

Lords of the Sea

Historical Perspectives on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Central Vanuatu



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A Role for History?

- History – both in the form of oral traditions and documentary sources – is seldom recruited to inter-disciplinary projects on deep history or cultural evolution
- Can be used to map questions for other disciplines – provides a more complex image of agency in the past and of the processes that produce diversity
- Early archaeology in the Pacific built itself on a conversation with oral traditions, until the “scientific” turn of the 1970s made that kind of dalliance unfashionable
- So Patrick Kirch’s model of triangulation between archaeology, linguistics and genetics omits history – despite his recent 2018 paper on the value of oral traditions for his own work on Tikopia, Niuatoputapu and Hawai’i
- Without access to these two forms of history, reconstructing linguistic history in central Vanuatu becomes much more difficult
- E.g. problem of defining Polynesian-ness primarily through language – focus on the “Polynesian Outliers” obscures a wide range of other Polynesian genetic or cultural influences in Central Vanuatu
- What follows is an individual interpretation of Central Vanuatu history, synthesised from oral traditions and documentary history, along with archaeology and ethnography

Central Vanuatu

What are the historical processes that have contributed to the production of contemporary linguistic diversity in Central Vanuatu?

1. Wotanimanu – myth as history
2. Title vs matriclan systems
3. Kuwae eruption of 1452 AD
4. Later Polynesian arrivals
5. Colonial transformations



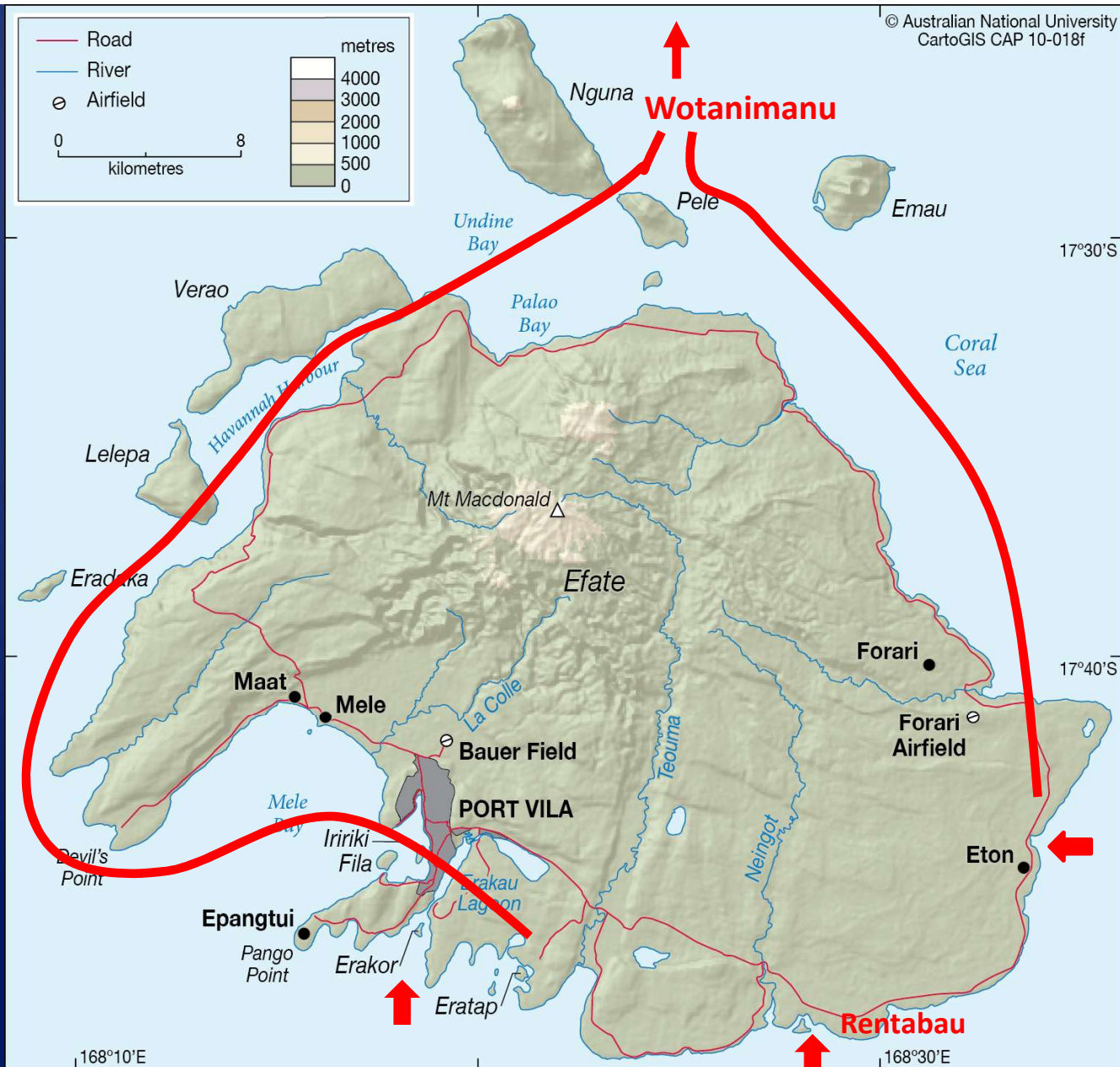


Wotanimanu – Lord of the Birds

Both a rock and the most widely known myth in central Vanuatu

- A stranger chief (*wota*) who comes by sea with many subjects to Efate from Erromango
- lands by canoe on south coast of Efate
- marries the daughter of an autochthonous chief
- reproached by his father-in-law for being a lazy fisherman rather than a planter of gardens
- leaves from south Efate around the coast (either west or east)
- asks each time he stops if he can still be seen by his father-in-law
- on hearing yes in response, he moves again, until he reaches his present location in the sea amongst the Shepherd Islands
- his subjects are now the seabirds (*manu*) that nest on the rock.

Monument Rock, Philippe Métois [Efate in the distance]

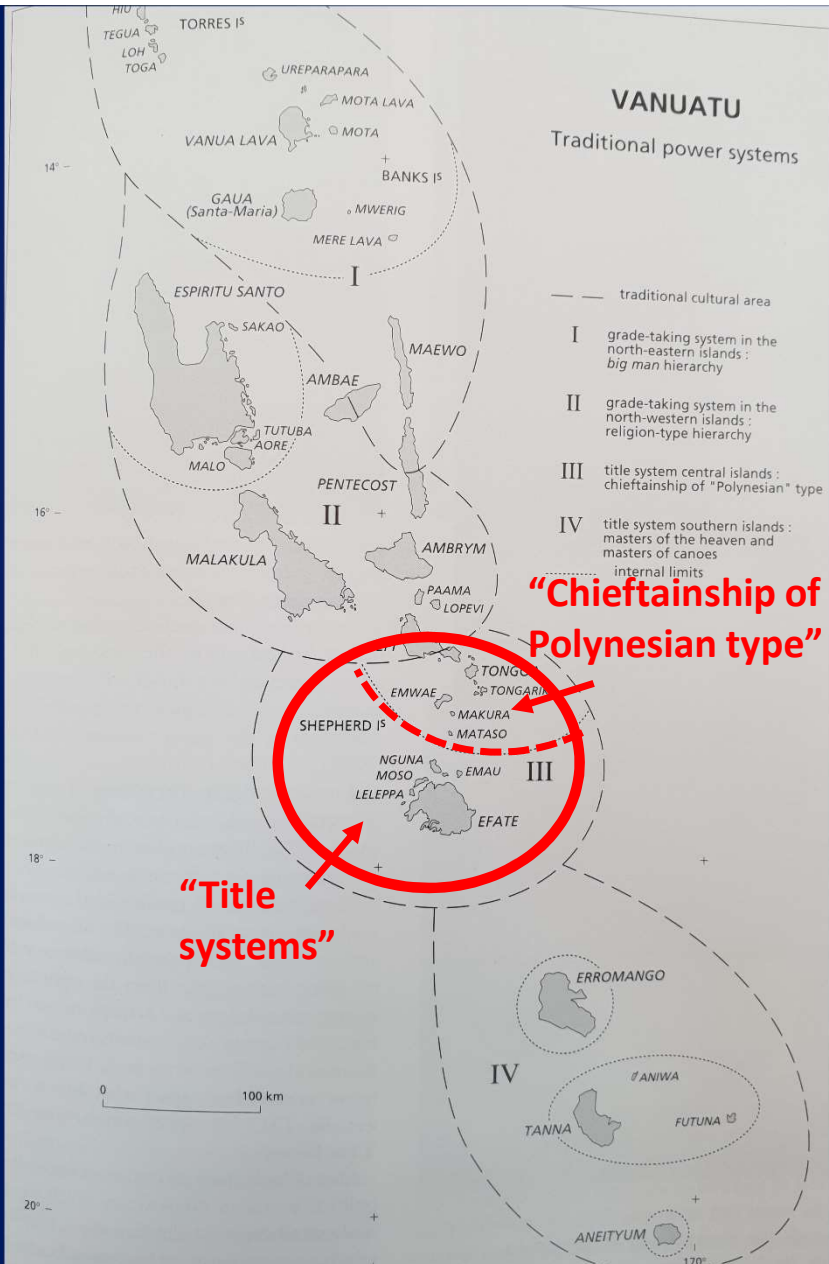


Wotanimanu's passage(s) through Efate



Wotanimanu – Myth as History?

