

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

The Fifty-Four Terrace Last Stand: Maintaining *Les Vestiges Archaeologiques*

By R. L. Crossland, MN '77

An Expedition and a Commemoration

On May 10, 2015, a party¹ from Explorers Club Expedition, Flag #83, under the direction of Edmundo Edwards, ascended *La Forteresse Hatuturi*. In doing so we commemorated the survey of that fortress by Thor Heyerdahl expedition undertaken in 1965² as we assessed the condition of the fortress.

In intra-island and inter-island warfare, Hatuturi would have been the last refuge for more than one tribal organization. Today, it may symbolize a figurative last stand for Polynesian historic sites. The ancient stronghold dominates Ra'ivavae, a small volcanic island of sixteen square kilometers circled by a coral barrier reef penetrated by four passages. Ra'ivavae is one of the five Austral Islands that straddle the Tropic of Capricorn. Hatuturi was carved into one of Ra'ivavae's steepest volcanic ridges, a ridge that points northward to Mt. Hiro,

¹ Alejandra Edwards, Georges Mahaa, Rainui Teapehi, and the author.

² Arne Skjölsvold, "Hill Terraces of Hatuturi," Reports of Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific, Thor Heyerdahl and Edwin N. Ferdon, Jr., Editors, Monographs of the School of American Research and the Kon-tiki Museum, Vol. 2, Miscellaneous Papers, Report 8, 1965, pp.108-116.

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

the highest point on the island. It is a defensive puzzle configured into fifty-four ascending, palisaded terraces. From the air, the fifty-four terraces look like a fish with its tail fins at the base of the ridge and the fish's head rising to swallow Mount Hiro (Figure 36). The official French Polynesia's topographical maps of the island indicate many of Ra'ivavae's marae or open-air temples with the rectangular "*vestige archaologique*" symbol. Hatuturi itself is in no way depicted on the government's Service De L'Urbanisme 1:15,000 or 1:5,000 maps.

Sadly, during the next few decades encroaching forces of nature will accelerate the reduction of Hatuturi, and Ra'ivavae's eighty plus marae, to shapeless, unintelligible jumbles of rock.

The problem lies not with the inattention of the map-makers; it lies with a more subtle influence, a lingering idea, a concept, that may have outlived its purpose. Ideas have consequences and sometimes those consequences can outlive their ideas.

Trouble in Paradise

In the early 19th Century Polynesia was a turbulent and unstable place. More disruptive was the new European

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

perception that Polynesia was a place of wonder and opportunity. Each of the islands was divided into several warring principalities, or more correctly, "polities." Prior to the 19th Century hereditary bloodline leadership of the polities was less common, and the polities were frequently led by war chieftains drawn for their martial merits from the aristocratic castes.³ Lineage determined caste. Caste determined privilege including eligibility for leadership positions.

If an island was at peace it frequently carried its war to other islands. Absolute peace was a rarity because religious observances were based upon required human sacrifice and cannibalism. Though the practice of human sacrifice was a subtle means of maintaining discipline, it was arguably it was better to satisfy those religious observances with outsider victims, than one's own people.

At the same time Europeans had become aware of two lucrative cargos, whale oil and sandalwood, and in pursuit of those cargos the Europeans were introducing their own brand of instability. Ra'ivavae was to present a prime example of the nature of that instability. In 1812, the

³Colin Newbury, "Aspects of Cultural Change in French Polynesia: The Decline of the Ari'i," Journal of the Polynesian Society, Vol.76, March 1967, pp.7-26,

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

now infamous Captain Michael Fodger and the crew of the brig, Daphne, arrived on the horizon seeking sandalwood. Fodger took a local chief hostage and simply extorted 1½ tons of sandalwood in ransom.⁴ The Europeans had firearms and steel weapons. The islanders were helpless.

The inhabitants of Ra'ivavae had learned that European traders such as Fodger could be a very negative influence on their daily life and the incident exposed their vulnerability.

On the other hand, prior to the Fodger incident, in Tahiti, a Tahitian chief, Pomare (néé "Tu") had realized the Europeans could be a positive influence. "[Pomare]...was politically astute...and...very deliberately cultivated Captain James Cook for the prestige it would give him on the {Tahiti}."⁵ Pomare quickly grasped the benefits of consolidating power to fend off total subjugation.

