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A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE FOLASA-A-LALO EXCAVATIONS

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The Folasa site, designated SU-Fo-1 in the numbering system adopted for Upolu, Western Samoa, is located in one of several named areas found along the east side of the Falefa River some two miles inland and near the village of Falevao-i-tai. These named areas often possess extensive archaeological remains. A large number of the structures in the vicinity of the area named Folasa-a-lalo, of which this site is one, were mapped by J. M. Davidson as a part of her survey of some 18 such named localities in the inner eastern arm of the Falefa valley (Davidson 1967a: 28; 1967b: 225). In Folasa-a-lalo surface remains most often consist of house sites indicated by pavements of water worn river pebbles called 'ili'ili' in which a curbing of larger natural stones delineates the house perimeter; similar stones delineate the area of an associated pavement. These structures are often situated on an earthen terrace. As well, a number of earthen terraces which were lacking in any visible surface remains were mapped, and at several points free standing stone walls were encountered in the area of the survey. Although the remains are well distributed over a wide and gently sloping area between the main stream and the mountain slopes behind, they seem to form a single settlement.

In this settlement the site of Fo-1 is a large earthen terrace lying on the north-east side of the area which was mapped and borders on the lowest slopes of the ridges which lead up to the adjacent mountains. Some of the terraces here were built on or cut into these slopes and on one of the upper terraces above this site, Fo-2, Davidson (1967b: mapped a square house, the only one of this type encountered in the survey. From the hearth or oven in one corner of the house, she obtained a charcoal sample. Typologically the house was thought to be that of a historic period plantation shelter and a date of 180± 70 B.P. on the hearth charcoal supports this supposition.

STRUCTURAL INVESTIGATIONS

Excavations at Fo-1 were carried out between January 10 and February 25, 1967. The principal portion of the site was a large earthen terrace partially cut into the slope of the ridge behind. However, inland of this terrace on more gently sloping land were additional terraces or in some cases mounds, where ditches had been dug along their upslope sides. In fact, it was the presence of the ditches which most clearly defined

these terrace-mounds. A portion of a low stone wall or platform had been found in association with one of these terraces.

Excavation showed that the main earthen terrace had been created by cutting back into the slope and using the spoil to fill in the area downslope, thus creating a large flat platform. On this flat surface, two round-ended house structures were outlined in stone curbing and associated with two larger rectangular pavements also outlined in stone (Figure 1).

The two terraces on the inland side to the south-east were also partially investigated. They lay on the other side of a shallow ditch and were not as well built. Their surfaces sloped downhill and were lacking in any stone remains which would indicate the presence of former structures. It is therefore doubtful that these terraces ever supported structures that were used as dwellings. After these terrace-mounds had been cleared of all vegetation, it was found that the easternmost terrace was associated with a stone wall which continued to the east beyond the terrace and into an area covered in forest.

The flat surface of the main earthen terrace of Fo-1 is 30 meters long and 15 meters wide and exhibits an irregular oval shape. The long axis runs from north-west to south-east and the surface is slightly lower at the north-west end. Most of the northern edge is defined by the abrupt change in grade where the terrace has been formed by cutting into the slope. The flat area is divided into two approximately equal portions by the remains of the two houses and their associated pavements which lie on its surface. The pavements in both locations consisted of small water worn river pebbles and larger boulders with diameters of 40 to 50 cm.

Extensive excavations were carried out in and around the house on the north-west portion of the terrace, which was designated as house No. I. Toward the termination of the investigations an area of some eight square meters was excavated in the area of the other house, designated as No. II.

When the structural relationship of the pavements associated with the two houses was closely examined, it was evident that the pavement of house II was constructed first and that the pavement associated with house I at least along this edge, was then added. Stone curbs were found forming the almost complete outline of one oval shaped house, and portions of several others were found on the north-west side of house I. A fireplace inside the complete structure near the northern end is thought to associate with the complete house. As this curb outline was almost intact and stratigraphically on the upper portion of the 'ili'ili layer, it represents the last house to be erected at this location.