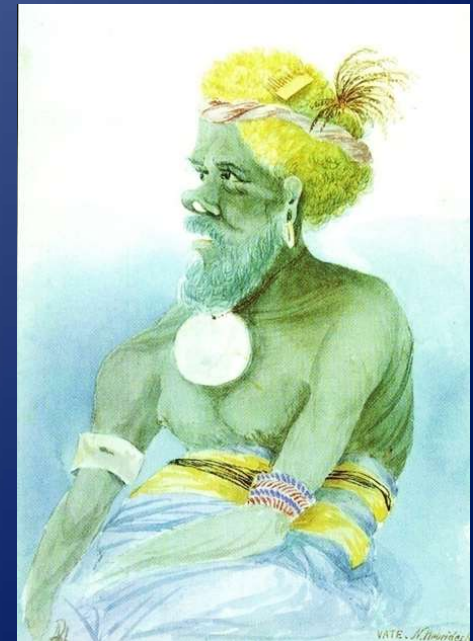
- Wotanimanu myth can be read as an allegorical account of historical events
- Arrival on Efate from the south by sea of a substantial population of western Polynesians led by titled chiefs, their conflict with the autochthonous or indigenous population of Efate, and the ultimate establishment of the most senior titled chiefs on Kuwae and the other Shepherd Islands.
 - Wotanimanu leaves local landmarks in his wake - cf. junior titles
 - Wotanimanu's daughter / retainer Sina described as « une belle jeune femme blanche, ses cheveux tombent sur ses épaules » (Guiart 1973)
 - seabirds – voyaging / marine people vs rats – terrestrial / inland people
- Central Vanuatu characterised by two very strongly contrasting historicities or historical logics – one genealogical and the other territorial – and they correspond broadly to the two figures of the ocean-going stranger chief, Wotanimanu, and the terrestrial autochthonous Efate leader
- The myth also sets up a conversation around the value of oral traditions, as well as documentary history, in generating propositions about the pre-documentary past that implicate a range of other disciplines.
- A Polynesian history by a Melanesianist?



Contrasting Historicities

- Two fundamentally contrasting historicities or regimes of historical consciousness in central Vanuatu:
 - Title / genealogical, based in Shepherd Islands
 VS
 - Matriclan (*naflak*) / territorial, based on Efate
- But the two systems are thoroughly integrated and interwoven on Efate

Chief, Havannah Harbour, 1848



Bonnemaison 1996,
"Traditional power
systems of Vanuatu"

Title System

- Found largely in Shepherd Islands, but with junior titles on Efate under a Tongoa-based hierarchy.
- Patrilineal system of hierarchically titled or ranked chiefs - rights pass ideally from father to son
- Titles attached to land, which is divided amongst vassals (*kainanga*) with whom chiefs are in a relationship of mutual fealty or tribute (*nasautonga*)
- Information critical to the success of a title lineage is the history of that title's holders:
 - ‘A title embodies the sum of all relations created in the course of its history over the routes it has followed, and some are an asset, others a disadvantage. The man who assumes a title, from one generation to another, must take on all these relations in his turn. He is thus caught in a web of allegiance and lordship which stretches beyond his territory, his island and sometimes even his memory. But there is always someone to remind him of his distant obligations and nothing is lost or forgotten. The islands are living records.’ (Bonnemaison)
- Lists of 48-52 successive holders of at least 4 senior titles on Tongoa; distinct “canoe traditions”
- Trained songmasters / historians: *aore* / *manuvasa*
- Sacred sites with stone shrines commemorating holders of senior titles
- Similar titles found in Shepherds and Tonga / eastern Fiji:
 - Ti (cf. Tongan Tui) as dominant title prefix on an island (Ti Efate, Ti Mataso, Ti Tongoa etc); also Ti Nabua / Tui Nabua (Nadroga Fiji); Mariki / Ma Ariki – title suffixes include Rangi, Mata, Muri etc

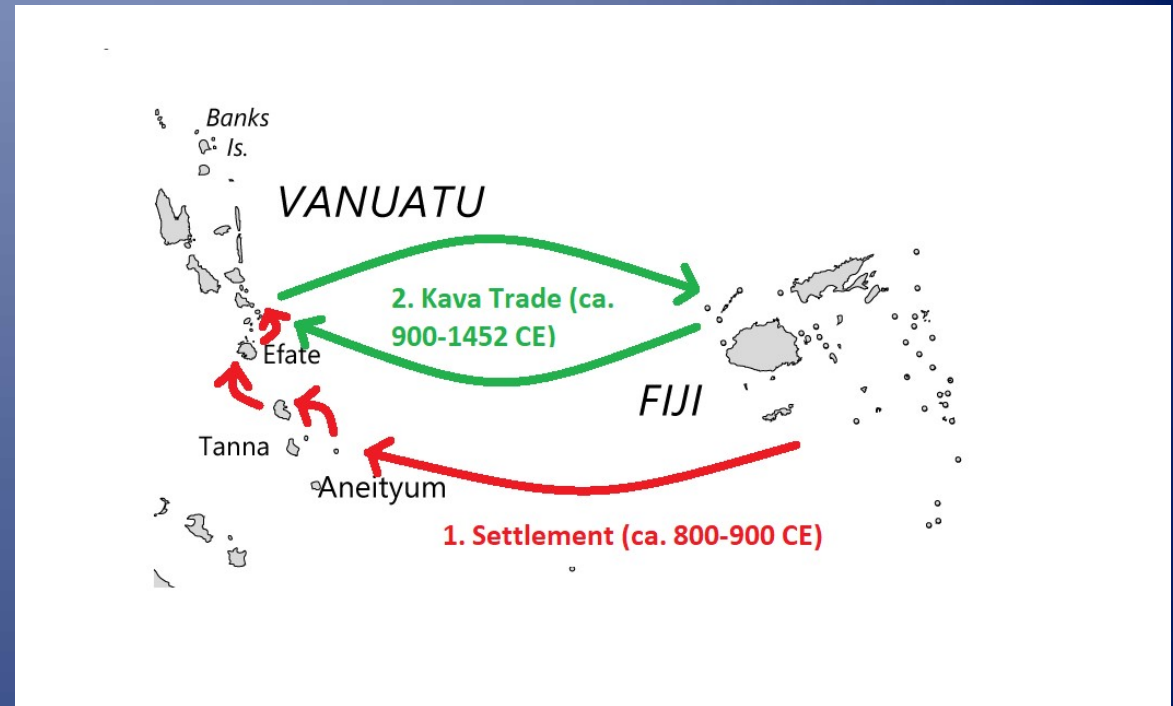
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Ancient and Modern Stelae on Tongoa

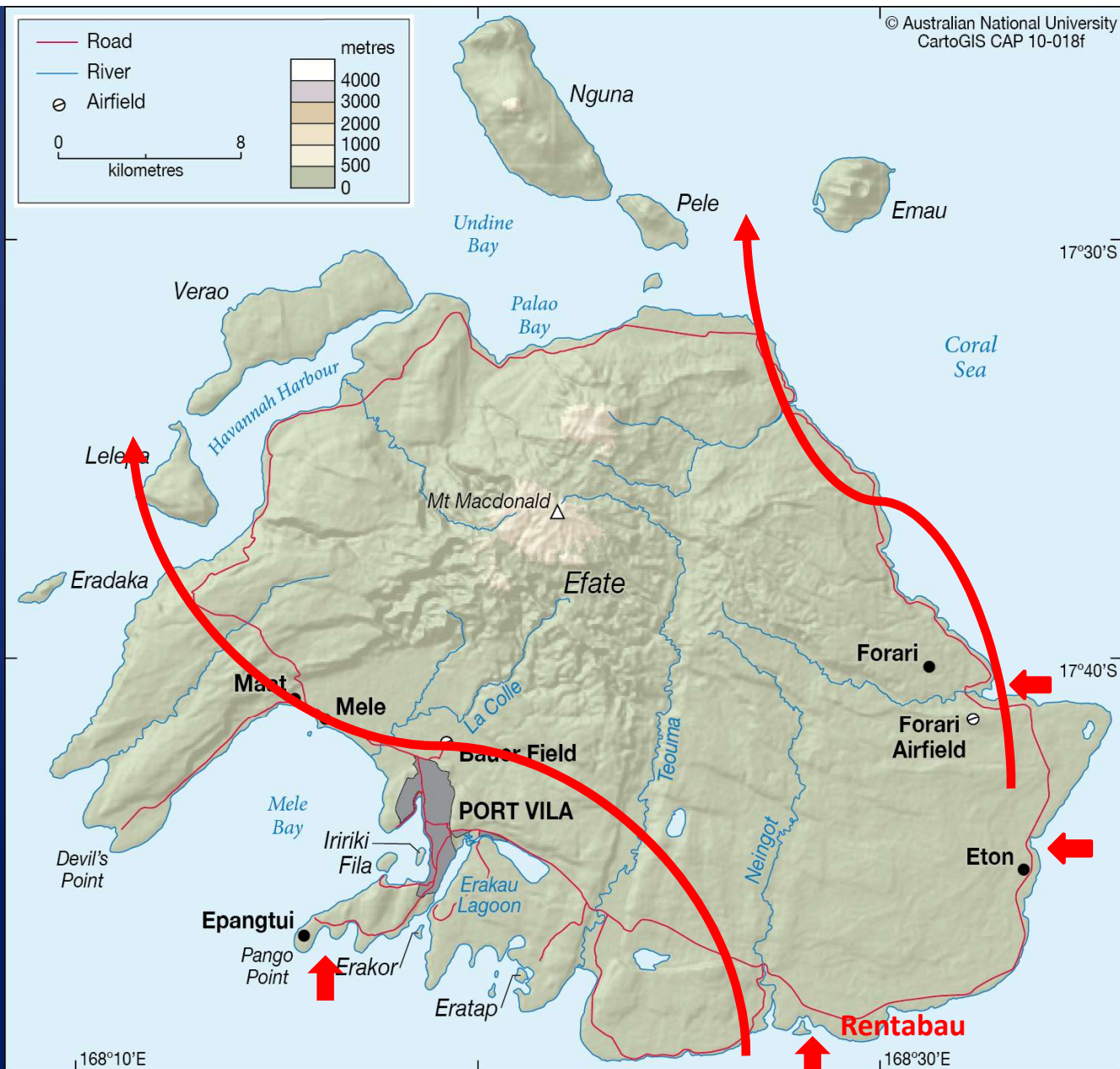
Canoe Traditions of Central Vanuatu

- “Kenu” (Bislama) - a long-distance loan from Arawakan “canoe”...
 - Canoe traditions relating to individual chiefly titles in Shepherds – in four stages:
 - 1) Arrival on Efate from Erromango and Tanna, exclusively
 - 2) Departure from Efate towards Shepherds
 - 3) Flight from Kuwae eruption
 - 4) Resettlement of Tongoa after Kuwae
-
- Named canoes, named individuals in positions within the canoe, and named landing places
 - First act on landing is the further division of titles and lands
 - Similar to (but probably earlier than) Maori traditions – scope for formal comparison?