Pomare died in 1803 and his son Pomare II took up the cause of consolidating power in Polynesia, but this time with a twist. Eastern Polynesian society worked under a

⁴ H. E. Maude, Of Islands and Men, London; Oxford University Press (1968), p.196, as cited in Edmundo Edwards, Ra'ivavae: Archaeological Survey of Ra'ivavae, Austral Islands French Polynesia, Easter Island Foundation (2005), p.17

⁵ Alan Moorehead, The Fatal Impact: The Invasion of the South Pacific 1767-1840, New York; Harper & Row (1966), p.73,

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

strict caste system. The land and the location a Polynesian could lay claim to were determined by the gods to whom he laid claim. Pomare II claimed a connection to the Christianity as his religion and substituted his religion for the old.

Just how far Pomare [II] made the running in all this for the purpose of extending his authority, and how far the missionaries guided him, it is difficult to say, but at all events at the time of his death in 1821, the old reprobate was firmly in control.⁶

At the very least, the representatives of the London Missionary Society served as intermediaries between the Tahitians and the seamen who regularly stopped for supplies. They could write home and shame the owners and captains of ships who overstepped their bounds and bullied the converted.

To finesse this end, Pomare II sent out hastily trained Polynesian missionaries, as opposed to London Missionary Society Missionaries, to effect the rapid conversion of islands such as Ra'ivavae. The Polynesian missionary regimen was severe, arguably more severe and Calvinistic than that of European missionaries. Nowhere was the new missionary regimen more severe than Ra'ivavae. The majority of the island's tikis were destroyed, all

⁶ Ibid, p.101.

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

ceremonial observances and meeting places were abandoned, and the residents of Ra'ivavae were encouraged to abandon the old ways wholesale.⁷ In 1829, an unidentified epidemic struck Ra'ivavae likely inadvertently introduced by European traders. The population of Ra'ivavae estimated to be in the 2,600 to 3,000 range was reduced by 75%, and perhaps to as few as 90.⁸ Conversion was not difficult to accomplish since the survivors saw themselves as living under a dark cloud. The old ways of a culture that had had no written record were hard to maintain when there were so few to remember the old ways, and there would have been doubt that the old ways were worth saving when the epidemic was perceived as a judgment.

Pomare II's ways were harsh. It is likely he believed the only way to check the European onslaught was to unify Polynesian control and to make his people learn European ways quickly and turn that knowledge to Polynesian advantage.

Shortly after his Christian baptism, Pomare II had established himself as king of the Society Islands. Soon through his influence all the inhabitants of the Society

⁷ Edmundo Edwards, Ra'ivavae: Archaeological Survey of Ra'ivavae, Austral Islands, French Polynesia, Easter Island Foundation; 2005, pp.18-19

⁸ Edwards 2005, 20-23.

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

Islands, the western Tuamotu Archipelago, and half of the Austral Islands now professed to be Christians.

The Pomare Code

The rapid conversion of the islanders called for the substitution of new values, customs, and laws to replace the old ones. Pomare II looked to the missionaries and Tahiti's first written law code, the Pomare Code was the end result. It was a synthesis of the general principles of British common law, Judeo-Christian moral precepts, and an aversion to traditional Polynesia rituals.

The Code decreed the death penalty for murder and infanticide. Strict observance of the Sabbath was required and there were penalties for such offenses as adultery, bigamy, theft, and rebellion. In keeping with time-honored missionary priorities in the Pacific, lascivious entertainment was forbidden.

Implicit to the Code was a subtle, unspoken concept. The concept was "to survive, we must abandon our ways, and our history completely."

A Concept Carried Too Far

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

Clearly some Polynesian practices were going to bring Polynesians into collision with the Europeans. Clearly there would may cooperative benefits to be derived from adoption of some European ways. No doubt the practices of human sacrifice, infanticide, and cannibalism were likely to make Polynesia a target for "moral high ground" conquest.

Though the concept was implemented with good intentions, the concept, coupled with the dreadful ravages of Western diseases, left the Polynesians with little knowledge of their own history and an ominous view of where any investigation in the that direction might take them.

On Ra'ivavae tikis were cut up and thrown into the sea. Artifacts were destroyed or pillaged wholesale, but there was an underground memory of sorts.

The concept has left many Polynesians to feeling like historical orphans.

