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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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# INTERPRETATIONS OF SAMOAN FORTIFICATIONS

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Samoa fortifications have been interpreted by Simon Best (1993) as places of sustained settlement with permanent defences. I, on the other hand, continue to see them as periodically refurbished, or at times, newly built refuges occurring in the Samoan archaeological record over the last 700 years, most of them probably constructed and used from time to time between 500 and 150 years ago (Green 2002: 146). However Best (1993: 434) avers it is no longer tenable to describe Pacific fortifications, and those of Samoa in particular, "as mere 'refuges', retreats to be used in times of emergency, with little or no attempt at permanent defences". Why the differences in viewpoint? Quite simply because Best believes they should all be interpreted from a Fijian perspective in which the same basic physical layouts and functions apply.

## **Fijian Fortifications**

Lowland valley floor and coastal settlements in Fiji were of the ring-ditch or multiple-ring-ditch form. Their actual plans vary greatly, as do their numbers. No-one seriously disputes their interpretation as ranging from simple well-defended hamlets, to fortified villages, or - by the standards of the European observers of 1808 to 1874 - as "towns". Certainly a great many of them are interpreted from the ethnohistoric accounts and by archaeologists assessing their physical remains as permanent settlements with permanent defences. Within their interiors, according to the size of the enclosed defended space, from three or four to a great many house mounds (*yavu*) are normally situated. In the larger defensive enclosures with numerous house mounds, one of the sizeable mounds is often singled out and interpreted as the mound platform base for the house of a chief. At times, one of the other of the higher mounds is held to be that for a god house or temple. The latter attributions are often supported by local oral

tradition. It is the presence of these typical domestic house mounds that attest to the forts' (*kolo*) long-term residential function.

Best (1993: 400) indicates his map of Nakorovusa may be taken as indicative of this site type on Lakeba, an island in the Lau group (Best 1993: Fig. 2). It also serves to illustrate others in the Lau Islands, as well as those found in general throughout Fiji. Within its 28,000 square metres of defended interior space, Nakorovusa contained some 33 plus house mounds, and the settlement was usually described by a succession of 19th century European observers as a "town". One even called it a city. The names of the six districts into which it was divided are known, and those parts where "other settlements on Lakeba took their positions in time of interisland war have also been recorded" (Best 1993: 407).

No such permanently occupied lowland fortified settlements occur in Samoa. Instead evidence of either raised pavements, stone platforms or earthen mounds on which the typical Samoan dwellings were situated, constitutes the main kind of settlement found on the same relatively flat land situation. None are securely encompassed within a substantial set of permanent circular perimeter defences. In sum, prehistoric Samoa lacked lowland ring-ditch sites of the fortified hamlet, village or town type found in Fiji.

The second common type of Fijian fortifications according to Best (1993: 400) is of the hilltop kind, in which lengths of sloping spurs leading up to it are also incorporated as part of the design and carry one or more defensive features, either ditches and banks, or terraces, or combinations of both. On occasion, low hills with sufficient flat area on the summit for a small fort, or with slopes not steep enough to act as natural defences, will exhibit ring-ditch like form (Best 1993: 404).

On Lakeba, the site of Kedekede with a central flattened summit of 300 square metres, bearing five house mounds, is seen in this instance as the Fijian-wide representative sample. It has a number of large terraces cut into the spurs running down from the summit which could have also served for habitation, but none of them carry house mounds. It too was described by early European observers as "the ruins of a town" (Best 1993: 387). It can be compared, for example, to other sites of the hilltop kind in the central highlands of Viti Levu, which also possessed house mounds or *yavu* on the highest most central part of the site (Best 1993: 399). Again one mound was suggested as supporting the dwelling house of the chief, and another as the foundation for a temple, while the largest was interpreted as the men's house of the village chief. Similarly

fortified hilltop positions are known, mostly from inland Samoa, though at least one coastal example was identified [site 52] (Davidson 1969: 204). The one ring-ditch fort on a hilltop encountered in the Samoan group was found on the island of Savai'i (Davidson 1974: 241). What these sites lack are house mounds, or other typical platforms and pavements as the foundations for the usual kind of permanent Samoan dwellings.