Canoe Traditions for a Sample of Shepherd Islands Titles (source: Guiart 1973)

Title	Proximal Origin	Landing on Efate	Efate	Islands / Shepherds	Tongoa
Ti Poloa	Erromango	?	Siviri	Emae	X
Ti Nabua Mata	Tanna, Erromango	Maniura	Vila, Lelepa	Nguna	X
Maraki Pule	Erromango	Maniura / Forari	Ebule, Ifira	Nguna, Emau, Mataso, Makura, Emae, Epi, Buninga	X (Pele)
Ti Mataso	Erromango	Maniura / Forari	Bufa	Pele, Mataso (X)	--
Tarieru (Roi)	Erromango	Rentapau	Eton, Ravenga, Bangbang / Woresiviu, Eratapu, Bufa, Mele, Tukutuku, Retoka	Moso	X
Taripoa Mata	Erromango	Maltanaurikiki	Nangisu Tapu (Devil's Point), Tukutuku, Siviri	Pele	X
Tarisa Liu	Erromango	?	Ebule, Erakor, Vila		X
Tariliu	Erromango (Cook Bay)	Pango	Tanakaroa	Nguna, Emau	X



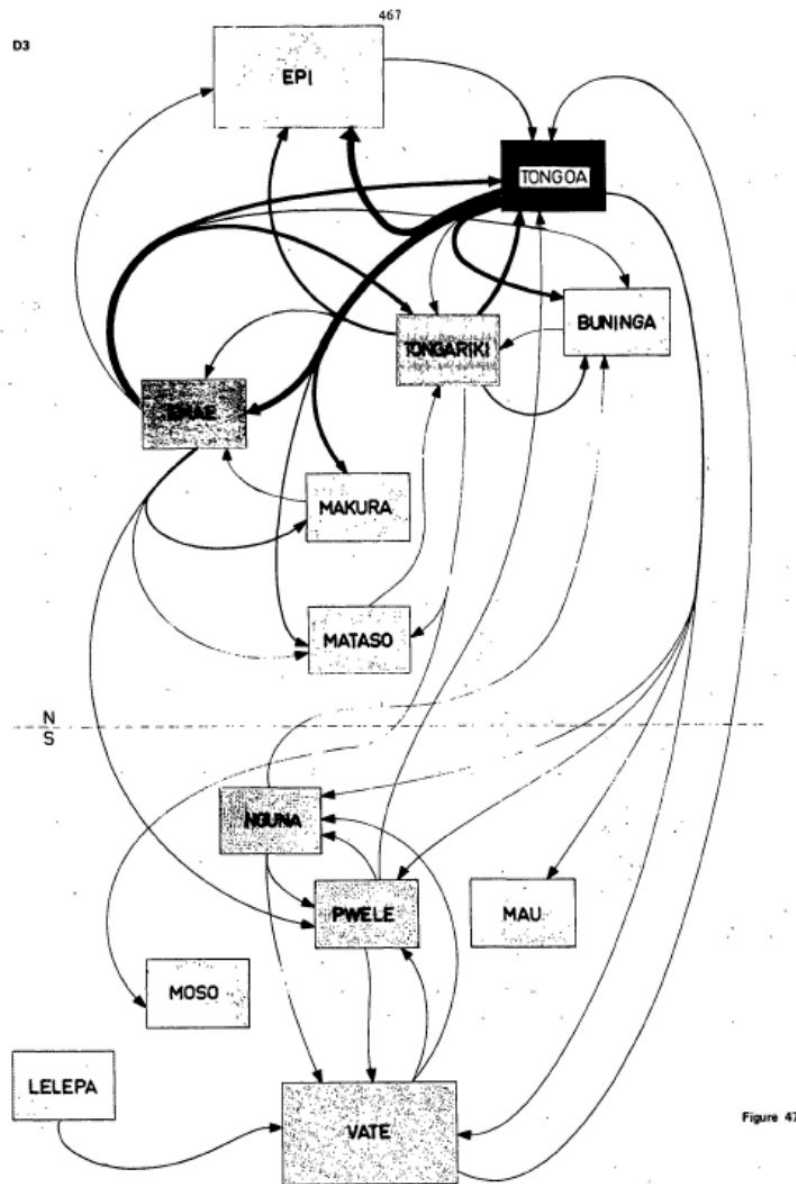
Migration of titled
chiefs to and through
Efate



Landing



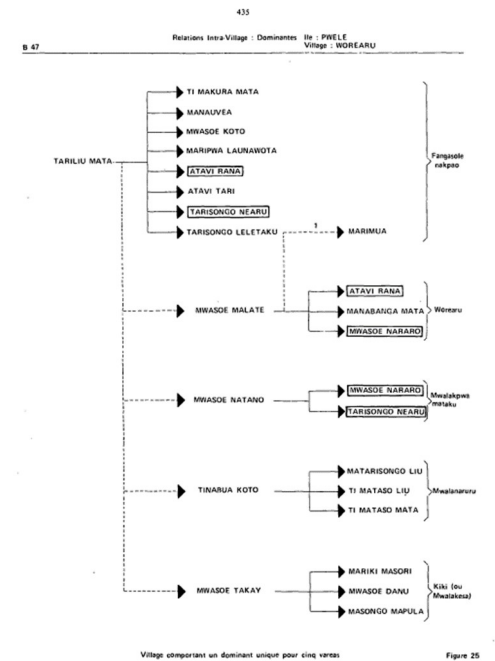
Migration



Title Hierarchies of Central Vanuatu – Jean Guiart –

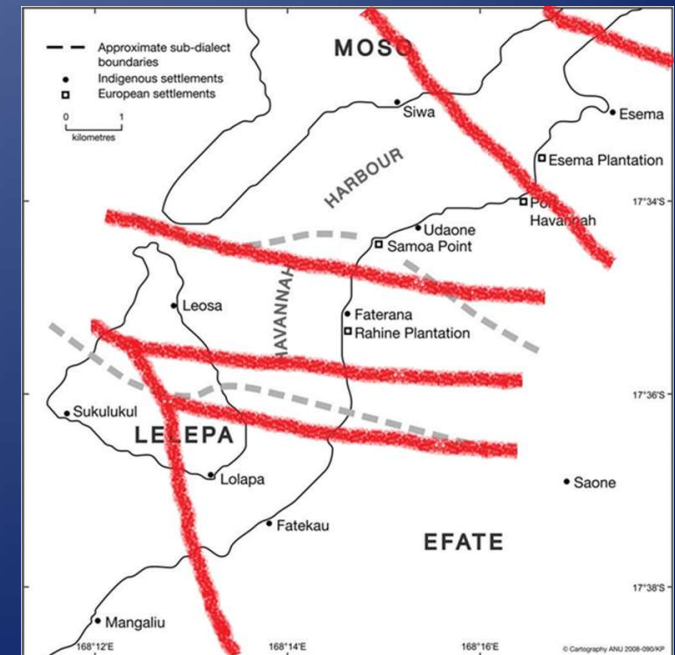
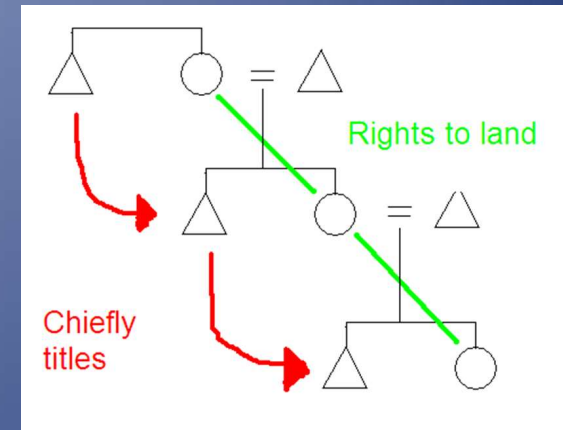


