

# CHIEFS, FASHION AND ZEITGEIST: EXCLUSION AS AN EXPENSION STRATEGY IN KINSHIP BASED GROUPS IN THE SOCIETY ISLANDS

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**Abstract:** *In this paper I argue that chiefs created the contemporary fashion of ceremonial sites (marae) and that this was a phenomenon that we may call the zeitgeist (spirit of the time) of the Society Islands that extended far beyond the local sphere. This is based on the fact that memory based societies are driven by spontaneous subjective actions, which allow such changes, since only accepted ideas are remembered. A House Society model is explored to explain how certain chiefs successfully dominated larger areas and expressed power through domestic and ritual material remains. Their status position in society made it possible for the chiefs to exclude, as well as to include, others by help of such material expressions as well as by threats of war, through their war god missionaries, the arioi society. Inter marriages between powerful chiefly houses in different islands have been additional important factors to form alliances and create access to land e.g. to legitimize power relations. Ceremonial sites, generally called marae, were the important material expression of this power game. They were the focal points of important decisions in society, and the place where humans met with the gods. They were ritual sites, as well as memorial places tied to genealogies, mythologies and land titles. These monuments went through constant changes since re-building and additions were necessary to keep their functions alive.*

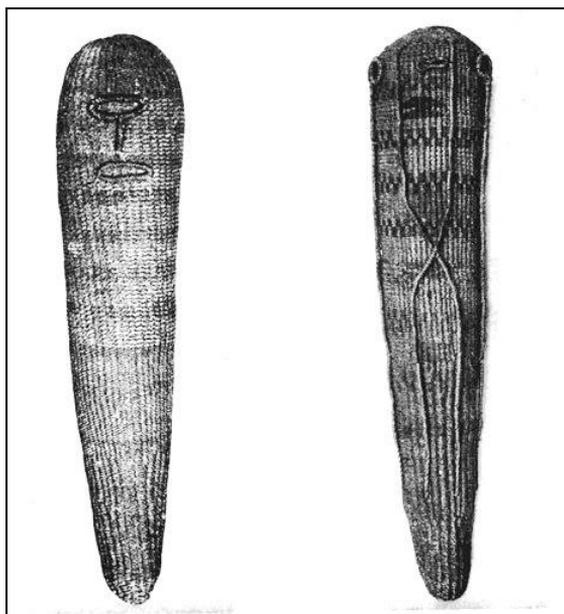
## INTRODUCTION

During the last ten years an intensification of the studies and excavations of ceremonial sites in the Society Islands has been undertaken. The monuments and their landscape and social contexts have been researched by different teams focusing in the Leeward and Windward Islands respectively (Wallin et al. 2003; Wallin and Solsvik 2010a; Kahn and Kirch 2003; Kahn 2011). These new efforts have inspired discussion, and new theoretical developments in the understanding of the monuments can be shaped based on these investigations.

The aim of this paper is to uncover how individual power, through exclusions (as well as by exclusive expressions) managed by *tabu* restrictions, was expanding in the Society Islands during the late prehistoric era and how this was achieved by high chiefs as creators of fashions, invented at the right moment, catching the zeitgeist or the spirit of the time (Vinken 2004). This should be understood in the light of the fact that some chiefs used their genealogical connections and links to the leading gods, which gave them advantages in this power struggle. They belonged to certain influential 'houses', and these chiefs were aware of their position and used it in the creation of monuments, as well as status symbols that were linked to divine status. The house society model (Levi-Strauss 1987) is useful for explaining how Polynesian chiefdoms were organized. The ceremonial monuments (*marae* mainly) as well as residential houses showed clear distinctions in their shapes (Wallin and Solsvik 2006a: 53). The *marae* was a sensitive tool used by the chiefly houses for fine grained distinctions, which are visible in a range of small variations in the architecture through time. The residential features on the other hand had one clear distinction, e.g. that the round ended houses were chiefly status houses (Green et al. 1967, fig. 10). The 'trend setters' of *marae* stylistic change seem to have been the traditional aristocracy at Opoa on the island of Raiatea, since they, according to local mythology in the Society Islands, had a closer connection to the gods than other chiefs of the Societies (Henry 1928: 119). This is especially evident when it comes to the establishment of the war (and fertility) god 'Oro, which had his original seat at the *marae* Taputapuatea at Opoa. Henry mentions that according to traditional history 'Oro created a mission school with the seat at Opoa, and the first master of this school was high chief Tamatoa of Opoa (Danielsson 1956: 166). The Taputapuatea structure was an expression of belonging to the worship of 'Oro (Figure 1).

