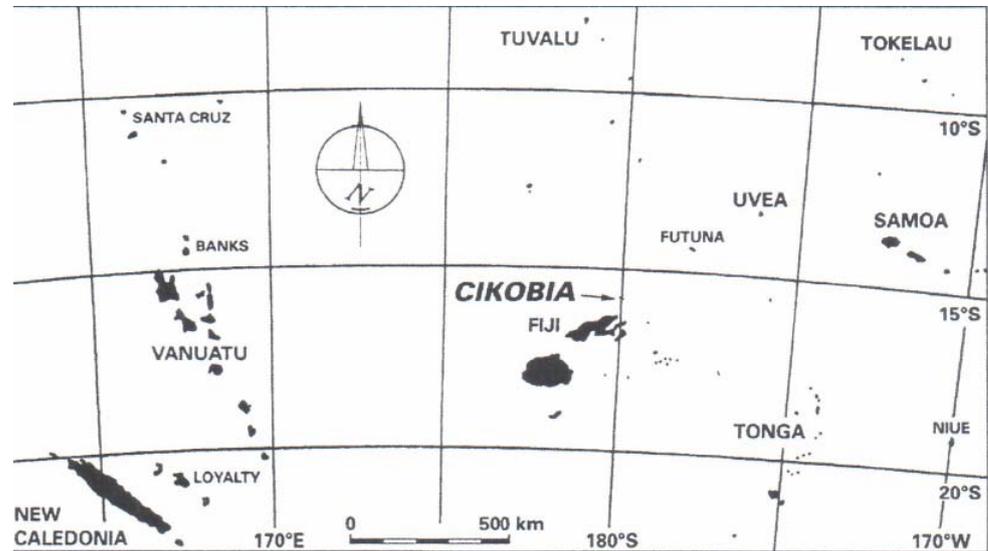


Figure 1: Location of Futuna and 'Uvea in the north of West Polynesia

Because of the annexation of Futuna and 'Uvea by France in the 19th century, a number of pre-European connections that anchored these islands to their cultural region have been lost during the colonial period (Poncet 1972), each foreign power trying to avoid the perpetuation of traditional links between the different archipelagos of the central Pacific. It is not surprising then that the francophone inhabitants of 'Uvea and Futuna today maintain more regular connections with New Caledonia in southern Melanesia, than with the neighbouring islands of Samoa and Tonga in West Polynesia. But oral traditions also point to major changes witnessed by the region over the centuries preceding the advent of Westerners, with the development of an expansionist political chiefdom originating in Tongatapu. This "Tongan Maritime Chiefdom" managed to extend its direct control over a number of islands of West Polynesia and Fiji during the second millennium AD, bringing in new cultural, political and linguistic influences, which have overshadowed former traditions (cf. Kirch 1984a; Aswani and Graves 1998; Burley and Clark 2003). This is especially the case with the islands of northern Tonga, like Niuatoputapu (Kirch 1988) and Niuafou'ou as well as 'Uvea (Sand 1998), where the Tongan influence has substantially reshaped cultural behaviours. Although numerous studies have been carried out on the triangular relations between Fiji, Tonga and Samoa (for example, Barnes and Hunt 2005), these two recent forms of "colonial" processes have mostly overlooked the historical connections between Futuna, 'Uvea and Samoa, who form the northern geographic axis of Western Polynesia. This paper is an attempt to put the two francophone islands back into the central Pacific picture, by proposing a preliminary look at the data of oral traditions, at archaeological results and also at linguistics. The structure of the presentation will favour a chronological approach.

### First Settlement Period

Currently, the archaeological data point to a first settlement phase throughout the region of Fiji and Western Polynesia linked to the spread of Lapita populations at about 1000-800 BC (Burley and Dickinson 2001; Sand in press). Although the data for Western Fiji (Nunn et al. 2005) and the main

