



NEW ZEALAND  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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SEE PLATE I

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PETROGLYPHS IN TONGA

J. B. Palmer

There is a very little information recorded about Tongan petroglyphs which occupy two pages only in McKern's general archaeological work (McKern: 1929). He stated that apart from some on Tonumea and on langi walls in Tongatabu, the only other island with petroglyphs showing was Telekivavau. McKern does not figure the latter but describes them as follows:

"seven ellipses, more or less circular, three of them with from one or two outer appendages and one of them with a series of more or less equidistant lines radiating outward from the rim. The remaining figures consist of an anthropomorphic representation with triangular body, closely associated with a small cross, and a line complex including as an important element a cross with arms terminating in three prongs...."  
(McKern 1929:78)

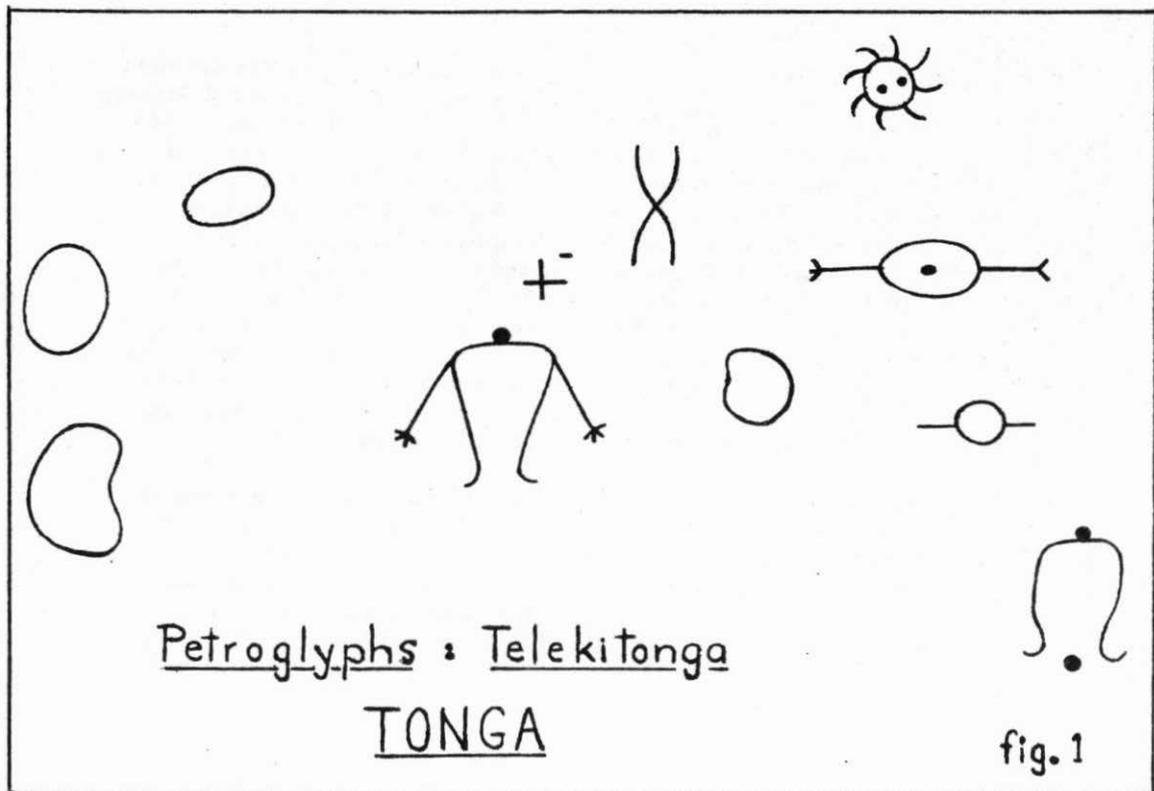
In view of the lack of illustrations of petroglyph material from this region, the accompanying figure in this note (Fig. 1) is included to fill out McKern's description. It is copied from a sketch in a Fiji Museum file, entered in 1958 by a former Curator, the late R. A. Derrick, M. B. E., who recorded the information from a Mr Wordsworth who was at that time a New Zealand surveyor in Tonga. Undoubtedly the figure refers to the site mentioned by McKern and a comparison of text and figure will enable the identification to be sustained. Wordsworth's notes are meagre and record little else except that the site was on a flat-topped, upraised