Miklouho-Maclay –
cicatrices on head wife of Ti
Nabua Mata, Tongoa, 1879

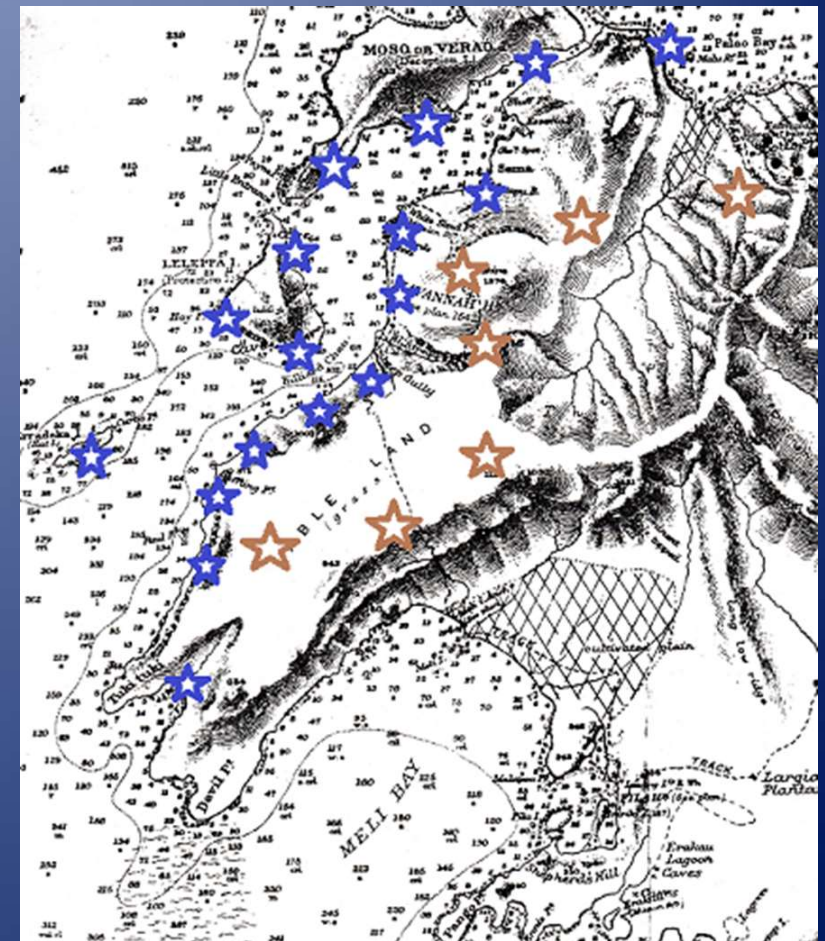


Naflak Matriclans

- Naflak / namatarao – “carried by woman”
- A matrilineal system, in which rights to land and titles follow women
- Male leaders of chiefs “speak for” the land of their sisters, and are succeeded to the title by their sister’s sons
- Naflak function as exogamous matriclans
- Father’s naflak (i.e. FM naflak) also excluded from marriage – identified by name prefixes and suffixes (*namavesi*) specific to each naflak
- Naflak formerly associated with exclusive settlements and territories – each with a distinct communalects/ dialect
- Naflak names reflect totemic natural species, such as octopus or coconut – but no food prohibitions
 - Terrestrial naflak: Nanu (coconut), Nawi (yam)
 - Marine naflak: Pako (shark), Wita (octopus)
 - Fission: Wita (octopus) → wita tao; wita lowa



- On Efate and most of its nearshore islands (Lelepa, Moso, Nguna, Emau – but not Mele or Ifira), individual settlements, coastal and interior, were identified primarily with a single landowning totemic matrilineal group or naflak.
- Implications for naflak historicity:
 - genealogies very shallow, max. 5-6 generations, usually to apical female ancestresses.
 - identity and rights to land self-evident from location and group membership.
- But naflak system has been greatly complicated by interaction with the chiefly title system, and through colonial era depopulation and settlement amalgamation
- Historical and demographic changes have greatly altered the distribution and composition of naflak
- Some of the 28 or more naflak now extinct throughout the Efate region



Naflak settlements, Havannah Harbour, ca. 1850

Blue = marine naflak

Brown= terrestrial naflak

Kuwa'e Eruption of ca. 1452 AD

- 2nd largest eruption globally of last 2000 years?
- Known initially from local oral tradition
- First documented in 1890s
- Apparently confirmed by archaeology (Garanger in 1960s) and then volcanology (ORSTOM team in 1990s)
- Circularity of confirmation - 1425 becomes 1452
- Kuwa'e (the local event) vs “Kuwa'e” (the global event)
- “Kuwa'e” as an eruption in search of a volcano?

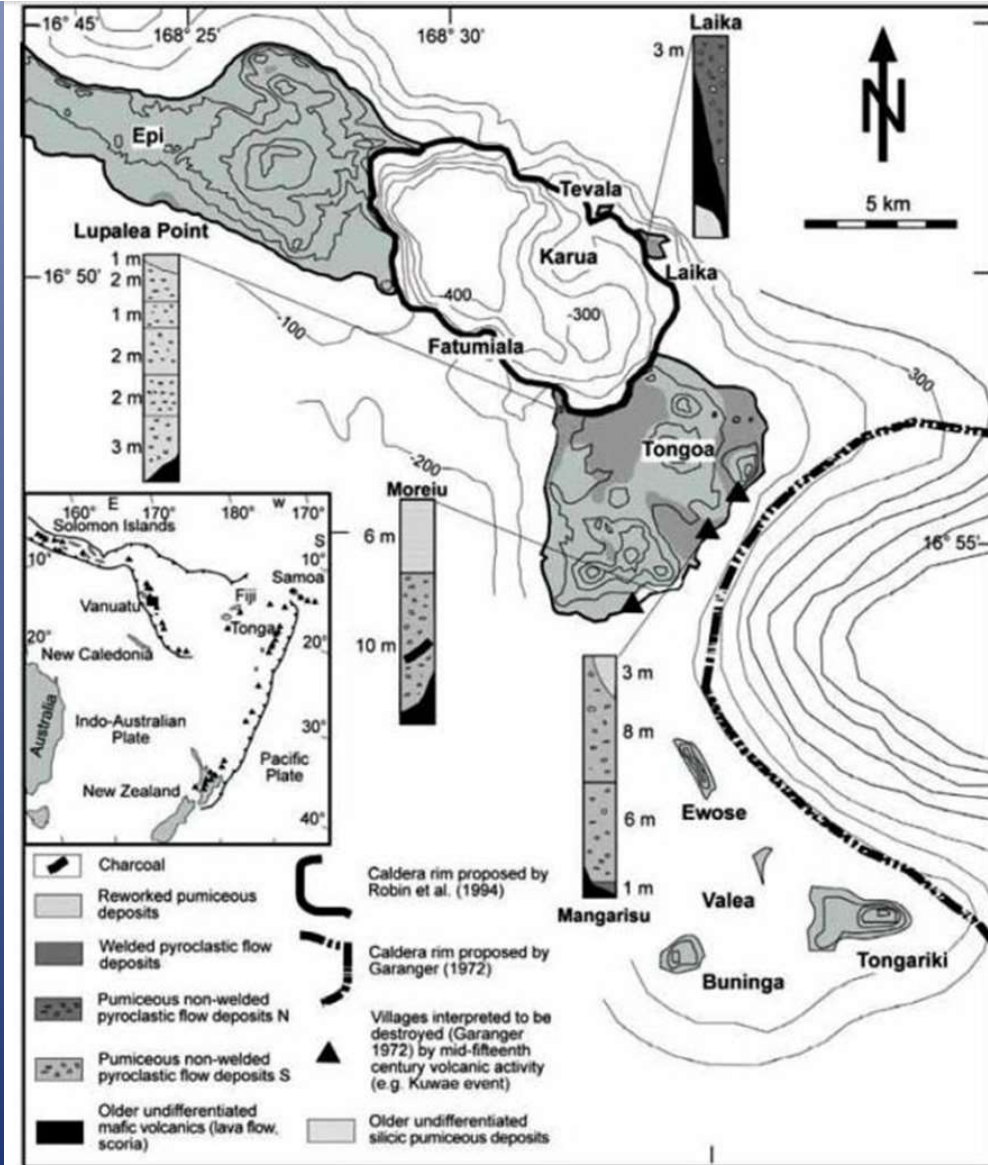
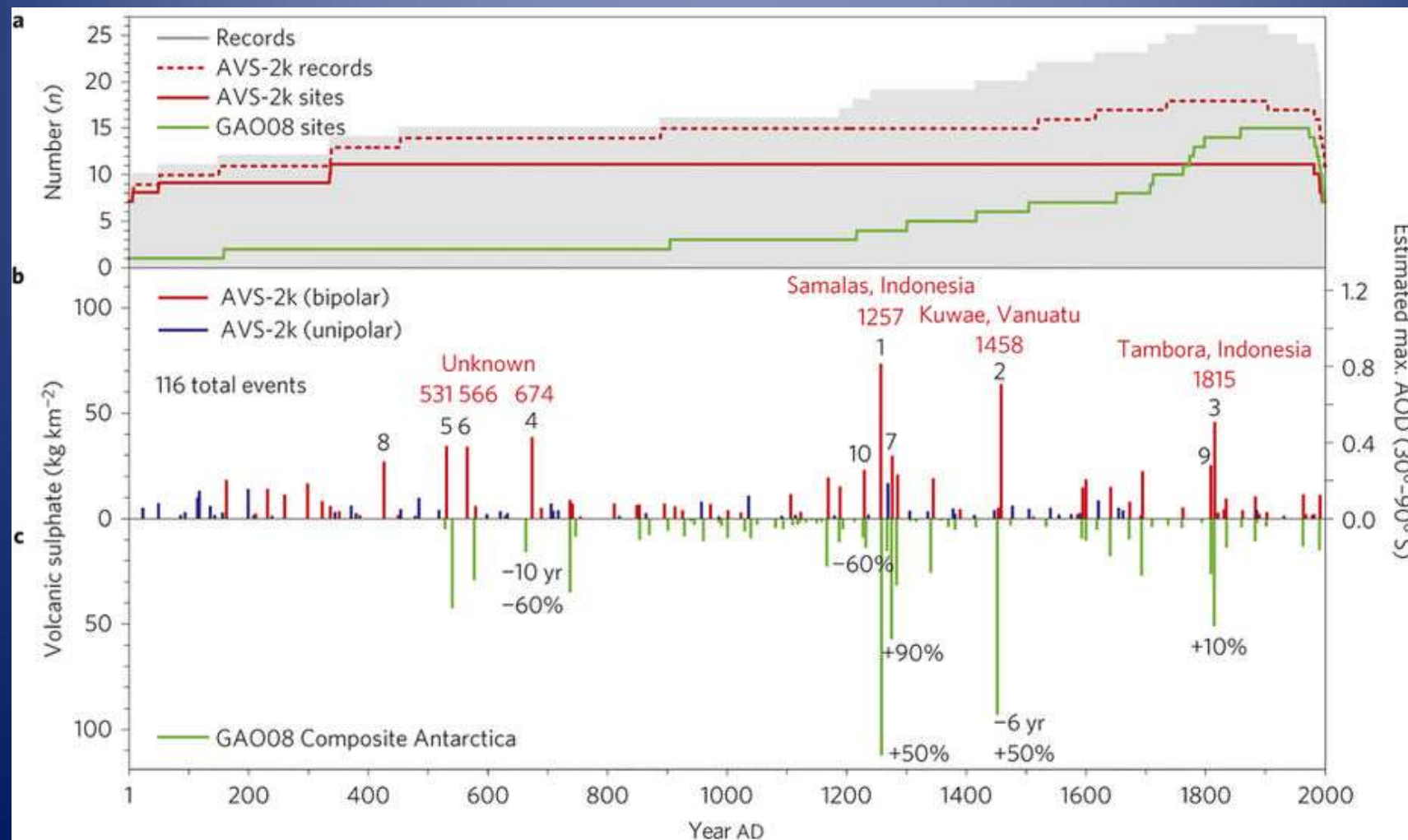