islands of Tonga (Burley et al. 2002) are today fairly well defined, north-east Fiji and the northern part of Western Polynesia remain less well understood. A simple look at a map points to the existence of a natural route from Fiji to Samoa, passing through Cikobia (Fiji), Futuna and 'Uvea (Figure 1). Not surprisingly, archaeological research in these three islands has shown the presence of Eastern Lapita sites, all dated around 850-800 BC (Sand 2000). This fairly late chronological signature falls well in line with the latest redating of the Lapita site of Mulifanua on the west coast of Upolu, calibrated around 800 BC (Petchey 2001). There is still a debate between archaeologists on the direction followed by the first settlers to the islands of northern West Polynesia, between a possible 'voyaging corridor' going from Tongatapu to Samoa (for example, Burley et al. 2002) and a west-east movement from Vanua Levu (Sand in press). Two archaeological data appear to favour the second hypothesis. The first is the presence of Lapita sherds in Mulifanua, petrographically sourced to the region of Udu Point in north-east Fiji (Petchey 2001). The second is that, during Lapita times, all navigation on simple canoes from Fiji to Samoa, if it did not go through the Lau group and Tonga, would have naturally required stopovers in Futuna and/or 'Uvea, which allow to get to the north-west and then take an east/south-east route to Savai'i. The existence of specific connections between the islands of northern West Polynesia about 2,800 years ago implied in this model, can be highlighted through a study of dentate stamped Lapita patterns present on the potteries. This has allowed Kirch to identify "a 'northern group' of Early Eastern Lapita sites which ... share a simplified set of design elements and motifs" (Kirch 1988:188).

Over the succeeding millennium of pottery production in West Polynesia, vessel forms started to diverge from a common pool developed in the entire region after the end of Lapita (Smith 2001). Although for over 500 years, the pots seem to evolve in a regional dynamic, very little is still known about the last part of the Futunan ceramic sequence, which may have been influenced by Fiji (Frimigacci 1990). In 'Uvea, the last period, between about 200 BC and 200-400 AD, is characterized by the production of mainly open platters, some fairly thin but others with very thickened walls and out-curved flat rims (Sand 1998). The nearest regional equivalent for these simple vessels is clearly Samoa, who produced during the "Polynesian Plainware" phase a number of bowl forms, identified in different sites in western and eastern Samoa (Green 1974). This connection is not really surprising, as 'Uvea and Samoa are located on the eastern side of the Andesite line and their populations had to adapt their production systems to less diverse geological environments than those found in the rest of Western Polynesia. Broad similarities in form of the adze assemblages during the ceramic period are also apparent in the presence of Type IV adzes in Samoa and 'Uvea at the turn of the first millennium AD (Green and Davidson 1969; Sand 1998). All this points to possible strong connections between 'Uvea and Samoa during this period, explained by geographical proximity but also geological linkages leading to shared adaptation processes.

### **The Dark Ages and Linguistics**

The loss of pottery in Western Polynesia before the middle of the first millennium AD (Green 1974; Sand 1992) deprives archaeologists of a major data set for tracking changes in regional cultural development. The period between the end of the ceramic sequence and the advent of monumental architecture related to traditional accounts during the second millennium AD, has been sometimes termed the "dark ages" (Davidson 1979). Little archaeological data from the first millennium AD can be used to show regional connections and identify differences. On a regional scale, the major input for this period is the identification, by linguistic studies, of the break-up of Proto-Polynesian into two distinct subgroups, namely Proto-Tongic in the south and Proto-Nuclear Polynesian in the north (Biggs 1971). This split marked the clear appearance of a northern sphere of mutual influences in the West Polynesian region, differentiated from the dynamics underway in the Tongan arc during the first millennium AD. The Proto-Nuclear Polynesian subgroup split before the end of the millennium into two branches, northern West Polynesia developing a Proto-Samoic Outlier (northern dialects of pre-Polynesian) (see Figure 2). Significantly for our purpose, this Samoic Outlier once again concerned the whole northern half of West Polynesia, comprising at that time Samoa and Futuna, but also 'Uvea and Niuaotupapu, even if these latter two islands today speak languages sharing close affinities with the Tongan languages (Biggs 1980).