This can be understood as a physical statement of belonging, and those that did not profess to 'Oro were excluded from the ceremonial site. Not professing to 'Oro could be seen as a provocation that could lead to war (Handy 1927: 265). These factors were powerful tools in expansion strategies that emerged from around AD 1600 and continued into the early European historical contact period. This is based on genealogies (Henry 1928), and has more recently been demonstrated by archaeological investigations and dating of late *marae* structures of

monumental size (Wallin and Solsvik 2010a, 2010b; Kirch and Kahn 2010).



*Figure 1. Images of the war god 'Oro (After Kooijman 1964).*

## **THE HOUSE SOCIETY MODEL AND FASHION AS FOUNDATIONS FOR STATUS EXPRESSIONS AND EXPANSION**

The house society model described by Levi-Strauss (1987) reached far beyond the household as such since it included a metaphor of larger societal groups including not just the residential group of the house, but all groups tied to this unit (Fox 1993: 1). Levi-Strauss's model was derived from his understanding of how Medieval 'Noble houses' were constituted. Fox writes based on Levi-Strauss 1987 that:

The characteristics of such 'houses' were critically defined by: possession of a 'domain' consisting of material and immaterial wealth or honours; the extensive use of fictive kinship in alliance and adoption; and the transmission of the 'domain' — titles, prerogatives, and wealth — via women as well as men. These characteristics serve to undermine a

simple reliance on principles of descent and exogamy for the perpetuation of social groups. As Lévi-Strauss (1987) remarks, one purpose in introducing the concept of 'house' was to address the weakness afflicting theoretical debates that are 'haunted by the idea of descent' (p.165). The 'house' can be seen as a forum in which a tension between conflicting principles of descent and alliance, property and residence, exogamy and endogamy are expressed and seemingly resolved (Fox 1993:7).

Using these ideas Levi-Strauss (1987) made a comparative anthropological study of house societies of the Pacific including the American North-West Coast, Indonesia, Polynesia, New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia and Madagascar. His purpose was to indicate a type of social structure in between elementary and complex societies that he had described earlier (Levi-Strauss 1969). The house society concept may therefore be used when interpreting stratified chiefdoms, where ideas on differentiated groups and expressions of power are visible in the constructions of houses, ceremonial sites and other material remains. The house society concept has been used in different ways in Pacific research, for example by Fox (1993), with an anthropological linguistic view in his edited volume *Inside the Austronesian House* and in archaeology by Kirch (2000), Kirch and Green (2001), Kahn (2005), and Kahn and Kirch (2003, 2013).

The concept of fashion may not have a good reputation, since it often is tied to flamboyance and the superficial. However, fashion has for a long time been of importance in sociological studies, albeit investigated in relation to what fashion appears to represent, which usually has been tied to issues concerning class and gender (Barthes 1990; Bourdieu 1989; Veblen 1899). However, fashion may not just be seen as a representation of such expressions but is also a way to communicate ideas as well as to execute power (Vinken 2005: 4). It is in this sense that I will use the fashion concept.

Fashion (as haute couture) in its classical meaning stands for exclusivity and originality and in some senses it expresses the disguised or a mixture of desirable features seen in certain relations, for example; female and male, fertility and war, life and death etc. In such relations fashion represents a transcendence or exotic difference that also reduces these disguised relations into pure identity attractive for those

in power. When such expressions are normalized it is not about identity anymore, but instead expresses difference or social/individual distinctions within a (local) group (Vinken 2005: 28). Fashion in itself is about the actual moment, and can only survive through its own destruction, and living in a constant eternal promise of new inventions and expectations (Vinken 2005: 42). It exists in a subjective, self-evident, uncritical eternal present, within the frames of a living memory (Norá 1996). Expressed in oral traditions, certain fashions are acted out, on the *marae*, their materialized memorial places, and there directed by the high chiefs and their priests.

The material expression of 'haute couture' fashion, as defined above could develop in certain high status lineages (houses). Changes may happen when traditional monuments became common expressions (or when falling into oblivion) within the existing network. At such 'vulnerable' moments, the network participants were susceptible for new strong expressions, and when this occurred, fashion can be described as the "art of the perfect moment" (Vinken 2005: 42), sometimes described as zeitgeist.