Fig. (1). Simplified location map of the 1964-defined Kuwa'e caldera (SE of Tonga), and the 1994-redefined location between Tonga and Epi Islands, Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides). Grey shaded areas represent land with elevation contours spaced in 100 m intervals. Partial bathymetry contours of the caldera structures are at 100 m intervals. Three separate areas of pumice-rich, predominantly pyroclastic flow and minor fall deposits are mapped on Tonga and Laika, marked by the dark grey.



Ten Largest Volcanic Sulphate Events of Past 2000 Years



Two Stories of Kuwae

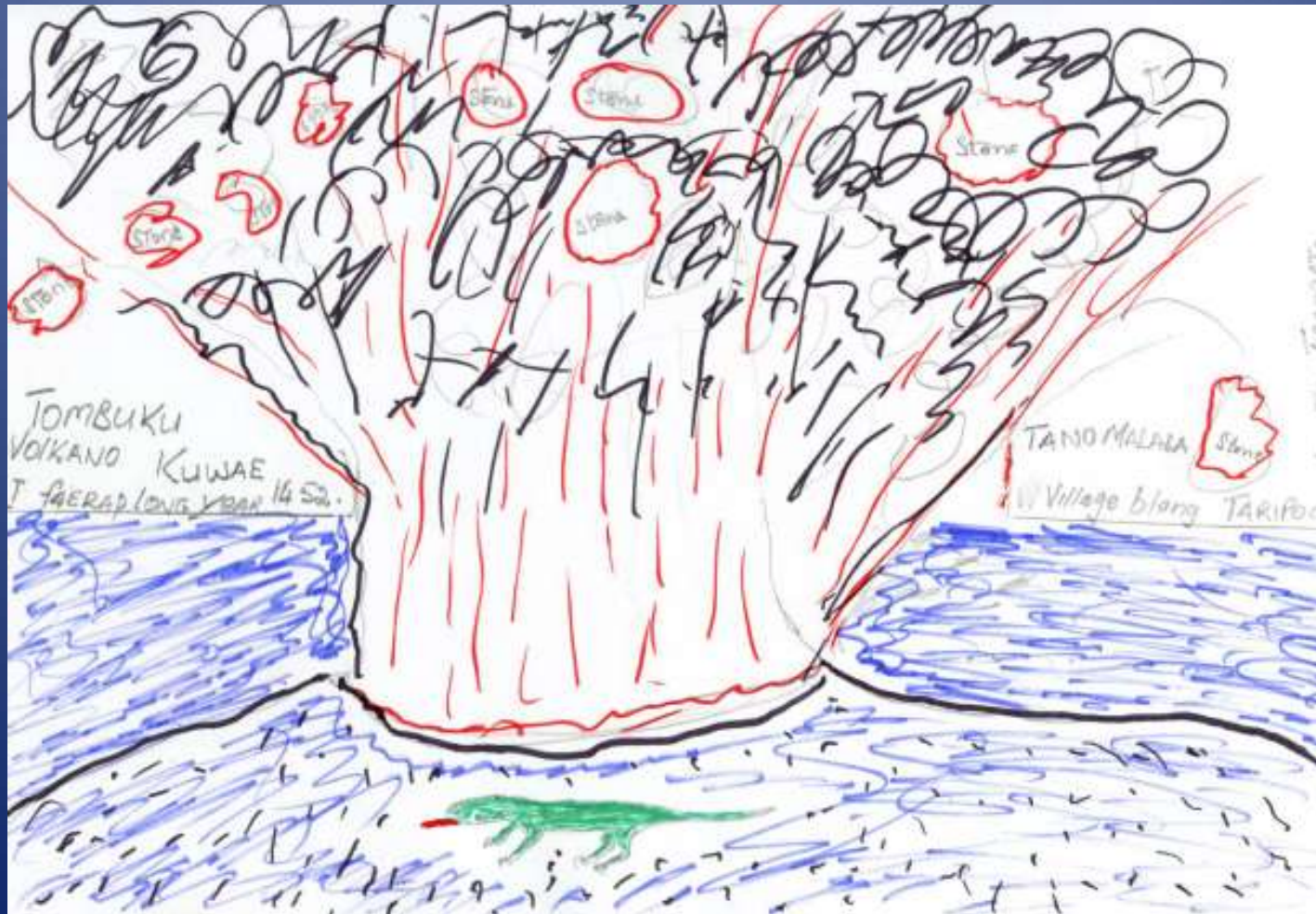
~ 70 versions documented

1. Bae / Tombuku and the eruption of Kuwae

- transgression (incest) and revenge
- the lizard from Lopevi
- story narrated in Nakanamanga

2. Matanauretonga and the resettlement of Tongoa

- one of two survivors
- first to return to Tongoa
- renamed Ti Tongoa – “paramount chief of Tongoa” (cf Tui Tonga)
- story narrated in Namakura



The Lizard in the Volcano

(image from Maëlle Calandra)