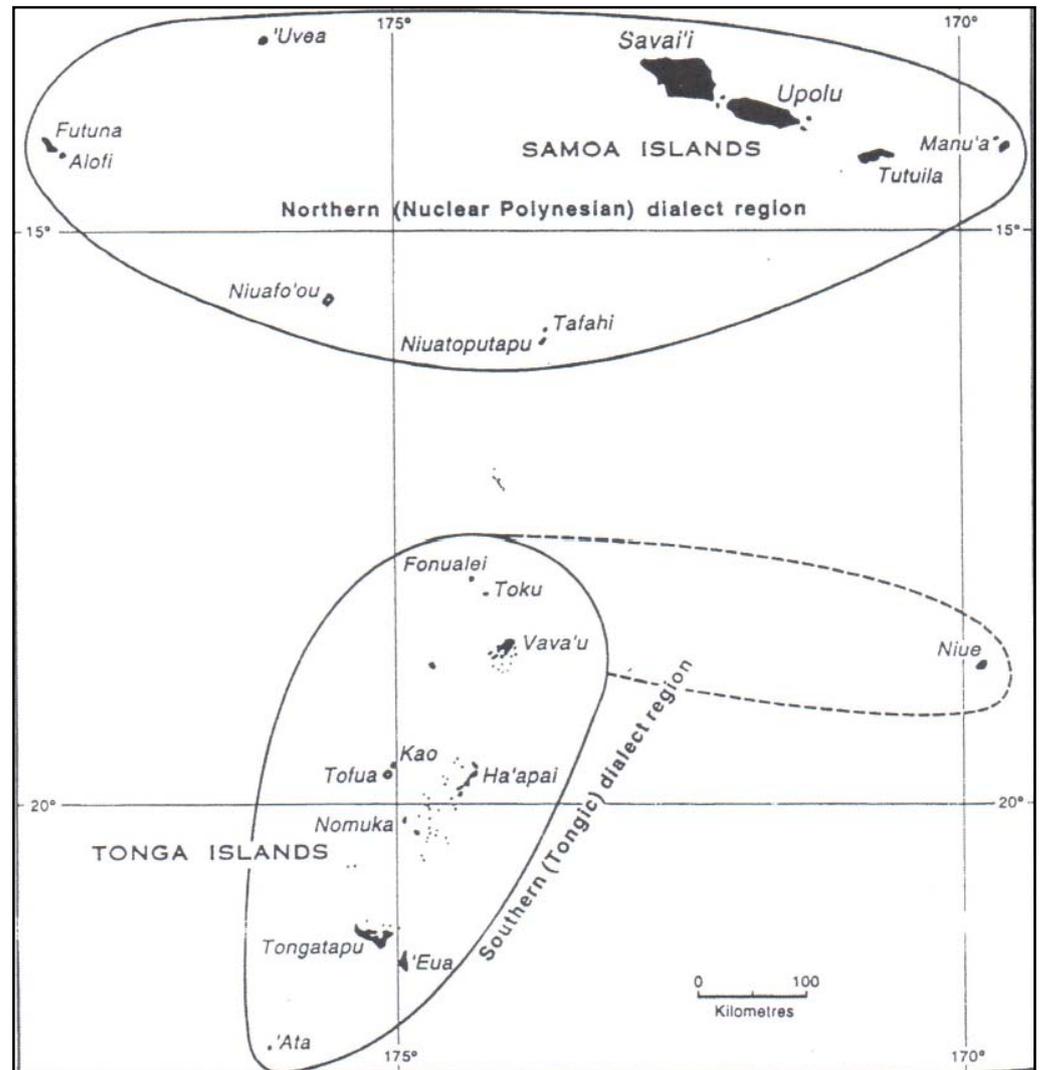


Figure 2: The northern and southern dialects of pre-Polynesian, showing the inclusion of Futuna, 'Uvea and Niuatoputapu in the Nuclear Polynesian dialect region (courtesy A. Pawley).

### West Polynesia Oral Traditions and Archaeology

Not surprisingly, data on the last period of the prehistoric chronology related to the traditional West Polynesian chiefdoms and their oral traditions are the most numerous. This period saw, in particular, the marked influence of the "Tongan Maritime Chiefdom" over the whole central Pacific, obscuring the regional influence of the other archipelagos, especially Samoa. This is the case for 'Uvea, where Tongan invasions in the 15th-16th centuries and the establishment of Tongan-derived hegemonic rule have obscured older cultural connections (Sand 1999). For example, Burrows has noted that "32.6 per cent [of the place names recorded on 'Uvea] are [also] found in Tonga, [but only] 4.5 per cent in Samoa" (Burrows 1937:169-170). This is a surprising situation for a Proto-Samoic Outlier island, indicating the advent of a major disruption process in recent prehistory (Pollock 1996; Sand 1998). As

a consequence, oral traditions are scarce on the links between the two closest neighbours, with only passing references. For example, Burrows mentions that "contact with Samoa is said to go back to the time of the legendary voyager, Tangiia (Blanc 1914). Henquel's history (detailing the oral traditions of 'Uvea) mentions several Samoan boats and men. Oliver (Dix 1848) says that his host, the high priest of 'Uvea, was born in Samoa. Voyages between these neighbouring groups were probably not uncommon" (Burrows 1937:171; see also Nicholas 1892 for Tangiia in Rarotonga oral tradition).

