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FORTIFICATIONS IN FIJI AND SAMOA: COMPARISONS AND PREDICTIONS

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This short paper is based on a seminar given in the Anthropology Department of Auckland University on 31 Oct 1990. Originally it was hoped that fieldwork to check the hypotheses developed would be carried out within a reasonable span of time. For various reasons this has not come to pass, and since the original theme expressed at the seminar has now appeared unacknowledged in a conference paper, soon to be a journal article, the author feels impelled to publish, however prematurely.

THE FORTIFICATIONS

During the author's PhD fieldwork in the Lau Group, Fiji, 47 fortifications were mapped, on a total of nine islands. These fell into three groups: coastal ring ditches on flat land, inland volcanic hilltop ditch and/or terraced sites, and fortifications along the tops of rocky limestone ridges.

All Fijian fortifications examined had one main feature in common. This was the social and/or religious organisation of the settlement. The centre of the fort, the *lomo-ni-koro* or heart of the village, had the largest and highest housemounds, containing specialised pottery (in shape, decoration and exotic temper – Best 1989: 594-617), and once away from the coastal flats was always the highest point within the fortifications.

While the first two categories of fortification lend themselves to this arrangement, by having simple topography, the third category, the coastal limestone ridges, do not. These ridges are long and razor-backed, often with no one especially high point. This results in the dispersal of features which in the other two types of forts are concentrated on or around a central place. This results in a fortification of great size apparently spread haphazardly over the countryside. Despite this, these forts are similar to the rest in having the highest point accentuated by sizeable earthworks or stoneworks, all access to which is cut off by ditches and/or banks of terraces.

In 1988 the author was invited (by R. Green) to join the team of Leach, Witter and Witter in the second stage of their project on Tutuila, American Samoa. This was to further investigate what Leach and Witter had found and identified as the fortified quarry of Tatagamatau (Leach and Witter 1987). This site appeared to break all the rules of Fijian fortifications, in that it was situated on a ridge which continued to run back up to higher ground above the site, with no central high area defended by ditches or terraced spurs. Although Leach and Witter had found earthworks higher up the ridge, they considered these to be merely outworks of the fortified quarry or a separate site (Leach and Witter 1987: 38).

A suggestion by the author that the 'fortified quarry' might in fact be part

of a larger site was rejected by Leach, and no plans had been made to investigate these or any other such features further up the ridge.

The author therefore carried out a more intensive survey of the ridge, the results of which are shown in Fig. 1. They show clearly that the area originally mapped by Leach and Witter is part of a much larger fortification. This expanded version incorporates a high area with a monumental earthmound, two terraced and/or ditched spurs running up to this, and an extremely large ditch in a saddle just north of the high point which cuts off access from inland. All these features are consistent with our knowledge of Fijian fortifications.

Leach and Witter (1990: 55) and Green (pers. comm.) question the interpretation of these features as a single fortification, and Leach makes the suggestion, quoting a local tradition, that the large ditch was dug by Tongans merely to impede access between villages (Best, Leach and Witter 1989: 9, 10). The place of the Terrible Tongans in the oral history of this area of the Pacific, and the lemming-like use by archaeologists of oral tradition to explain archaeological features, is a subject in its own right, and will be dealt with in an expanded version of this paper.

Since the interpretation of the complex of features as a single fortification not only makes good sense, taking into account the local topography, but also finds archaeological analogies in Fiji, the author prefers to stick with this view rather than any of the more esoteric explanations.

The results of my survey indicated a rethink of the Tatagamatau quarry. It can no longer hold the status of 'fortified quarry', a term which implied that the rock source was the reason for fortification – it is only a very small part of the site with considerable evidence for quarrying elsewhere.

However, Leach was correct in saying that other Samoan sites were similar to her original interpretation of Tatagamatau, in that they are restricted to the lower parts of descending ridges, with no central area, and with ditches on the uphill side. This is the case with most of the inland sites mapped by Green and Davidson in Western Samoa. Leach specifically refers to the sites of Mafafa and Luatuanu'u (Leach and Witter 1987: 38). However, rather than add weight to their interpretation of Tatagamatau, such analogy merely serves to highlight other discrepancies in the above survey. Other sites mapped or described have no coherent design apparent in the relationship of features such as ditches, banks, terraces, etc. (Green and Davidson 1969; sites 1–4 on p. 17 v. 1, and the Tula-i-pule and Tula-i-matafale site complexes inland of Luatuanu'u village, pp. 184-194 v. 1).

I am therefore led to put forward the following predictions based on my understanding of the internal organization of Pacific fortifications.