Karua 1897

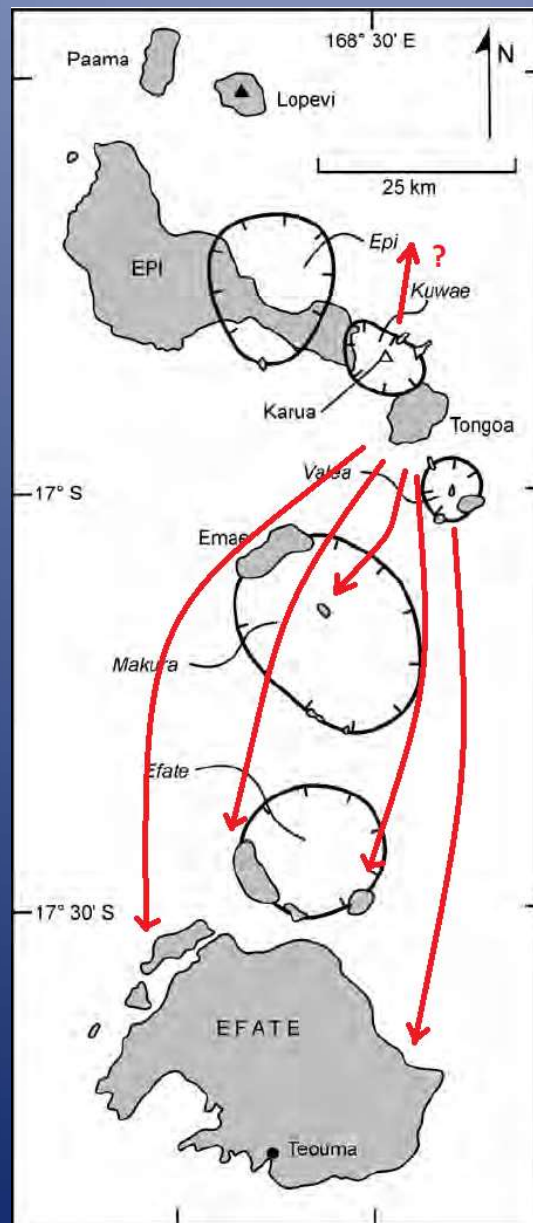


Pacific Manuscripts Bureau

PMB Photo 88-1

Karua 1971





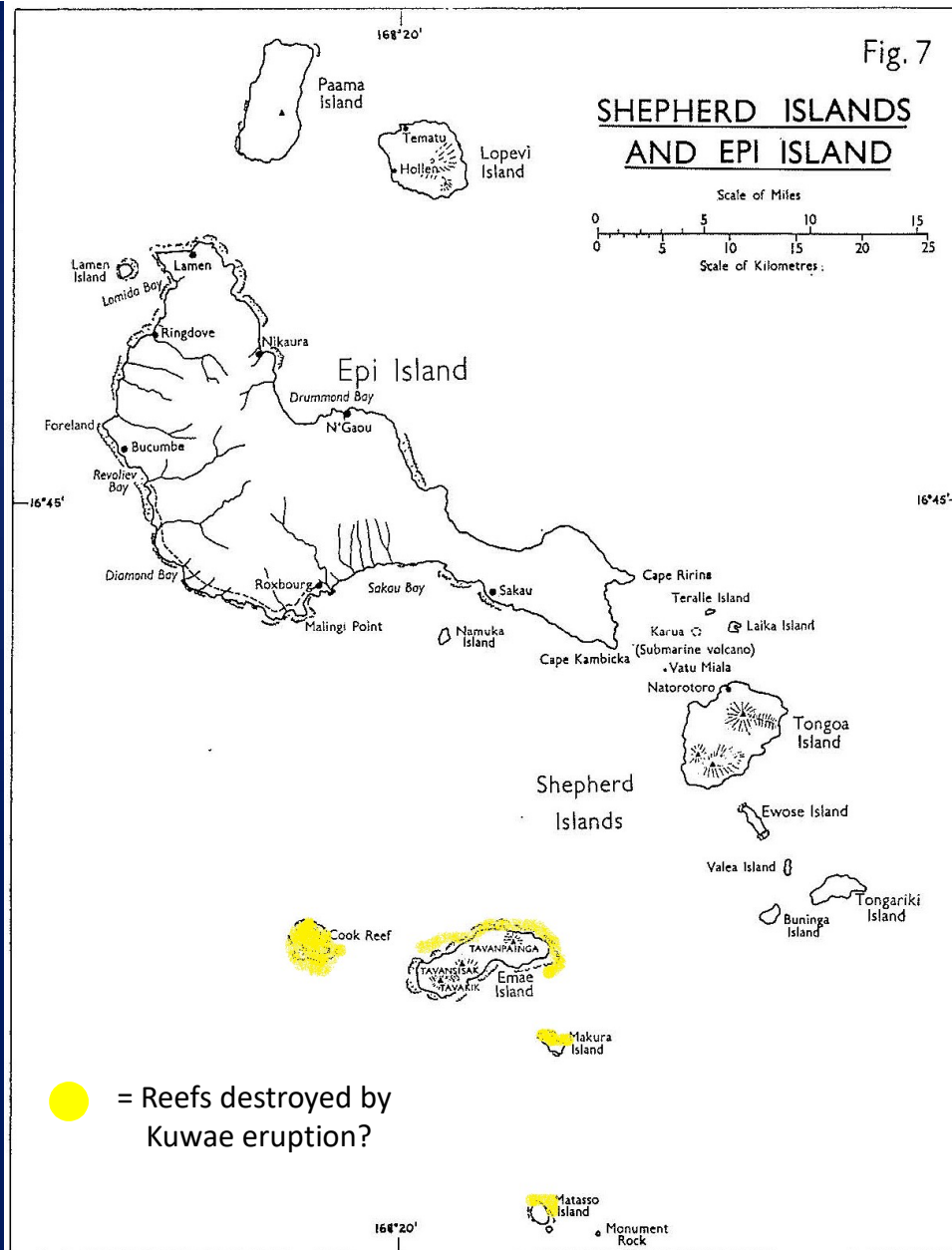
The Flight from
Kuwae, 1452 CE



Mataso and the Shepherd Islands



Tonga, with Tongariki (L) and Buninga (R) in distance

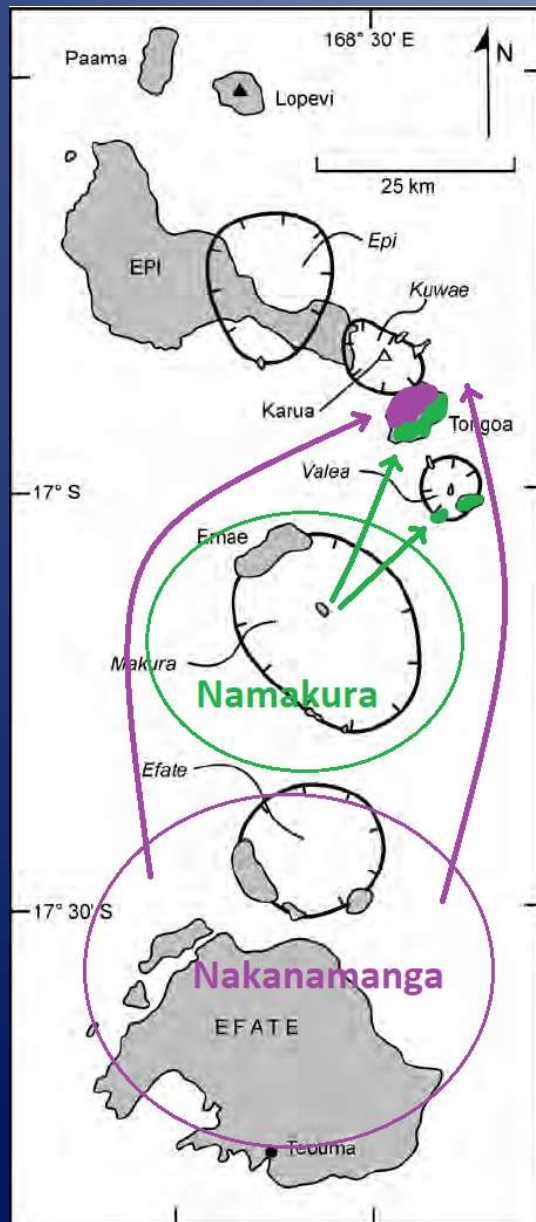


Impact of Kuwae Eruption on Coral Reefs?

- Mythical narratives of the destruction of the community at Bulaiwa (Cook's Reef) – tsunami from the Kuwae eruption?



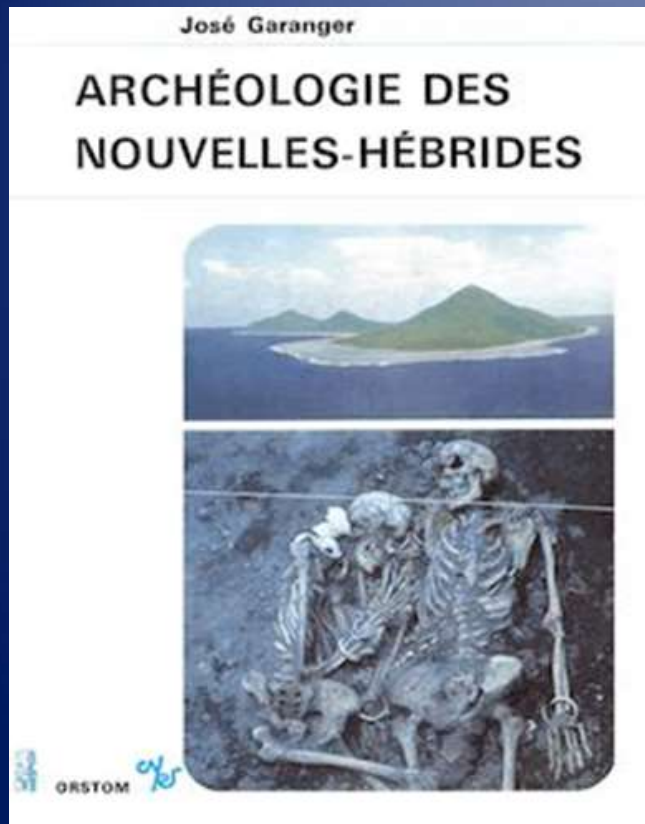
Bulaiwa / Cook's Reef and Emae



Post-Kuwae recolonisation of Tongoa, Tongariki and Buninga by two non-Polynesian languages:

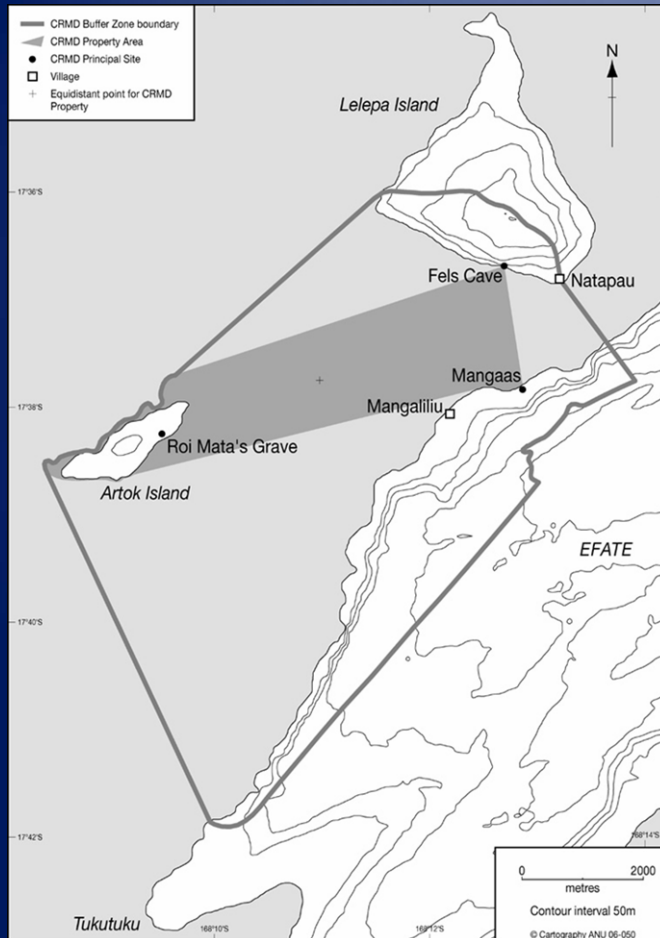
- first, Namakura speakers
- then, Nakanamanga speakers (Tongoa only)

Retention in Nakanamanga on Tongoa of source dialect differences from Efate?