Finally, Best (1993: 400, 404) has a site type where a hilltop is not available to the defenders, and a length of ridge or ridge ends are used. On Lakeba, the 38 ha limestone ridge fort of Ulunikoro (Best 1993: Figs 3 and 4) serves as his Lakeba, Lau and Fiji in general representative. It displays both stone platforms and low earth mounds at various points within its defences, often at high points (Best 1993: Fig. 5; Best 1984: 108-109). Two of these earth mounds lie on two of the stone platforms (Best 1993: 410) and more than a dozen additional earth mounds with stone around their perimeters in other locations (Best 1993: Fig. 4). Best (1984: 111) says low earth mounds are the fore-runner to *yavu* or house mounds of later sites. Thus "House mounds are present at all main sites after this time [930 B.P.] and appear to have their origins in this period" (Best 1984: 644).

In the Sigatoka River valley ridge forts on limestone peaks and ridges also have stone platforms on their high points, and one recorded example revealed some 37 house mounds (Best 1993: 397). On Taveuni, ridge forts with mounds are again described, and on the small knoll which is the high point of one, a central large mound has been designated as marking the residence of a chief (Best 1993: 398).

Best draws attention to similarly fortified ridge sites in Samoa, some of which he recorded in far more detail than previous investigators. The ridges, of course, are of eroded volcanic origin, as for geological reasons limestone does not occur in Samoa. But the defensive perimeters display the same basic pattern and layout as in Fiji. Again it is the typical kinds of pavements, platforms, and earth mound bases used for Samoan dwellings which are not found along the ridges lying within the defences of this kind of fort. The best known and recorded exception, Tula-i-Pule (Davidson 1969: 194) will be further discussed later, where it is shown not to contradict this generalisation.

Best (1993: 404) does not view his main topologically based descriptive types as constituting classes or categories to which most Fijian [or Pacific] fortifications can or should be assigned. Rather they serve to indicate the basic principles of defense which applies to all of them, from the smallest to those which are complex and extend widely over the landscape. In short, he finds

little, if any, cultural determinant in the actual shape of each fortification (Best 1993: 400). The principles behind his three illustrative types are seen as fundamental and cross-cultural, indeed world-wide. The only differences he asserts are *scale* and *permanence* (Best 1993: 400, emphasis added). In short, "Fort builders will come up with the same answer, given the same topographical restraints, even when separated by half a world" (Best 1993: 434). What we have here, of course, with respect to the defensive elements of fortification, is an extreme case of environmental determinism and a kind of innate cultural logic in their application. "For every situation to be defended there is one optimal design of fort and, since the penalty for failing to meet this could be fatal, not just for the builder but for his whole tribe, cultural whims had no place in the plan" (Best 1993: 400).

Taking as a given in this construction of the argument, that the structural elements, physical shape and layout of the defensive features of fortifications in Fiji and Samoa are reasonably congruent, where could significant differences in their cultural function and interpretation lie? *Scale* and *permanence* are recognised by Best as being two such variables. A third, in my view, is the distribution of fortifications within the overall pattern of continuing or sustained settlement – i.e. general *distribution* with respect to locality and *number* in relation to the prevailing settlement pattern. Let us examine each.

Best's overview makes it apparent that fortifications appear everywhere, and in fair numbers in the Fijian Islands group, from coastal, stream and river valley situations to all degrees of inland circumstances. The ratios of fortifications to other kinds of undefended settlements, where they can be determined, place that kind of settlement in the fairly numerous category. Thus Best (1993: 399) lists 47 fortifications having been mapped in the Central and Southern Lau Islands alone, of which 12 were coastal ring-ditches, while in the Northern Lau among a group of 102 recorded sites found on nine islands, 19 were fortified. The sample of recorded sites on Lakeba alone is 202 sites, of which 24 are defended (Best 1984: 45-3 and Table 2.1). Seven are of the hilltop kind, 6 of the limestone ridge form, and 11 are coastal ring-ditch forts. On the island of Beqa, 40 defended sites were recorded, of which 14 were coastal ring-ditches (Crosby 1988: 31-35, and Table 2.1) among a total sample of some 179 sites. If one moves into the river valley systems of Viti Levu like the Rewa, Navua, and Sigatoka, landform zones not at all available in the volcanic landscapes of Samoa, the numbers of such fortified sites that can be identified, of course, rises quite dramatically (Parry 1977, 1981, 1987).