The house concept as well as fashion is considered useful in the study of chiefly power relations expressed in the ceremonial sites of the Society Islands, which ultimately, as mentioned above, were tied back to the legendary site of *marae* Taputapuatea at Opoa on the island of Raiatea. Raiatea was traditionally referred to as *Havaiki* or the homeland of East Polynesian culture in early legends (Buck 1938; Handy 1927). Since the paramount chief (called *ari'i rahi*) of Opoa was widely renowned, we may talk about the house of Opoa representing a strong chiefly household that carried high chiefly titles including control over large land areas, managed by lesser chiefs (*ari'i ri'i*). It was through controlled marriages and/or warring pressures the paramount chiefs were able to collect the high titles that gave them influential power over large land areas or in some cases complete islands. An example of this is seen in the collection of chiefly titles described in Samoan genealogies (Krämer 1994: 644-647). Henry (1928: 139) mentions that the chiefly title was tied to the *marae* that was built on land controlled by its 'owner', and since the name of Taputapuatea was spread from Opoa to Tahiti, Mo'orea etc., it indicates a strong tie back to these chiefs and their titles and genealogies.

In the Society Islands it is clearly indicated that power relations were expressed by material things, such as feather girdles, wooden staffs and carvings, as well as by architecture both of residential types seen in oval shaped houses, as well as in the ceremonial sites (Kahn and Kirch 2013; Wallin and Solsvik 2010a).

In this context I will discuss the ceremonial sites in more detail. The *marae* structures were in constant change, although the general outline was quite fixed. The changes occurred within the outline of an accepted frame preserved within the collective memory of a gathering place. The general outline is a demarcated square that has a stone platform called *ahu* placed at one side. The courtyard generally has several upright stones indicating places of participating chiefs, priests and ancestors (Handy 1927). The arrangement of these features and the facing and shape of the *ahu* changed from place to place and in the Society Islands there were differences among the Leeward and Windward Islands (Wallin and Solsvik 2010a). I have argued elsewhere that these small changes are probably due to individual chiefly expressions, however extensive alterations probably expressed changes in the gods worshiped at the *marae* (Wallin 1993, 2001).

The extensive change that occurred at Opoa expressed in the large *marae* Taputapuatea can explain the dynamics of the expansion of an extremely powerful house seated at Opoa. The status/power expression concentrated to Opoa is seen in the genealogies which are tied to *Tangaroa*, the creation god, who according to legends broke through the sky and placed his right foot at Opoa where the first quite small *marae* was built (Handy 1930: 8; Wallin 1993: 108). His left foot was placed on the other side of the island at Tevaitoa where another *marae* of the same kind was built. The senior branch had its main seat at Opoa and junior branches were probably placed at Tevaitoa, and also spread in other areas. This legend links the creation of gods to the chiefs of Raiatea, as well as the creation of the earliest *marae* structures.

Expansion within an island was tied to senior and junior competition within the leading houses as mentioned above. Interrelated family members were tied to different land areas by different chiefly titles and thereby controlled different parts and districts. The lesser chiefs could in fact be larger landholders, and therefore also responsible for producing surpluses for the paramount chief, who could distribute these as a sign of wealth (Goldman 1970: 184). Connections to different land

areas were also strengthened through marriages which tied the houses together.



Figure 2. Marae Taputapuātea at Opoa (Photo: Paul Wallin).

A broad consensus of the outline of the *marae* is seen in the Society Islands. They were structures initially of a size that could be built by smaller family units/lineages and were dedicated to gods like *Tangaroa*, *Tane* and *Rono*, gods of creation, the land/woods, the sea etc. As mentioned above the first *marae* according to legends were built at Opoa, and spread throughout the islands from there (Handy 1930: 92). However, when a concept of a certain *marae* type is repeated again and again it will be turned into routine. The once respected meanings lose their credibility and become more or less meaningless. In such a situation the high chiefs at Opoa with their cultural capital as the original centre for the invention of the *marae* elevated the war god called 'Oro as the main god of worship. To do this they also shaped a new monumental *marae* expression. They created the grand *marae* Taputapuātea (Figure 2) and placed it on the tip of the point at Opoa, and called it *Te Po* (darkness). Thereafter this type was erected at several places in the Leeward Islands after the same fashion (Wallin and Solsvik 2010: 112), and in the Windward Island the new god was honoured by stepped *ahu* structures, with nicely worked round ended stones, placed on the *marae* court, and some of them were given the same name: Taputapuātea (Wallin 1993: 107). These structures could not be built just by the individual families; they demanded large

amounts of labour to manage the large megalithic blocks or the preparation of the many rounded stones. In this way the chiefs at Opoa could continue to exert influence over a large area, since they created new demands to control the new god. If these expectations were not followed then there was a threat to be excluded or else conquered by force. However, by accepting the new god the influences from Opoa came to dominate thinking, and a new spirit of the time became visible (Figure 3).