Jose Garanger

- Excavation of the grave of Matanauretonga (Ti Tongoa) on Tongoa
- Dated to 1475 +/-85 AD (uncalibrated)



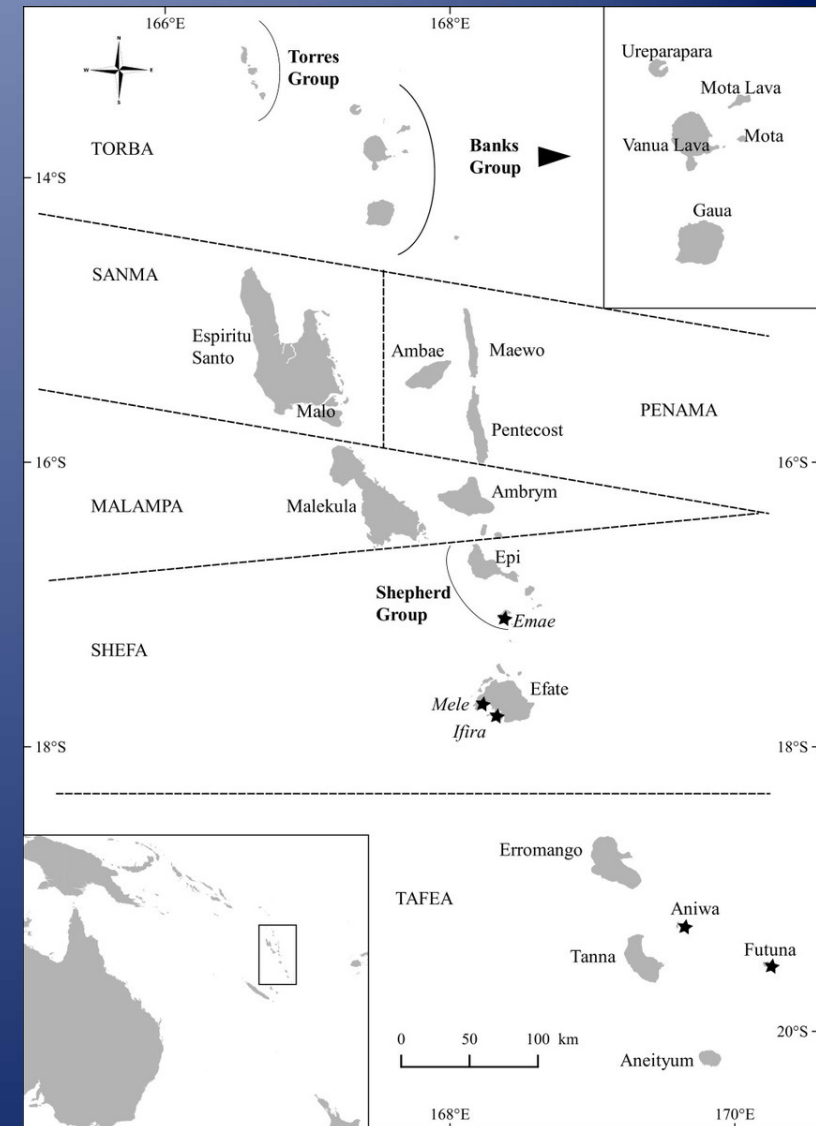
Chief Roi Mata

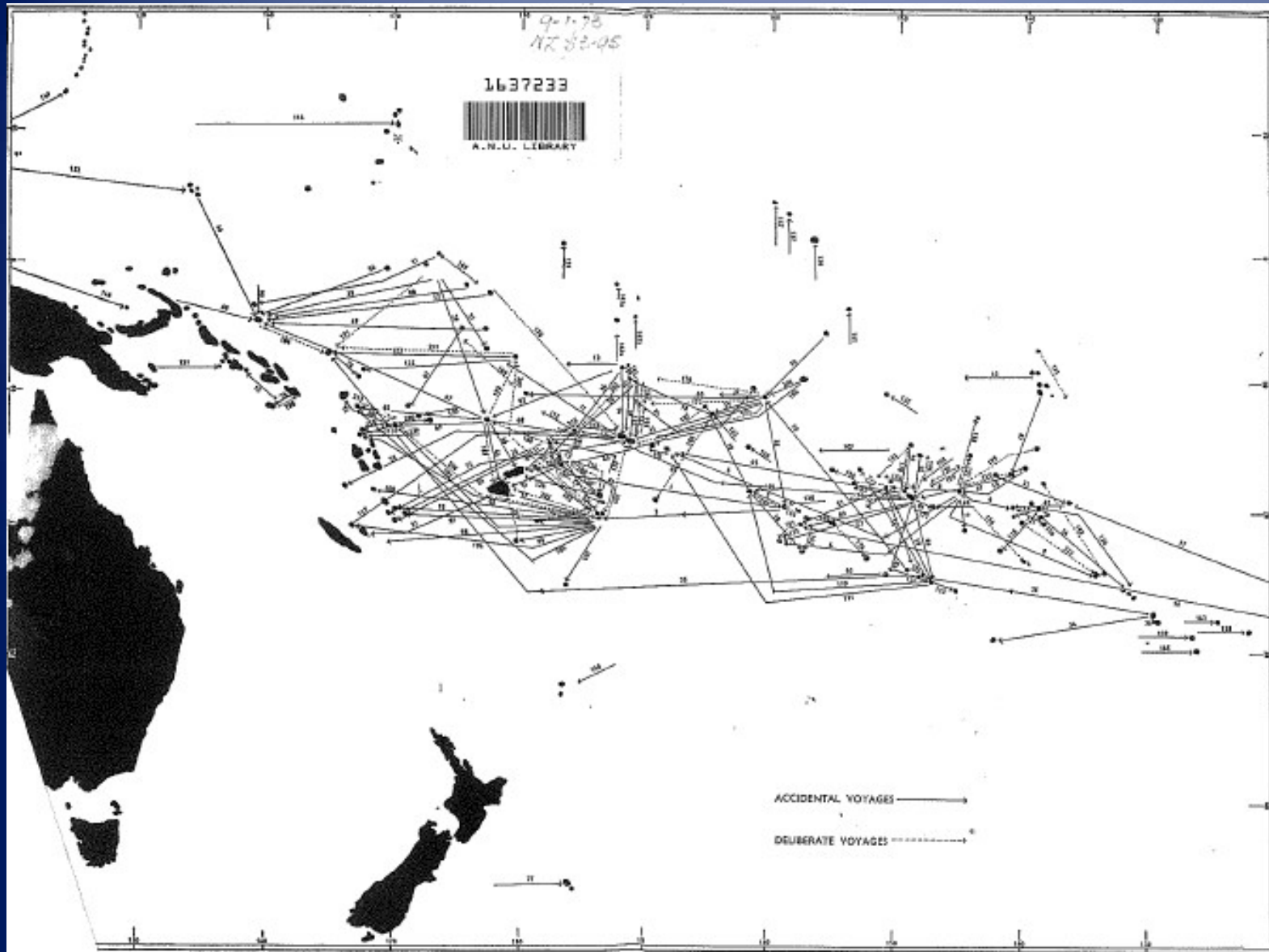
- Kuwae refugees as source of conflict on Efate
- Roi Mata renowned for settling “Great Efate Wars” of 16th C
- Credited with establishing the *naflak* matrilineal system
- Roi Mata dies ca. 1600 CE
- Mass burial at Artok (Retoka) Island
- Richest burial known for the Pacific region
- Naflak couples in grave?



Later Polynesian Arrivals

- So what are the Polynesian Outliers?
- Maybe just outliers in a long sequence of Polynesian voyaging – deliberate and accidental – to Vanuatu, because they've managed to retain Polynesian languages...
- Documentary history of drift voyages (Dening 1972[1966]), using non-traditional documentary sources
 - lists 152 accidental + 62 deliberate voyages
 - only 24 of 152 examples of accidental voyaging travel east
 - vast majority travel from east to west
- Levison, Ward and Webb (1973) on simulation of Polynesian voyaging
 - almost all landfalls in central Vanuatu derive from Tonga (or eastern Fiji)
- When have Western Polynesians NOT voyaged or drifted to Melanesia?





Accidental and Deliberate Voyages

Dening, Greg M. 1963. 'The geographical knowledge of the Polynesians and the nature of inter-island contact.' In J. Golson (ed.) *Polynesian Navigation*, pp.138-153.