In the Sigatoka valley, Field (2002: 110-111) places the sites in three categories. One third are small highly mobile production, sites lacking any visible fortification earthworks or natural defences. Another third are defended production strategy sites with constructed defensive features and/or natural topographic protection. These were probably used more often, perhaps year round. The last third consist of defensive site, common on ridgelines, used only temporarily during times of conflict.

Thus fortified sites in Fiji occur within all of the recorded distributional localities reflected by settlement pattern studies within those islands, from small islands to the largest. Their numbers are sufficiently numerous to be described as constituting a common occurrence. In scale in all these situations, the fortified sites range from quite small to rather large and in design complicated constructions which extend widely over varying topographic landscapes. Early European observers often referred to the larger among them as "considerable towns" (Best 1993: 386, 388-389). That a majority of them were inhabited on a permanent basis is strongly attested by the typical house mounds within them which served as foundations for the common residential dwellings erected on them. Moreover at high points within the upland type of fortifications, some platforms and/or mounds which could be interpreted as bases for the erection of houses for the chief, or temples for their gods, are also a common occurrence. In some cases this kind of status interpretation can also be advanced for the larger among the lowland ring-ditch fortifications, as for Nakorovusa above, or sites of several kinds on Beqa (Crosby 1988: 241-251).

One question that can be raised, of course, is that of the degree of *permanence* of settlement within Fijian fortifications. Here the matter turns not on the permanence of the defences, but the kind of long-term residential structures within them. The defensive earthworks were a kind of permanent investment in infrastructure, using considerable resources of the group who initially built those defences, as they constituted features which could thereafter be refurbished with much less additional investment whenever needed. Much the same applies to their irrigation systems, also not present in Samoa. It is not the permanence of the defensive features, therefore, that serves to distinguish between long-term occupation within Fijian forts and temporary residency. Rather it is the kind of ordinary and common residential dwellings, along with any elite or specialised structures that occur within them that attest to whether these forts functionally served as permanently occupied settlements, or whether some of them were in fact refuges to which communities retreated from time to time in the case of conflict situations. In my view, there are enough examples across all topographic types of fortified sites in Fiji, lacking house mounds or residential

platforms, to entertain the interpretation that at least some among them may have functioned solely as refuge localities as Field has interpreted one category in the Sigatoka valley. This would mean they were never occupied for any length of time, and have within the defensive perimeters only living surfaces on which temporary huts could be or had been quickly constructed as needed. Is this alternative a possibility elsewhere in Fiji?

Best (1993: 432) says of his Lau sample of 193 sites that there were "two periods when the population either moved inland, or at least maintained inland hilltop refuges or fortifications". In the early period on Lakeba – 2,500 to 2,100 B.P., the inland sites appear not to have involved earthworks. Instead, defensive features enclosing coastal localities began to develop from about 950 B.P., and after 500 B.P. there was a time (Period IVB) when there were mainly inland hill sites, including all seven fortified hilltop sites on Lakeba (Best 1984: 560). The return to the coast in the 18th century is associated with the ring-ditch forts as was the case in the Lau group. Could this mean that at least some fortified sites in Lakeba and other places in Fiji, both coastal and inland, functioned largely in a refuge capacity?

Certainly all of the fortifications present in Fiji do not have typical house mounds representing a degree of permanent residency within their defensive perimeters. The existence of smaller sites with little more than man-made defences would seem to be the case on Lakeba (Best 1984: Table 2.1), and many illustrated fortified sites of various sizes from other localities in Fiji suggest this applies more widely. Moreover, there are hints in the early ethnographic observations from Fiji of just such a pattern. Thus in 1840, during Wilkes' visit, most of the population apart from those in the centre of Viti Levu, were by that time living on the coast, often in settlements surrounded by ditch and bank fortifications, and/or stockades. However, "they either still had inland fortified positions to which they retired when threatened, or had only recently abandoned these" (Best 1993: 386). Thus on Munia summit, the remains of an abandoned small village was described by Wilkes in the mid-19th century as a place in which some of the huts were kept in repair, as refuge in times of danger (Best 1993: 387). Crosby (1988: 229-231) interprets some of his inland peak top fortifications in the last 500 years on Beqa as having a refuge function, in contrast to others with quantities of debris and *yavu* suggesting a lengthy occupation. The late ring-ditch forts on Beqa were seen as permanent settlements.