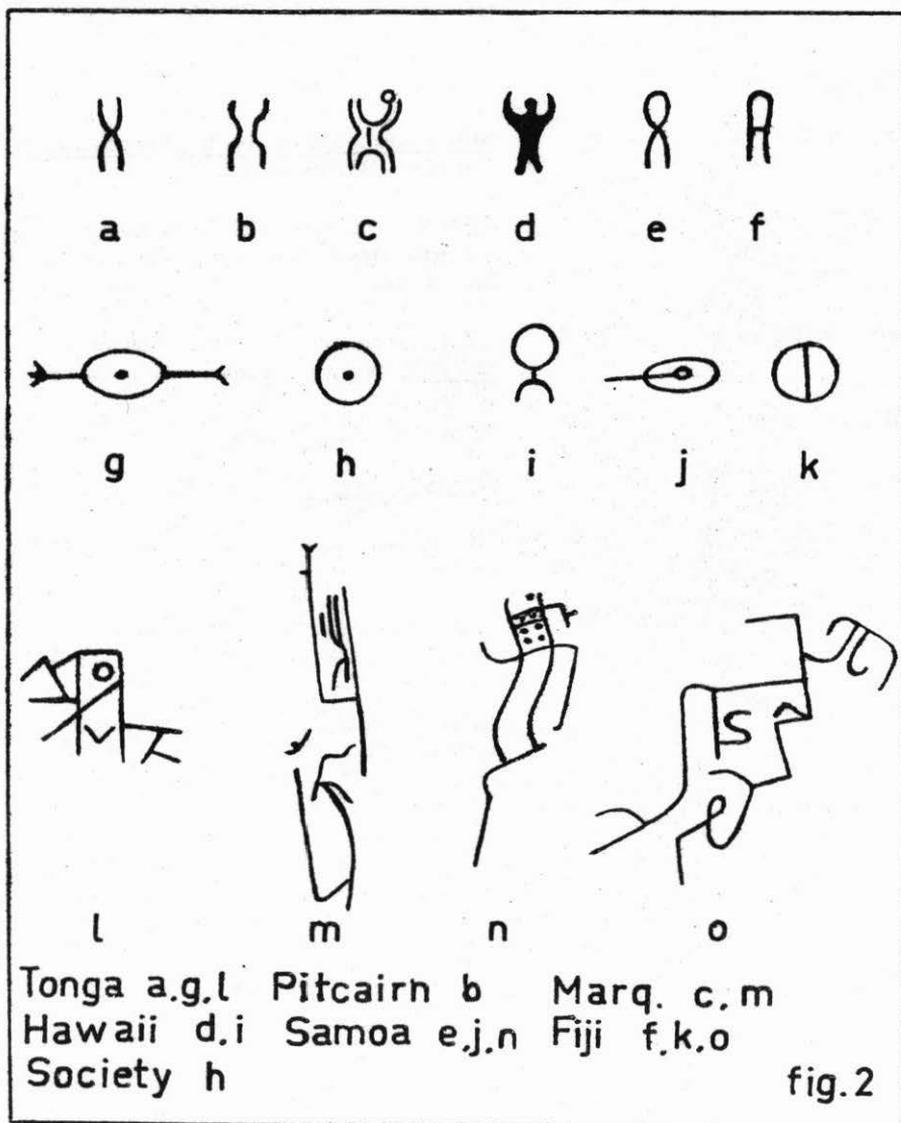
coral rock on Telekitonga Island, south of the Ha'apai Group. The petroglyphs were said to be up to twelve inches in size, the lines were gently curved in cross-section and they appeared to have been filled at one time with red pigment. The site name differs from McKern's Telekivavau but both are low-lying uninhabited islands lying a little over four miles apart, both being in the Otu Tolu Group south east of Nomuka. As the names imply, Telekitonga is the southernmost and since the sketch was made by a surveyor, the location given by him seems to be reliable and as McKern's information appears to be second hand, it would be safer to follow Wordsworth's identification of the island.

It would appear that there are general resemblances in some motifs between Samoan and Tongan petroglyphs although Kikuchi states that recently found Samoan ones do not seem to be related to those from other Pacific islands (Kikuchi 1964: 166). The tongan and Samoan resemblances include circles or ellipses (not however, always formed by the same technique), attenuated forms with parallel enclosures and apparent random appendages, and what may be called headless, anthropomorphic motifs which, in the Samoan example is closed at one end. This comparison is shown in Fig. 2 but it should be noted that the orientation of the figures is to be assumed as vertical, as without further analysis it is impossible to determine the viewing plane of the artist (or succession of artists) at the one site. This point becomes evident in Fig. 2 g-k, where an apparently unrelated series in that figure becomes more meaningful if an arbitrary orientation could be decided upon for the purposes of comparison. If this is done, however, one has first to admit failure in determining the natural viewing plane.

The comparative study can be extended to other islands too. The circle or ellipse is found in Fiji (Vuinadi in Vanua Levu and at Sawailau in the Yasawas) besides occurring in the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Emory states that while plain circle petroglyphs are rare (1933), plain circles with a dot in the middle, or a circle within a circle are more common. Series of concentric circles running up to four and usually with a dot in the middle are also found (Emory 1933:173). The attenuated forms are found at Sawailau (Snow 1953:Fig.9) as is the closed headless motif (same figure). A lesser variant of the attenuated shapes is found in the Marquesas (Suggs 1961: Plat 8b) and the circular motif with radiating lines from Tonga (Fig. 1) as general parallels with two petroglyphs from Aneityum in the New Hebrides (P.I.M. 1964:63). Emory figures a series of somewhat similar motifs from the Society Islands (Emory 1933:172) which he identified at that time as headdresses or masks which may be the explanation of the Tongan example. Dotted lines occur in Sawailau (Snow 1953 Fig. 9), Samoa (Kikuchi 1964: 164) and Hawaii (McAllister 1933:101) while independent parallel lines are found in the Marquesas (Suggs 1961: Plat 10B) and Tonga (McKern 1929:79). The headless anthropomorphic figure from Tonga resembles Pitcairn (Emory 1933:174) and Marquesas examples (Emory op. cit.) and the simple addition of a dot for a head would introduce comparisons with Pitcairn, Marquesas, Society Islands and Hawaii.

No strong case is being made from these brief comparisons. They are being stated merely to stress the need for a much wider study based on all published material and the mass of unpublished data from areas such as Hawaii. A rational





approach to this problem should enable a greater mass of data being made available for research. It would seem timely to suggest that copies of all unpublished data on petroglyphs should be sent to one institution which could then initiate a systematic study of the material. The Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Hawaii appears to be the logical centre for this.

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