19th century voyages from Polynesia to central Vanuatu

- Ca. 1825 – Samoan drift voyagers to Efate – Sualo the mercenary warrior
- Missionary Peter Milne's "6 tragedies" in north Efate / Shepherds
 - Very high attrition rate amongst drift voyagers:
 - Ca. 1856 – 18 Polynesians arrive at Tongariki, all killed
 - Ca. 1861 – two Europeans, father and son, arrive from Fiji or Western Polynesia on Buninga – both killed
 - Between ca. 1856 and ca. 1861, bridal party travelling between Samoa and Tongatapu drifts to Makura and Emae with 80 on board. All killed (many by the Polynesian Outlier community at Magatea) except one small boy, adopted on Makura.
- We have to conceive of a regular flow or input into Vanuatu of Polynesian genes, materials and language.
- What are the factors that render Polynesian influence / input linguistically, culturally or archaeologically visible?
- Successful retention of Polynesian practices, genes and language likely to have reflected
 - either a minimum immigrant number relative to indigenous population,
 - or a capacity to locate and amalgamate with other Polynesian survivors in Outlier settlements such as Ifira and Mele

Colonial Transformations

Early contact history on Efate:

1774	Captain Cook passes Efate on both west and east sides
1822-1840s	Whaling ship visits – and the first epidemics
1825?	Samoa drift voyager Sualo arrives at Erakor, Efate
1842	Sandalwood traders in Havannah Harbour – role of Tongan Ma'afu – Te Ariki Rangi settles until killed in 1860s
1845-1860s	LMS Polynesian teachers established on Efate
1864	First European missionary, Morrison, on Efate
1867	Cotton planters arrive in Havannah Harbour
1868	First recorded lease in Havannah Harbour



HAVANNAH HARBOUR.

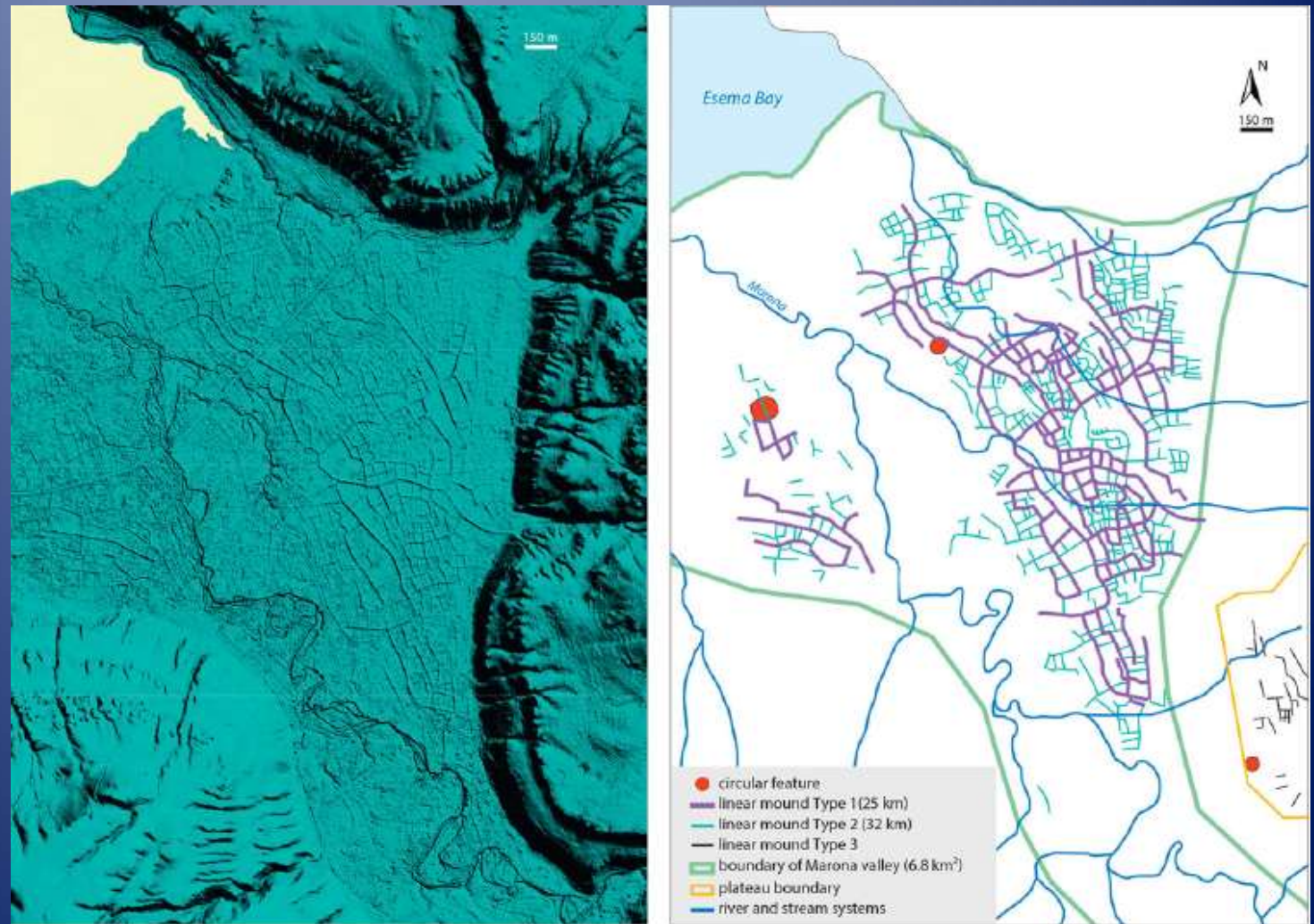
From a Drawing by Lieutenant Field, of H.M.S. "Nelson."

Royal Navy Australian Squadron at Havannah Harbour, 1888

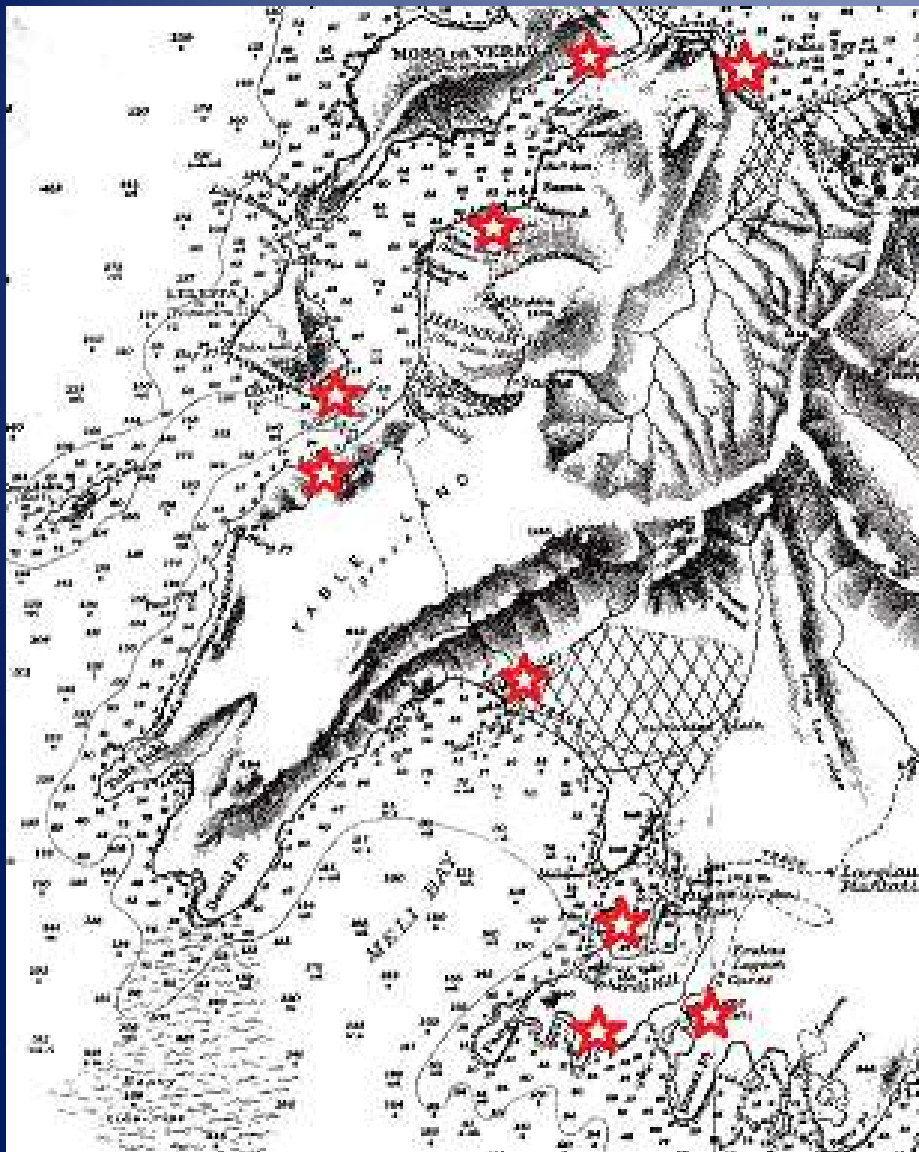
Population estimates for Havannah Harbour

	Havannah Harbour	Lelepa Island
1853:	2500	1000
1889:	1000	
1899:		150
1907:	423	
1913:	250	
1961:		239
2014:		700

Bedford et al. 2018
LiDAR imagery of relict
field systems in Havannah
Harbour, north Efate



Bedford, Stuart, Patricia Siméoni, and Vincent Lebot 2018. 'The anthropogenic transformation of an island landscape: Evidence for agricultural development revealed by LiDAR on the island of Efate, Central Vanuatu, South-West Pacific.' *Archaeology in Oceania* 53(1): 1-14.



Remaining settlements, northwest Efate, 1900-present

- Amalgamation of multiple naflak and communalects in single coastal settlements
- By 1920s, survivors from approx. 15-20 pre-colonial naflak settlements were gathered in each surviving community
- Little if any of this history could be deduced from either linguistics or archaeology working alone.
- Whether it ultimately proves accurate or not, history sets out a series of plausible and testable propositions, which also form part of the knowledge base on which people act in the real world.