The point then, is that in assessing permanence in habitation within Fijian fortifications, functional interpretation may in fact be viewed as ranging from



reasonably permanent occupation due to a continuing state of conflict or potential for conflict, to one of short-term refuge from time to time when circumstances dictated, though otherwise living on undefended hilltops or in coastal hamlets and villages without earthworks. I will not pursue the matter further; it is one for Fijian archaeologists to address as more excavation and mapping evidence becomes available.

### **Samoa Fortifications**

As Best (1993, see also 1992, 1994) has demonstrated to a degree not previously appreciated through inadequate mapping of fortification complexes in Samoa, its inhabitants invested over the last 700 or so years considerable resources in putting in place defensive earthworks fully congruent with those of the Fijian hilltop and ridge types. Once in place of course, they represented a continuing infrastructural feature to which an area's inhabitants could have recourse whenever needed, reusable with only a small degree of refurbishment. One documented case of refurbishment relates to the Luatuanu'u inland ridge fort, where its seaward ditch and bank defences were enhanced (Scott and Green 1969: 207-8). What then are the differences, if any, between the fortifications of Fiji and Samoa, adopting the Best position that they cannot be based on the nature of the defensive earthwork features themselves, because those reflect little or no cultural variance of any significance.

First, Samoan fortifications in relation to all the rest of the types and numbers of sites recorded, are actually few in number. Best's (1993: 436) summary statement: "The large number of fortifications in Samoa and their apparent widespread distribution over the landscape" is simply a gross exaggeration of the available information, at least in comparison with the Fijian case on which he so heavily draws to interpret the fortifications in Samoa. Certainly the number of currently known fortified sites in the Samoan group is an under-representation of their total number, especially on the island of 'Upolu, but their frequency is very likely to remain an order or several orders of magnitude less than anywhere in Fiji when controlled for the total area under examination. The most thorough coverage currently is probably for American Samoa, where one would be hard put to come up with more than 10 examples of substantial fortifications, most of them very large inland ridge-top sites. Certainly only some of them have been adequately mapped, but the Historic Preservation Office in American Samoa only has 15 prehistoric fortified sites with defensive features in total on its Register (J. Taomia and D. Herdrich pers. comm.). Taomia (2001) has recently interpreted them as "refuges where forces or populations retreated in times of warfare".

Davidson (1974: 240-241) provides a thorough overview of the number of fortified sites noted by members of the *Archaeology in Western Samoa* project. She lists at least 28 examples recorded from 'Upolu, plus three coastal historic forts. The greatest number of these fortifications occur inland from the north coast of 'Upolu, where the bulk of both coastal and immediately inland settlement has been centred for nearly 2000 years (Green 2002: 148). Fortifications appear to be most abundant inland from that north 'Upolu coast between Solosolo to the east and Apia near the central portion (Davidson 1974: 241). This closely approximates Best's (1993: 394) useful summary of the ethnohistoric observations: "Fortifications were in use in every area of Fiji, but for Samoa appeared to be restricted mainly to 'Upolu".

On Savai'i, despite diligent enquiry by archaeologists, records for fortifications of the traditional type were very few – three in number. Again this low figure is consistent with ethnohistoric observations (Best 1993: 391-392). It is interesting that one of these was a ring-ditched hillfort (Davidson 1974: 241), the only one so far recorded in the Samoan group. The other two examples, one of them a quite unique example typologically, were historic fortifications adapted for gun warfare. According to the detailed Index for the *Archaeology in Western Samoa* volumes (Brown 1979), references to fortifications number 19 in Volume I and 16 in Volume II, making it clear Davidson's summary is fairly complete coverage, and my rather liberal counting of the entries of the fortifications for which we had records or notes of them in ethnohistoric accounts is quite reliable. Best (1993: 413) provided better maps for three examples known to us, showing them to be much more extensive than initially recorded, and with far more coherent and functional defensive earthworks. However, he did not add materially to the number of known fortifications in [Western] Samoa.

In the intervening years, I have acquired reports of perhaps a few more fortifications in the interior of 'Upolu. Still, when compared with the records of 47 fortified sites in the Central and Southern Lau Islands, or the 19 on nine islands of the Northern Lau group, or the 40 on the island of Beqa off the south central coast of Viti Levu, one can see fortifications were nowhere ever as numerous in the Samoan group as they were anywhere in Fiji in relation to comparable amounts of land surface available for their construction.