An earlier alignment of stone curbing lay partially exposed inside that of the intact house on the north-east end indicating an older house under the last one. There were also remains of a house outlined in very large stones that almost completely surrounded the last house foundation on one side. These were set in a different pattern and are now part of the last house pavement. After removing the majority of the river pebble fill or 'ili'ili layer in the area of these curb alignments, leaving only the curbs, it became clear that in fact there had been five dwellings built at this location in the course of time, all in slightly different positions. A radiocarbon date on charcoal from posthole No. 87 in Sq. D-5 belonging to the fifth house in the series yielded a date of 470 ± 180 years before 1950 (GaK 1434). Within a one sigma deviation this places occupation between the 15th and 18th century A.D., with house 5 at the middle of this range, and several others following in the period up to the 18th century A.D. This was demonstrated not only by the exposed curb alignments, but also by the distribution of the postholes defined in the clay layer underlying the river pebble fill, or 'ili'ili layer. Here the relationship of the various posthole patterns to the remains of stone curbing was especially important in connecting surviving portions of the stone alignments with the correct house.

When the 'ili'ili layer was removed in areas outside the curb alignments, in particular to the south-west and south toward the front of the terrace, at least four more sets of house outlines could be traced from the posthole patterns both outside and crossing through the more central portions of the later houses. Therefore, it seems clear that at least nine times dwellings of an oval or round-ended shape were rebuilt in the location of house 1. In size these dwellings range from those 7 meters long and 4.5 meters wide to those 9 meters long and 5.5 meters wide.

To check on the presence of the same phenomenon in the location occupied by house 2, the 'ili'ili layer from a small series of squares within that house was again removed. Even though only eight square meters were opened, posthole patterns revealed the existence at that locus of at least four prior houses besides the last, the curbing for which still remained intact. Additional excavation would doubtless have increased the number as at house 1.

An excavation trench was laid out at right angles to the length of the earthen terrace. It extended from well up on the slope behind, across the area of house 1 and then down the terrace bank. This revealed the cut and fill construction of the earthen terrace. But on the northern side, well up on the slope, it also revealed nearly 100 postholes. Two shallow oven pits with charcoal at their base were also encountered. A radiocarbon date on charcoal from oven No. 2 in Sq. B-5 yielded a date of

210± 70 years before 1950 (GaK 1436). Using a one sigma deviation this would place the occupation associated with the oven between the late 17th and early 19th century A.D., suggesting it belongs with one of the later houses in the series. From their position, one reasonable explanation for the postholes was from posts which formed a fence bordering the terrace at the rear. Another is that some of them were from posts of cooking houses erected over the oven pits. Both are likely explanations.

Charcoal collected from a lens of mixed charcoal and angular pebbles which lay on top of the natural subsoil at the base of the excavations but under the two clay layers carried and dumped to form the terrace yielded a radiocarbon date of 1410± 100 years before 1950 (GaK 1435). It indicates that construction of the terrace probably dates to after the 6th or 7th century A.D. and that human utilization of this locality dates back to that period or before.

BURIALS

While removing the 'ili'ili' layer, burials were discovered within house 1 under the pebble pavement which constituted the floor. In all, five burial pits were identified in the clay fill, each completely sealed in by the upper portion of the 'ili'ili' layer and so clearly earlier than occupation of the last house at least. One of the five pits was very shallow and incomplete. Only part of a mandible and a few teeth were found in it near those walls that remained. For this reason it was impossible to determine the size of the pit or guess the orientation of the burial. The four remaining burial pits were all of rectangular form with rounded corners. Three were between 1.6 and 1.9 meters long and 60 cm. wide, but the fourth was much larger being 2.9 meters long and 70 cm. wide. Depths of the pits from the surface of the clay layer were shallow, and the deepest measured only 50 cm. from the upper surface of the 'ili'ili' layer. While it is probable that all were cut from some earlier surface within the 'ili'ili' layer, the nature of this layer makes this point impossible to determine.