Archaeological data can demonstrate this point and also tell a more complex story. Direct relation between Samoa and 'Uvea is indicated, like elsewhere in the Western Pacific (Best et al. 1992), by the presence of a number of easily identifiable large adzes originating from the Tataga Matau quarry in Tutuila, American Samoa (Sand and Llau 2000). A project is underway seeking to identify among the numerous adzes found in surface collection on the island, other specimens coming from less recognizable quarries of Samoa.

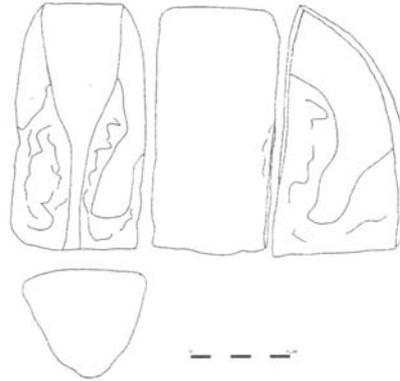


Figure 3: Proximal part of a large adze of Samoan origin, discovered in the south of 'Uvea.

Monumental architecture is another topic suggesting links between Samoa and 'Uvea during the last millennium. Surveys on the latter island have identified, aside from raised house-mounds for commoners, the existence of large fortified compounds defended by deep ditches and high walls made of basaltic boulders, such as Lanutavake in the southern district of Mua. Some of the large fortifications enclose massive ceremonial platforms, several metres high, like the large Talietumu mound inside the fort of Kolonui (Frimigacci and Hardy 1997; Sand 1998). Although oral traditions point to a link between these monumental structures and the Tongan invasion (Burrows 1937:17-45), some dating results have shown that the process of platform building started well before the arrival of the Tongans led by the Tui Tonga Kauulufonua in the 15th century (Frimigacci 2000). In conjunction to this data, most of the Tongan tradition of fortification-building seems to stem from the political crisis witnessed by the Tongan chiefdom much later, at the end of the 18th century (for example, Marais 1990). The closest affinity of a great number of the 'Uvean forts and large platforms is not in Tonga, but clearly in Samoa, where sites of the same type have been regularly studied for decades (Green 2002a). It is though not impossible that part of the monumental architecture of 'Uvea was related to a pre-Tongan period before the 15th century, structures that the Tongans simply appropriated and used when they settled the island (Sand 1993). The total absence of star-mound shaped platforms on 'Uvea (and Futuna), although pigeon hunting was practised, may be an indication of the relatively recent appearance of this unique shape of mound in Samoa during the very last centuries before

European settlement (Herdrich 1991).



Figure 4: View of the eastern part of Talietumu platform, 90m long, 60m wide and reaching 5m high.

Because they successfully repulsed all Tongan invasion attempts (Frimigacci et al. 1995), the Futunans have retained a great number of their specific customs. As summarized by E. Burrows, "Futunan culture, in many respects, is not only western Polynesian but early Polynesian" (Burrows 1936:233). Aside from the linguistic data classifying the Futunan language as a Samoic Outlier, connections between Samoa and Futuna can be identified in a number of important oral traditions. The origin story of the highest chieftom of Futuna in Alo, represented today by the lineage Tui Agaifo but formerly named Fakavelikele, tells the story of the arrival of three Samoans, Mago, his wife Tafaleata and another man named Salo, navigating "in a coconut shell". Their youngest son Fakavelikele (or one of their descendants according to other traditions) founded the ruling line (Frimigacci 1990:69-70). Another important and powerful line of the southern district of Futuna, Tui Asoa, claims a Samoan origin. The date of these arrivals is unknown but probably relates to events of the middle of the second millennium AD. Burrows noted that the ethnographic data seemed to infer that "arrivals from Samoa were peaceful" (Burrows 1936:56).

A number of other examples in the oral traditions point to historical links between Futuna and Samoa. Burrows writes:

For one kindred ... the Fale Tolu or *kutuga feke*, there are suggestions of Samoan provenience. The name Fale Tolu occurs in Samoa as the ceremonial title of the village of Tau in Manu'a (Buck 1930:93; Mead 1930:193) and as the name of the *malae* of the neighbouring village of Faleasao (Mead 1930:196). The octopus, the divinity associated with this kindred, is widely known in Samoa in a similar connection. It is associated especially with Savaii: but some authors trace it back to Manu'a (Blanc nd.:

196) (Burrows 1936:231).