Next, the records of flat land valley and coastal ring-ditch type fortifications appear to be nil, and only one hilltop has a fortification of this common Fijian type. Overwhelmingly, the fortifications in Samoa lie inland of the coastal, valley floor, and ridge line settlements recorded in the intensive surveys of both

coastal and inland zones in Samoa (Green 2002). The common variations in Samoan settlement patterns are in a very real sense complementary distribution to its fortifications. On the one hand, there are the ordinary every day undefended pavements, cut earthen terraces in ridges, as well as flat land zones with earthen mounds, and raised stone platforms on their surfaces, on all of which typical Samoan dwellings were usually constructed. These zones are where most Samoans in the last millennium lived on a more or less permanent basis; the fortifications to which they retreated in times of loss in battle or threat of conflict usually lie well inland of them. The Luatuanu'u and Vaialele cases are as instructive local area examples as any. Best's claim for similarity in the distribution of Samoan fortifications over its landscape, as comparable to that in Fiji, has no empirical basis. The overall patterns of landscape use in which the fortified sites are embedded are instead very different in these two island groups.

In the matter of scale, however, Best has done us a real service. Samoan fortifications consist in large part of quite sizeable monumental structures when properly surveyed. Yet of small forts, there are few or no prehistoric examples, and for medium sized fortifications only a limited number. It would seem that residential undefended communities in selected areas, when they retreated to inland refuges, frequently coalesced and often concentrated themselves in large inland forts. Best's (1993: 438) description is apt: "large, well-constructed and labour-intensive fortified complexes" usually situated inland. This explanation seems a more satisfactory interpretation of the seaward distribution of an abundant undefended permanent residential component and the rather remote, far less numerous inland fortifications in the Samoan landscape.

The last variable lending itself to cultural variation and assessment is the state of permanence of an occupation. This is always a difficult proposition, if assessments had to be based on a given number of years. What we do know is that undefended earthen terraces in Samoa may have been the infrastructural foundation for as many as 5 to 8 successive dwellings (Isizuki 1974: 44-45), and that multiple sets of successive dwellings on pavements and mounds are to be expected. Moreover, we do have extensive data on the size of earthen terraces, mounds, pavements and platforms on which typical Samoan dwellings were erected (Green 2002). In almost all cases, they occur in open air undefended locations. In contrast, the cut terraces within the defensive perimeters of Samoan fortifications, where they are not part of the defences themselves, are small in size and lack the expected indications that permanent dwellings have been erected on them. Even the few larger terraces and the summit flats fail to have comparable foundations for the usual kind of Samoan dwellings. They are simply potential living surfaces, for which some kind of habitation function may

be inferred. Usually they are devoid of artefacts or the usual river gravel pavings, stone pavements and house outlines which characterise, for instance, the ridge line settlements of the Luatuanu'u region below the main ridge-fort of Lu-41 (Davidson 1969). The inference is they are either *malologa* 'resting places' as some archaeologists have interpreted them (see Best 1993: 431), or more likely residential surfaces on which only temporary dwellings or shelters were built, an interpretation which I prefer.

However, it is the case that a few mounds sometimes occur within hilltop ridge line fortifications. Usually, however, they are of a rather specialised form, though on occasion a single probable house mound will be found within a fort's defensive perimeters as in inland Vaialele, site Va-41. Again two such house mounds occur on one spur, along with two "slightly higher flattened points" in the area of the summit at Mafafa (Best 1993: Fig. 8). Best (1993: 416) also interprets a low square platform on the summit of Mt Vaea as a "prehistoric house platform" (Best 1993: 415). In the case of the Vaialele Va-1 example, where mounds are numerous towards the coast, it is recorded that a number of low mounds are enclosed between the two defended ends of this inland ridge fort, but it is also noted that "whether they are contemporary with them has not been determined" (Green 1969: 101). Because earthen mounds also occur outside on the ridge above and below this fortification (Green 1969: Fig. 47), I am inclined to think they and those few inside need not be interpreted as fully contemporary with the defences.