The condition of the bones was uniformly bad due to the highly acid nature of the soil. Only parts of crania, pieces of mandible with teeth, and traces of femur were found. The shape of the pits, however, suggests the bodies were laid out full length. Except in the largest pits, the crania were all located fairly closely to one end wall of the pit. In the largest pit the skull was found about 50 cm. from one end. The orientation of the pits did not appear significant, one lay S.E.-N.W., one E.-W., and two S.W.-N.E. However, all the crania were placed toward the southern end, even in the pit oriented E.-W., where the skull was placed off centre toward the south. No burial offerings were recovered.

As well as the burial pits, a low "burial-like" mound had been noted to the east of house 1 and near the border of the pavement associated with house 2. Debris from the mound itself covered the pavements associated with both houses and was therefore assumed to have been created after both of them. Excavation of the mound did not produce any evidence of bones, offerings, or red clay that often mark a burial. Thus, although a rectangular pit was defined from which the spoil had come to mark the low mound, it was not possible to be certain that it functioned as a burial pit. The pit was 1.5 meters long and 35 cm. wide at the base. Its depth from the surface of the mound was 60-70 cm.

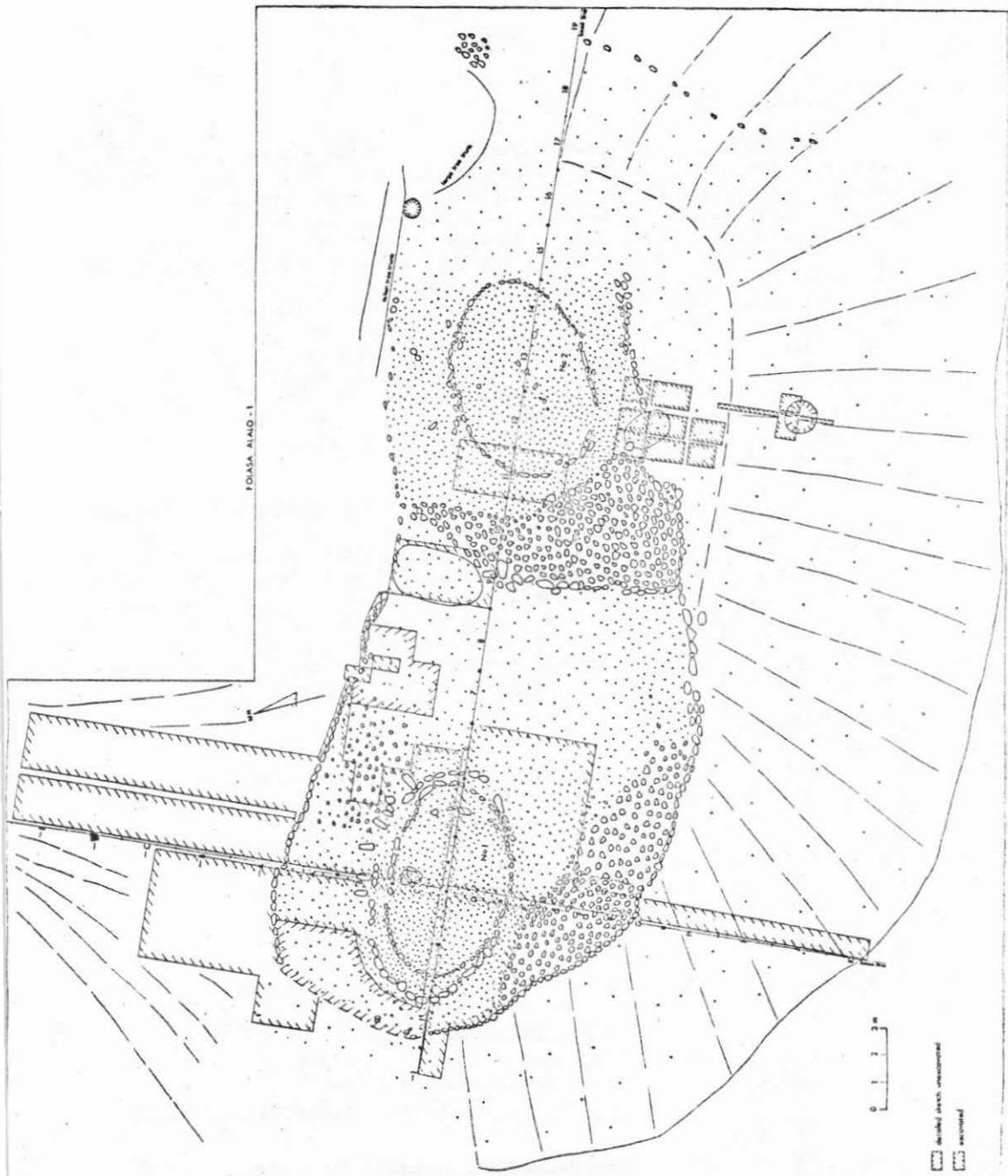
A smaller but otherwise similar mound was located outside of but touching upon the border of the pavement associated with house 2 at the edge of the earthen terrace to the south of the house and pavement. Again the mound's position suggested it was later than the house. The southern half of the mound was sectioned in excavation; this revealed at least three later pits which had greatly disturbed the area. For this reason it was impossible to reconstruct the shape of the original feature. From one of these later pits, pieces from very recent porcelain penguins made in Japan were recovered. On the slope of the earthen terrace, about four meters south of this mound, an indentation about a meter in diameter had also been noted and was investigated. One likely interpretation had been the remains of an earth oven, but this proved not to be the case; instead another pit was defined from which additional pieces of the porcelain penguins were recovered. Thus this pit, like one and probably all of the others above, were very recent.