*Figure 3. The stepped marae Mahaiatea (After Wilson 1799).*

## **EXCLUSION AND DOMINATION STRATEGIES: WAR AND MARRIAGE**

When creating something exclusive and powerful the chiefs also create a desire of something new and powerful, which are signs tied to fashion (Vinken 2005: 16). In political science questions of exclusion and domination have been discussed frequently and Danielle Allen argues that exclusion is a method used to achieve domination (Allen 2004: 30) among, for example, ethnic groups etc. Domination and control are concepts closely tied to chiefly systems seen in Polynesia, and were

carried out usually via *tabu* regulations or restrictions that excluded everyone other than the chief himself to act in certain situations, and the late chieftdom structure of the Society Islands is described as one of the most stratified ones in the area (Goldman 1970: 170-197).

When the war and fertility god 'Oro was elevated to be the main god (Handy 1927: 109) this was partly an act of exclusion of the old gods. It was also a god clearly disguised and tied to a transformed message. As such it was strong, exclusive and attractive. The old gods became less important, which also made the old *marae* less important or restricted to certain rituals. According to the myths recorded by the early missionaries (between c. 1797 - c. 1850), 'Oro was the son of *Ta'aroa*, and he lived in heaven together with his wife. The myth continues with the story that 'Oro killed his wife by pushing her out of heaven. However, after a while he looked for another wife, this time on earth. For this purpose he sent his two sisters to search for a wife among the different Society Islands. On the island of Borabora, west of Raiatea, they found a beautiful girl, and the two sisters asked her to become the wife of their brother. Soon 'Oro came down on a rainbow-bridge from heaven to earth. After a while the two brothers of 'Oro, called *Orotetefa* and *Urutetefa*, also walked down the rainbow to look for him. They found him together with his new wife and their son *Hoatapuiterai*. The brothers also thought his new wife was very beautiful, and started to look for a nice celebration gift. They searched, but could not find a better gift than themselves, so they transformed themselves into a pig and a bunch of red feathers. These attributes thereafter became the symbols of a new society that 'Oro created, namely the *arioi* society (Danielsson 1956:166-167). 'Oro selected his members himself, and the first human representative of the *arioi* 'missionaries' was the chief Tamatoa of Raiatea. It was also stated that the members of the society should not have children or be married, but only carry out singing, dancing, and religious/fertility rites. 'Oro himself went back to heaven with his wife and son, and became the ruler of all the *arioi* (Ellis 1831: Vol I: 230; Handy 1927: 308).

This myth seems to have been created to give the exclusive power to the chief Tamatoa in Raiatea to give him (and following chiefs of Raiatea) continuous and new divine rights directly from the gods. The story also shows that the power among gods goes from father to son, and also exclusion by death of his wife, as well as tying new connections

in new lands, outside heaven, something that also can be indicated by new intermarriages between the divine chiefs of Raiatea with the more traditional chiefs of Tahiti (Henry 1928: 129).

The mission of 'Oro was taught at quite organised schools. The teaching consisted of chanting of prayers, reciting of genealogies etc. Henry mentions such a school situated at Fare Roi *marae* at Point Venus in Tahiti. She wrote: "*The sister, Toa-te-manava, was kindly received at 'Uporu (Ha'apape) [Point Venus], where she established a school for the aristocracy of the motherland, Ra'iatea*" (Henry 1928: 130). The missionaries of 'Oro were called *arioi*. The society was a ranked organization with seven different levels, including both men and women. The different levels were distinguished by different tattoo signs placed on different parts of the body (Danielsson 1956: 170). Men of high social rank occupied the highest positions. In historic sources it is mentioned that when an *arioi* group came to visit, ordinary work was abandoned, and the people prepared themselves for feasting. The ceremonies that followed were initiated with declamations of creation myths and important legends. During these prayers generous offerings to 'Oro were performed. This was followed by more entertaining parts, like dancing, singing, and performances (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Dancing performance in the Island of Raiatea. Engraving by Hodges from James Cooks second Voyage to the Pacific. Engraving in possession of the author (Photo: Paul Wallin).