Drawing on that perspective allows me to make the point that the specialised mounds found within other fortifications also need not be contemporary with the defences. Many such mounds are star mounds, as at Tataga-Matau (3 examples) and Fagasa (5 examples) (Best 1993: Fig. 12, Fig. 13). This leads Leach (pers.com., cf Best *et al* 1989) to point out to me that layer B2 of the star mound terrace at Tataga-Matau was associated with a blade core and two preforms relating to probable pre-defence quarry activities, as were those of the rubble terrace, well before the late construction of the star mound. The dates Best (1993: 420-1, 431) cites of 600 B.P. for the fortification is therefore not securely tied to either the construction of its defensive features or the star mound. Moreover, as Best (1993: 431) notes, he himself found some 9 star mounds at specific points within these defended complexes on Tutuila, along with another such star mound on the southern spur high point marked C at Mt Vaea, 'Upolu (Best 1993: 416). Star mounds are not residential platforms, but specialised structures usually interpreted as places for catching pigeons and related ritual performances associated with this activity. Typically they occur in inland bush clad areas, and on an ethnohistoric basis their use seems to have been a seasonal

activity. Thus "large groups of people moved to *malologa* camps a short distance from the pigeon-catching mounds, or *tia seu lupe*, sometimes for months at a time (Clark and Herdrich 1993: 173). It is not at all surprising that in some instances, a number of them were situated within the defences of inland fortifications when those were not in use for defensive purposes.

One ridge line settlement, on Tula-i-Pule stands out as a seeming exception to the above observations. Davidson (1969: 187-188) recorded it as a series of defensive features along this ridge, and used the term "fortification" for each individual feature. One segment (Lu-38 to Lu-49) she thought might constitute a single fortification complex with six residential terraces with their house pavements or river gravel lying in between the two ditch segments. A more likely view now is that the whole set of terraces strung out along this ridge, each with signs of typical residential structures on their surface, just as found on the adjacent Tula-i-Mata ridge, represent a single community. It is just on the Tula-i-Pule ridge line that the terraces are internally divided by short lengths of internal ditch features across the ridge. None of them, however, except the uppermost is of any great size, nor would they serve as substantial barriers to access (Davidson 1969: 187 and Fig. 75, plus individual plans of "fortifications" - Figs 76, 77, and 78). Interestingly, the uppermost, which forms a more substantial barrier, bars entry to the area above the settlement not below it (Davidson 1969: 194). Ditches serving principally as boundary demarcations among living surfaces were also recorded in site Va-38, where they were not interpreted as defensive features (Hougaard 1969: 177-178 and Fig. 72).

From the perspective of the principles of defensive fortifications set out by Best, the terraces along the ridge of Tula-i-Pule, cut by a series of ditch features with none at the seaward end of the ridge, and one facing in the wrong direction at the opposite end, do not qualify as constituting an enclosed fort, defended on all sides. In fact, the sloping sides of the ridge are of a fairly moderate angle and would not serve as strong natural defences, nor do its transverse ditches really warrant defence as an interpretation of their principal function.

In short, the ridge line settlement along Tula-i-Pule does not stand as some kind of exception. Rather, it may be taken as the kind of permanent residence that is strung out along the top of ridge line. As such it may be contrasted with ridge lines forming coherent large scale fortifications situated much further inland, where defence, natural and artificial, is a primary concern.

A final suggestion from Best (1993: 432-433) is again based on his Lakeba experience. This indicates there were two periods - 2,500 to 2,100 B.P. and 950

to 200 B.P. – when the population of that island moved inland. Looked at in more detail, it suggests to him that the second retreat inland in Lakeba and perhaps elsewhere in the Lau group “may also have been made at much the same time” as that in the Samoan Islands group. He allows, however, that the discrete period for this event in Samoa has not been established, so it may not be precisely the same as that for Fiji. Yet the period from 950 to 200 B.P. in the Samoan group is one of the better recorded through site survey in both inland and coastal regions (Green 2002). No one has suggested from those remains that occupation in valley floors, along ridges, or on coastal flats was other than fairly continuous. So far there is *no* empirical evidence for a time when the Samoan population was living almost entirely inland of the seaward zone of undefended site complexes that are distributed over the landscape in a whole range of different ways in the last 1000 years (Green 2002: 140-146).