THE OTHER TERRACES

The first terrace to the south-east of that with the house remains was irregular in shape and surface, and was differentiated from the first not only by its lower height, but also by a shallow ditch between the two. Another narrow shallow ditch divided this terrace from one above. As noted in the initial description, a low stone wall was found in association with this last terrace.

A two-meter-wide trench was laid out and excavated which cut through both the ditch between the terrace with the houses, and that to the south-east, as well as one which exposed the stratigraphy in the ditch which divided the two terraces without structures. As no postholes were encountered in these operations, this provided another indication that structures were probably not built on these terraces. Given their irregular outlines, sloping surfaces, and the fact that the principal function of the ditches seems to be for carrying off excess water in times of heavy rain, a horticultural function is suggested.

FOIASA ALIAD - 1



excavated
measured but unexcavated

0 1 2 3 m

PORTABLE ARTEFACTS

No artefacts of European origin other than those already mentioned were recovered throughout the entire excavations. This lack of pieces of grass, crockery, gun flints, clay pipes or more recent items, such as are found in historic sites, indicates the major occupation dates to a period before 1830 A.D. when the main trade oriented European contact began. Thus only the few pits described above are recent and were not contemporary with the earthen terrace or the various house or other structural features. The radiocarbon dates given above for two of these features indicate that occupation probably extended from before the 15th century to the 18th century A.D. This is consistent with the fact that a reasonable collection of portable artefacts in stone were recovered from the excavations. These include 23 adzes, 1 grater (made on a section of a broken adze), 5 adze blanks, 3 hammer stones, 4 flakes, 3 fragments of grinding stones, and several pieces of ochre. As well, one piece of cassis shell was encountered.

The adzes may be classified into five types following the classification used by Buck (1930: 334-54). Common types are I, IIa or IIb, IV, and VIII. A careful examination of the distribution of various adze types in relation to their stratigraphic positions failed to identify any chronological change by type through time. Rather, from this point of view, it reveals a continuity in adze type as there is in house form and type of burial. Thus it is likely that the entire sequence of occupation represents a single period in Samoan prehistory, and one which lies toward the late end of the prehistoric sequence for that island group.

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