The importance of the octopus bears a locational connection:

the chief, Tui Asoa, said they came from Samoa and landed at Pouma. It is worth noting that Pouma, in Samoa, is the name of the region inhabited by the octopus kindred (in Futuna the Fale Tolu). But Futunans say the old name of Pouma in Futuna was Pousi (Burrows 1936:27).

The fact that a previous name was remembered in Burrows' time suggests that the installation of the Fale Tolu happened relatively recently.

Other signs of relationships, like a taro named *talo manu'a* (Kirch 1994:77), a banana called *saamoa*, a variety of pandanus named *Pala Tutuila* and a dance entitled *faka-Saamoa* (Burrows 1936:56) are too general to be given any datable point in time. Direct relationships during the last millennium can be attested by the presence of a few massive adzes of typology and geology pointing to Tataga Matau in Tutuila (Frimigacci et al. 1985). It is worth noting that Futuna was probably one of the passing points for the distribution of these Samoan adzes to parts of Fiji (Clark 2002) - like Cikobia where some Samoan adzes have been found (Sand et al. 1999) - and beyond. The large-scale influence of the northern part of West Polynesia (and especially Futuna) further west in the Pacific, is probably best shown by the inclusion into the Samoic subgroup of Polynesian languages (more recently termed "Nuclear Polynesian dialect" (Marck 2000)) of all the Polynesian Outliers of island Melanesia (Pawley 1967). The existence of long-distance voyages to some of these Outliers is postulated by the discovery of Samoan-looking adzes (not geochemically sourced) as far away as the Solomon Islands (Kirch 1984b).

Another indication of shared influences between Futuna and Samoa could be suggested by morphological similarities in hilltop fortifications. Although the presence of banks, ditches and sometimes low walls in the two archipelagos may also simply be constrained by similarities in hilly topography (Green 2002b). This last example highlights how incorrect it would be to imagine Futuna as simply a smaller version of Samoa during the late part of the chronology. Burrows notes that in Futuna, there is an absence of "such devices as the long round houses, the composite bonito canoe, and a number of plaited articles, as well as of several characteristics of social organization" (Burrows 1936:231) like:

"talking chiefs, village maids, chiefs' language, division of privileges between the kinsfolk in the male line and those in the female line ... Buck's work on Samoa (1930) includes reference to several traits that he considers old in Polynesia, some of them in Samoa itself, but not prevalent there now. Among these are parallel rafters on the rounded end of houses (1930:665); inheritance of the position of master-craftsman (1930:84-85); pandanus leaf for house thatching (1930:83-84); right-through lashing of canoe planks (1930:672). All of these prevail in Futuna to this day. Presence in Futuna of some other practices absent in Samoa is interesting as bearing on the same point: felting of bark cloth, nose flute, backrest stones on old malae (Burrows 1936:233).

These examples are enough to indicate cultural differences and deep autonomous historical trajectories, leading to specific local traditions between Futuna and Samoa, in a context of regional networks at play on the *longue durée*.

## Conclusion

This quick synopsis of the connections identifiable between Samoa and its closest Polynesian neighbours to the west, has shown the longstanding regional influence of the large northern-eastern archipelago of Western Polynesia during pre-European times. Aside from linguistics, the information gathered from oral traditions and archaeological discoveries on 'Uvea and Futuna, mainly published in French, help to disentangle the role of Samoa in the human history of the central Pacific and counterbalance the pre-eminent role played by Tonga in the region over the last centuries before first European contact. Different geochemical sourcing studies underway on basalt tools discovered in 'Uvea and Futuna will soon give new insights into long-term relationships and exchanges between islands. They will also characterize local quarry signatures, allowing identification in Samoan,

Fijian and Tongan adze collections, of specimens originating from these two small archipelagos of northern West Polynesia. This paper has just scratched the surface of the complex topic of historical connections between the numerous islands of the Polynesian homeland during the nearly 3,000 years of its human history. There is, in conclusion, clearly more at play than the massive cultural influence of Tongatapu witnessed by the region, through the "Tongan Maritime Chiefdom", in the last part of the prehistoric chronology of the Central Pacific.

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