The only recent support for this particular proposition coincidentally occurs in the same issue of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* as Best’s article, in which under the unusual nomenclature of Proto-Samoans and Tongafiti, terms propagated by Smith (1903: 3) and Churchill (1908: 80, 1911: 45) are discussed. Drawing on them, Geraghty makes the following claim: “According to Smith and Churchill, Samoan traditions tell of a group named the Tongafiti, of unknown origin, who invaded Samoa after its initial occupation and occupied the coasts of Savai’i and ‘Upolu, driving the existing Proto-Samoan population into the hills” (1993: 367). Smith estimated from genealogies that they were in Samoa for 550 to 600 years, before they were in turn driven out by the Tongans (Geraghty 1993: 367).

Yet as Geraghty himself admits, there is no warrant for most of this narrative tale among earlier 19th century writers on Samoa, nor does it occur in the modern histories drawing on the oral literature still current and widely debated in Samoa. Its sole source seems principally to be Churchill and two of the Samoan elites who instructed him in their oral history (Geraghty 1993: 367-368). In my view, it has about the same cogency as the myth of an earlier Moriori population preceding and being driven out from the main islands of New Zealand by the Maori, yet another tale also current at that time taken as historical fact. In short, such an interpretation has little basis in either authentic Samoan oral tradition or its archaeology.

Best’s suggestion for a move of most of the Samoan population at some time between 950 and 200 B.P. to predominately inland zones projects a Lau Island perspective onto the Samoan Island group as well. The concept is lacking in plausibility. It has the same status as Churchill’s Proto-Samoan and Tongafiti



construction - speculation bordering on early 20th century mythological invention parading as some kind of historical event.

### **Conclusion**

The defensive components of fortifications in Tonga and Samoa are constructed according to the same principles resulting in similar shapes and layout, according to the kind of topography on which they are placed. Thus in physical terms they are very similar, and environmental determinants are to the fore, though perhaps not to the extent envisioned by Best. The room for variation is based on other more culturally motivated factors. The cultural components of fortifications that vary are: distribution and number within the overall settlement pattern, the scale of fortified sites, and the degree of permanence in occupation suggested by their residential provisions. These components, which are those that have most to do with function, are not the same in Samoa and in Fiji, and both sets of fortifications cannot be interpreted from the one Fijian based perspective employed by Best. In Fiji permanently inhabited hamlets, villages and small towns are not only reasonably numerous occurrences, but they are widely distributed over the whole prehistoric and ethnohistoric landscape. Both archaeology and ethnohistory attest to the same conclusion.

In Samoa, on the other hand, no early 19th century observer ever referred to strongly fortified hamlets, villages, and towns as the typical types of settlement found either on the coast, or further inland. Rather the usual settlements were seldom nucleated and they largely lacked defences. In contrast the references to fortifications indicate they are placed well inland, and that they served as retreats or as places of refuge, with temporary huts of coconut leaves, where a small force could protect itself from a larger one. Archaeologically, most of them are inland on high hilltop or mountain ridge localities, and of difficult access. There is little evidence Samoans ever lived in fortifications for extended periods, or retreated to them for a long interval at some point during the last 900 years.

To go beyond these ethnohistorically based observations in Samoa, therefore, requires Best to use Fijian based observations and analogies, to forward the claim that the fortifications of Fiji are equivalent in function to their Samoan counterparts. This can be evaluated by examining the components of distribution and number within the overall settlement pattern, in the size scale over which they range, and in the degree of permanence suggested by the habitation surfaces within their defensive perimeters. In each instance, the empirical evidence indicates his Lau and Fijian based analogies are seriously defective in their application to Samoa. Thus there is still almost no evidence that Samoan fortifications were other than retreats, defensively carefully inscribed on the

landscape as in Fiji, and other parts of Polynesia. Once in place, they were valuable resources that could be reused and refurbished from time to time as the occasion warranted, but never occupied for long periods spanning centuries.

Some also served as localities to which people had recourse when catching pigeons, times during which refuge from conflict was not a consideration, but competition and related merry-making were to the fore. These periods of license, of course, did not go down well with the early missionaries, any more than did continuing conflicts over status and suzerainty among the paramount chiefs of Samoa. By the end of the 19th century, both ever-present warfare and pigeon-catching competitions had ended in Samoa, leaving the archaeologists to record and interpret the structures which had a role in these practices. It will be interesting to see how many continue to be drawn to Best's Fijian perspective for their interpretations of the Samoan data, and how many retain a more Samoan based one that draws not only on its ethnohistoric record, but also the ever increasing record provided by the archaeology of that island group, at least in the first instance.

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