Why does no one speak of our history, or if so, in only the most negative tones? Why are there so few visible remains of their earliest history? What was it the early Polynesians done that so flawed? Were early Polynesians without any redeeming accomplishments? Was their record so

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

much more terrible than others? Was their history so less consequential than the histories of others?

There are indications, human beings being human beings, that even on little Ra'ivavae not everyone accepted the concept whole cloth.

A Hidden Recorded History

Reference has been made to the connection between caste, the gods, and land ownership. Several secret *puka tupuna*, or ancestor books, were prepared in the late 19th Century documenting lineages, but also providing a wide range of other information of historical interest. The *puka tupuna* were written in Tahitian, but in Roman script. A couple of these manuscripts are in non-Polynesian hands, but it is believed far more exist. They are kept secret ostensibly because an "enemy could invoke a clan's deified ancestors to cause harm."⁹

Another possible reason for secrecy is the manuscripts provide detail lineage and connection to gods. This information governing caste is spelled out. Caste lineage historically determined land distribution. There is probably a perception that the manuscripts could be used

⁹ Edwards 2005, 9.

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

against landowners, post-Pomare Code, to challenge land ownership rights. This is likely a misconception and it is likely that owners of long held land cannot be dispossessed. A declaratory judgment in the local courts stabilizing land titles might help bring the contents of the *puka tupuna*, and with it Polynesia history, to light.

The immediate problem is the historical information in the manuscripts which the writers sought to preserve, may have been over-protected and as a consequence lost to the people of Ra'ivavae as an ethnographic treasure trove. Once again the concept has outlived its purpose.

A Concept Should Not Outlive Its Purpose

IN countries subject to the common law system, the rule against perpetuities forbids a person from putting qualifications and criteria in that person's will that will continue to control or affect the distribution of assets long after he has died, a concept often referred to as control by the "dead hand" or "mortmain".¹⁰

Just as the dead should not completely rule the living, it is suggested that likewise the living should not completely rule the achievements of the dead. A reciprocal

¹⁰ See "Duke of Norfolk's Case," 3 Ch. Cas. 1, 22 Eng. Rep. 931 (Ch. 1682)

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

"vivemain" should govern proclaiming that no rules should completely destroy a culture's ability to understand its own history, good or bad.

That concept, abandonment of history, if it continues to hold sway, will allow the majority of marae and other physical evidence of Polynesian history on Ra'ivavae, its *vestiges archaeologiques*, including the Forteresse Hatuturi, to further degrade until they are "unreadable," lost, or forgotten.

Resolution?

Our party cleared on the topmost terraces, laying visible what we took to be a small marae. In a way it seemed inconsequential, but we simply did not weren't a large enough party to clear the fifty-four terraces. We descended not long afterward. Returning to the caldera at the base of the fortress, we enjoyed sandwiches enjoyed in folding chairs among free-ranging chickens on the lawn of a local household. Perhaps presumptuously, I suggested to Georges Makaa and Rainui Teapehi that they encourage their friends to keep clearing parts of the fortress and the marae whenever they could. Their ancestors had been interesting people with intriguing technical

R. L. Crossland
220 Colonial Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824
Limpet6@aol.com

accomplishments. Perhaps they had their faults, but whose ancestors didn't?

The world still had things it could learn from those ancestors. Outsiders such as myself could not hope to save their heritage alone. We are too far away. We could attempt to help, but in small ways, publicity, technology, etc. but they controlled the most important factor, and that was interpretation of the old concept.

With a little help, they could save their historical heritage, and who better?

~~~~~

R. L. Crossland, MN '77m is a retired naval captain and trial attorney with a broad knowledge of Pacific cultures. Recently he served as a volunteer field worker on the Flag #83 expedition. He was graduated from Columbia College with a degree in History-Sociology.

#### Graphics

1. [flag photo, credit Alejandra Edwards]
2. [Heyerdahl, Figure 36] [figure still needs to be located]
3. [Bureau d'Urbanization map excerpt]
4. [Overgrowth marae #1, credit: author]
5. [Overgrowth marae #2, credit: author]
6. [Overgrowth marae #3, credit: author]
7. [Hatuturi palisade foundation cleared, backpack centered to give sense of scale, credit: author]

R. L. Crossland  
220 Colonial Drive  
Fairfield, CT 06824  
[Limpet6@aol.com](mailto:Limpet6@aol.com)