This means that the contacts between the islands were kept through the *arioi* who arranged meetings on the different islands, and they arrived on big canoes (Figure 5).



Figure 5. War Canoes of Tahiti. Observed on Captain Cook's second voyage 1772-1775 (From Cooke's *Geography*, 1817).

These meetings involved large groups of people. General meetings could assemble from hundreds up to several thousand persons (Forster 1777). Such meetings established strong ties between people of the different islands and in arrangements of marriage. The genealogy of the Raiatean high chiefs was highly respected and desirable in all of the Society Islands (Emory n.d.; Oliver 1974, Henry 1928).

High chiefs assigned political power by favouring certain houses in marriage. The highest status was tied to the chiefs at Opoa, and they married their daughters to chiefs of Tahiti and other islands. By doing this, Opoa power was spread to all islands, and the consequences of this are that the political power of Opoa became not only local, but of inter-island importance (Henry 1928). Since this power was intimately tied to the war god 'Oro, it also had a strong religious connection. Power was

tied to wealth that was expressed by domination over land. Land boundaries were therefore guarded against thieves, who had their own deity, *Hiro*, who was the son of 'Oro, and it has been argued that thievery can be seen as a warlike act, due to the link between *Hiro* and 'Oro. This is because theft within a district was an assault to the land owner's honour, which can be compared with a warlike action against an outside enemy (Goldman 1970: 184). However, wealth in itself was not important, since a powerful chief was the one who distributed wealth to his subordinate chiefs and never refused what they asked for (Ellis 1853, Vol. 1: 128). Such economic powers expressed wealth, and gave internal political and ritual authority to the persons in control (Goldman 1970: 184).

## **THE MARAE AS A STATEMENT OF EXPANSION FOUNDED IN COLLECTIVE MEMORIES**

The *marae* was a memorial place, as well as an active part of a creative prehistoric societal fundament, based on myths and genealogies. When looking at the phenomena from an archaeological perspective one can see that there are clearly different 'stories' told by different material expressions tied to habitus based practices (Bourdieu 1977), and these narratives have different rhetoric expressions (Hodder 1993).

The French historian Pierre Norá has extensively discussed the distinctions between memory and history (Norá 2001, 1996). He argues that memory is oriented towards the spontaneous, subjective and organic, and history on the other hand is tied to the general, descriptive facts and institutions. Other concepts of Norá are more directed towards the discussion of memory itself and its transformation into history, and here he makes the distinctions of *milieux de mémoire* and *lieux de mémoire*. The first concept exists in traditional societies without temporal reference but with a predictive, strong, spontaneous memory of the ancestors, which repeat the tradition and myths in an organic way (Norá 2001: 366). The second concept is tied to memorial places, which occur according to Norá, when memory turns into history, in a break with the past when the memory only can be recreated through place (Norá 2001: 365).

When memory milieus are broken there is space for new creations and the establishment of new values, which are a way to keep the memories alive. Past memories become history preserved in legends

and myths. Here again we can see the rise of a foundation of a new memory milieu with new innovations. However, when the East Polynesians, in this case the Raiatean aristocracy, created monumental architecture it may have been due to difficulties with the remembrance of the meaning of the prevailing structure that was created in the past.

Common memories of creation, gods and legends were shared in the Society Islands and great genealogies were tied to these to express their importance. In the same way the ceremonial sites were tied to individual genealogies to give them importance. This entangled web of associations worked to tie the general to the specific, the myth to practical expressed realities at the local sites. Existing networks were used for the dispersal of such new ideas. Using and controlling these networks made it possible to reach and compete far outside one's own island. Central points tied to old traditions seem to be the creation centres of new fashions in architecture styles. The house of Opoa in Raiatea and its high status had the power over humans, and the relations with the gods, to be able to change material expressions. They were the creators of the intellectual thought that dominated cultural expression (Montgomery 1832: 126), indicating the "spirit of the time" sometimes called *zeitgeist* (Magee 2011: 262).

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF THE FOUNDING OF *MARAE* AND A LATE EXPANSION**

During the past ten years new excavations with the intention to date *marae* structures have been carried out in two main areas, one conducted by Paul Wallin in the Maeva district on the Island of Huahine (Summarized in Wallin and Solsvik 2010b, 2010a, 2005, 2006b), the other conducted by Jennifer Kahn in the Opunohuu Valley on the Island of Mo'orea (Kahn 2011, Kirch and Kahn 2003, Kahn and Kirch 2013).