PREDICTIONS

1. That many of the inland fortifications surveyed and mapped by Green and Davidson will, when resurveyed, turn out to be parts of much larger sites, which will conform to the pattern suggested above. These will have a central extensively modified high area, with all access routes defended by

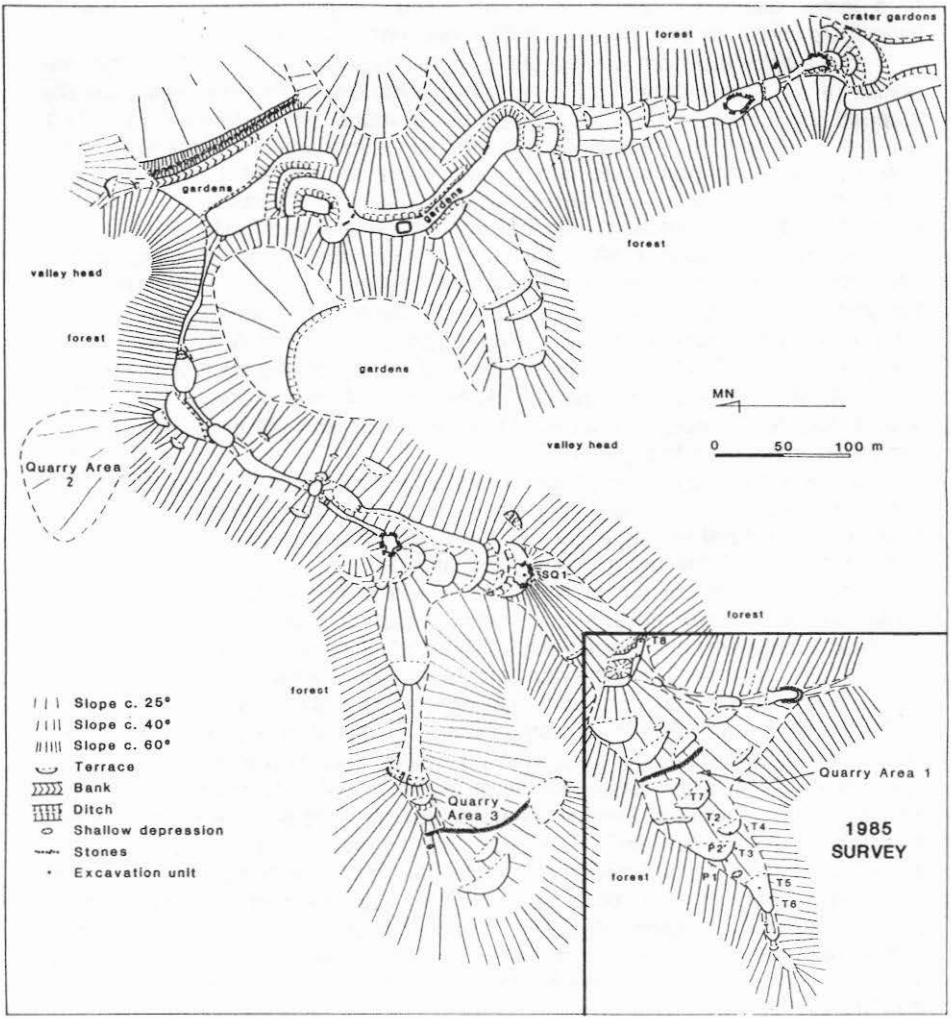

Fig. 1. Tatagamatau: first and second season surveys.

ditches and/or terraces.

2. That these sites will all belong to the same time period in Samoan prehistory, which is likely to be of the same order as the dates for Tatagamatau, between 900 and 600 years BP. Although one of the West Samoa sites, Luatuanu'u, has already been dated by Green to 1500±80 BP (Green and Davidson 1969: 208), this date was taken from flecks of charcoal within the matrix of one of the bank fortifications. The event that produced the charcoal cannot be tied into the construction of the bank, and almost certainly relates to prior use of the ridge as gardens.

3. That the same re-interpretation can be applied to many of the groups of features mapped by fieldworkers in American Samoa (i.e. Clarke 1989).

4. That other archaeological features such as the enigmatic 'star mounds' will be seen to fit into the overall pattern of settlement, rather than, as at present, stand out as isolated objects of curiosity (i.e. Herdrich 1991).

If these predictions are found to be correct, then obviously some major re-interpretation of Samoan prehistory will result (not to mention a rethink of presently accepted 'intensive' survey techniques). Any sudden efflorescence of monumental structures with an internal hierarchical organisation, which are not necessarily connected to any real or perceived likelihood of increased warfare, poses some fascinating questions concerning the role of authority in the society, and the role of the gods in that authority.

FUTURE FIELDWORK

A project for resurveying some of Green and Davidson's sites has been approved by the various authorities in West Samoa. The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of R. Green over the 12 months this has taken to arrange. However, so far no funding has been available, and continuance of the project depends on the ability of an out-of-work, out-of-money, and definitely out-of-favour archaeologist to get himself across the water gap and poke around. Any donations, however small, will be gratefully received.

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