Even though the sample of excavated *marae* is small, it is clear that two defined and archaeologically dated phases of *marae* structures can be traced both in the Leeward as well as in the Windward Islands (Wallin and Solsvik 2010b; Kahn 2011). There was an initial *marae* building phase around AD1400-1500, that shows smaller structures tied to family or lineage groups (Wallin and Solsvik 2010b: 88; Kahn 2011: 44) (Figure 6a & 6b). A second phase is indicated by large structures, built of megalithic limestone slabs in the Leeward Islands, and large

structures with stepped *ahu* with worked stones in the Windward Islands (Figure 6c & 6d).

In Huahine three structures of the large 'Oro type were dated, *marae* Manunu, *marae* Anini and *marae* Ohiti Mataroa were dated to the time frame c. AD 1600-1800.



Figure 6a. *Marae* Vaitaha, Maeva Village, Huahine. Lime stone slab *ahu* (Photo: Paul Wallin).



Figure 6b. Tahitian *marae* with a platform *ahu* (Photo: Paul Wallin).



Figure 6c. Marae Manunu, Maeva Village, Huahine. Lime stone slab ahu of 'Oro type built in two steps (Photo: Paul Wallin).



Figure 6d. Stepped ahu in Opunohu Valley, Mo'orea. Late monumental type with rounded worked stones (Photo: Paul Wallin).

A new calibration of an old shell date (Emory and Sinoto 1965) of *marae* Taputapuatea gave the date AD 1503-1799, which falls in the same time frame. In Tahiti a new date from *marae* Marae Ta'ata, a stepped *ahu*, indicated the time frame c. AD 1653-1951 (Wallin and Solsvik 2010a:89). The excavations by Kahn at the inland areas of Opunohuu Valley also show four *marae* with stepped *ahu* or worked stones, which generally are observed around the coasts in the Windward Islands. However, these structures were dated to about the same time frame or c. AD 1620-1760 (Kahn 2011: 40-41).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper discusses the relations among chiefs and their control of wealth, and how they were actively involved in the creation of fashion giving the trends manifested in the material expressions that can be seen as zeitgeist eras. These aspects were a fact within the social structure that was reflected in a society organised within the frames of a classical house society (Kahn and Kirch 2013). These houses are visible since it can be shown through archaeology and ethnohistory that they were in possession of both material and immaterial wealth expressing the honourable qualities of the chiefs. Another feature present is that they connected kinship through controlled marriage strategies.

In the Society Islands there was an obvious elite house seated at Opoa on Raiatea, it was widely known and accepted that they had been given their superiority and quality through a direct connection to the gods (Montgomery 1832: 126; Henry 1928) The Opoa paramount chiefs were not late to use this privilege, and they did it effectively by use of *tabu* regulations which made them even more exclusive. With such methods they controlled material expressions of status. When recollection is unclear in memory based societies, or when old ideas lose their significance, new creations/inventions are needed. Such clear breaks could work extremely effectively since memory based societies are open for change in a spontaneous way (Norá 1996). However, at the same time old ideas are turned into mythological histories useful to secure status tied to genealogies.

Based on archaeological evidence I argue that the genealogical stories indicated an original creation of small family and lineage *marae* which preceded the later large status monuments seen both in the Leeward as well as in the Windward Islands. Such a scenario has been

suggested and indicated already by the stories recounted by the missionaries of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has been described by Henry (1928, from a manuscript based on early accounts), by Handy (1927, 1930), as well as by Emory who argued that the late expansion of 'Oro from Raiatea happened around AD 1600 according to genealogical dating (Emory n.d.). Henry (1928: 129), ties this to chief Tamatoa I, who genealogically should be placed around AD 1450, and ties the late expansion to Tamatoa II who ruled over all districts of Raiatea (Henry 1928: 248). There is a strange c. 10 generation gap between these two high chiefs of Opoa. This could be due to the scenario I mentioned above, placing Tamatoa I earlier in time as a founder, much more ancient than he actually was. If the time between Tamatoa I and II was shorter, Tamatoa I could have been the one who established 'Oro at Raiatea probably around AD 1600, which actually is suggested by archaeological dating of the 'Oro temples (Wallin and Solsvik 2010). To conclude it is suggested that some general trends are visible in the genealogical dating of *marae* foundations and their changes, and that these changes were probably the actions of powerful chiefs creating the spirit of the time; the zeitgeist.

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