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What is Archaeology for in the Pacific? History and Politics in New Caledonia

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In an island world, where control over limited land has always been a source of conflict, human history has probably always been manipulated. Far from being closed, isolated entities separated by wide and dangerous waters, the islands of Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia have regularly seen arrivals of new canoes, for trading, social exchange, or new settlement (Kirch 2000). To account for progressive transformations in cultural traditions as well as to help establish new settlers, oral traditions had to manipulate historical processes and events to provide evolving societies with identifiable foundations.

Depending on one's perspective, the intrusion of Western colonists into the Pacific from the 18th century can be placed anywhere along a spectrum ranging from an "invasion" of foreigners to just the arrival of more new canoes. European influence on indigenous societies has been very different from one archipelago to another, depending on local circumstances. Situations range from permanent self-government in the Kingdom of Tonga to overthrowing the indigenous government in Hawai'i , and from "terra nullius" in Australia to the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand-Aotearoa. Yet in all these settings, Europeans tried to understand the indigenous societies they were facing, often in a very basic opposition of "savage: civilized," with the explicit intention to bring "undeveloped" cultures to "modernity." It is clear, though, that early researchers working in the western Pacific were confronted with a far more complex picture than they expected when they first began recording oral traditions and writing histories of the islands to incorporate them into "World History" (Oliver 1988).

Indigenous histories were rapidly obscured by the increasing use of archaeology from the second half of the 19th century. Archaeological objectives and methods are directly linked to the evolution of European science during the 17th and 18th centuries. No earlier society ever advanced so distinctively the idea that studying the material remains of past societies was useful. However, attempts to reconcile archaeological findings with local histories transmitted by oral traditions – as most

local histories were until the early 20th century – led in most cases to divergent conclusions, simply because the two approaches to the past are so different. In all colonial situations, archaeology was a political tool in the hands of the ruling foreign elite. Consciously or otherwise, researchers using archaeology in the Pacific during the first part of the 20th century (and sometimes still) often tried to minimize the historical rights of indigenous populations by "demonstrating" the presence of "older" cultures in the islands that had been "invaded" by the forefathers of the modern indigenous groups, just as the Europeans had later done to them. Selectively using oral traditions to support such notions, researchers proposed, for example, the invasion of Island Melanesia by "black Papuans" who destroyed a highly developed civilization of "white Ainu" (Avias 1950), and the invasion of New Zealand by the Maori, who overthrew the Moriori (Trotter and McCulloch 1971:60). Similarly, Windshuttle and Gillin (2002) recently argued that the ancestors of modern Aborigines extinguished earlier populations of "Australian pygmies."

This classic process of colonial analysis, serving in its first stage as a means to justify historically the invasion of the Pacific by European newcomers and to deny Pacific peoples their rights to the land, shrank back with the rise of a new generation of professional archaeologists in the Pacific after World War II. Over the past half century, new scientific findings have encouraged a new perspective on Oceanic history and prehistory, particularly in relation to the abandonment of any cultural hierarchy between human societies (for a review, see Kirch 2000: chapter 1). Pushed by global processes, this period has also seen the rise of claims for indigenous self-determination, leading to political independence for most Pacific archipelagoes. The advent of new nations politically controlled by indigenous leaders has brought about a shift in archaeological policies, with the creation of local research institutions and the promotion of "indigenous archaeologies." In Vanuatu this led to a ten-year ban on archaeological excavations between 1984 and 1993 (Bedford et al. 1998), but there are many examples from the past few decades of the diverse uses that can be made of archaeological results, from supporting land-claims in the Solomons and encouraging protests against site destruction by developers in Hawai'i and Tahiti, to resistance against archaeological research in Fiji (Crosby 2002) and manipulation of archaeological writings in Australia (e.g., Dortch 1998; Smith 1998).

In this chapter we present a case study from New Caledonia (Figure 16.1) which outlines the politics of doing archaeology in Oceania today. New Caledonia is the southernmost archipelago in Island Melanesia and comprises a long, narrow island called Grande Terre, of continental origin, surrounded by a set of smaller uplifted limestone formations. Settled by Austronesian-speakers about 3,000 years ago, the country is now a decolonizing Pacific nation with a multicultural society of just over 200,000 people. Doing archaeology and writing about the history of the archipelago has become a complex business, complicated over the past decade by an explicit political project to "create a unified nation." We will try to show this complexity by first sketching the history of archaeological research in New Caledonia, identifying the major trends that the local context can impose on the reconstruction of the

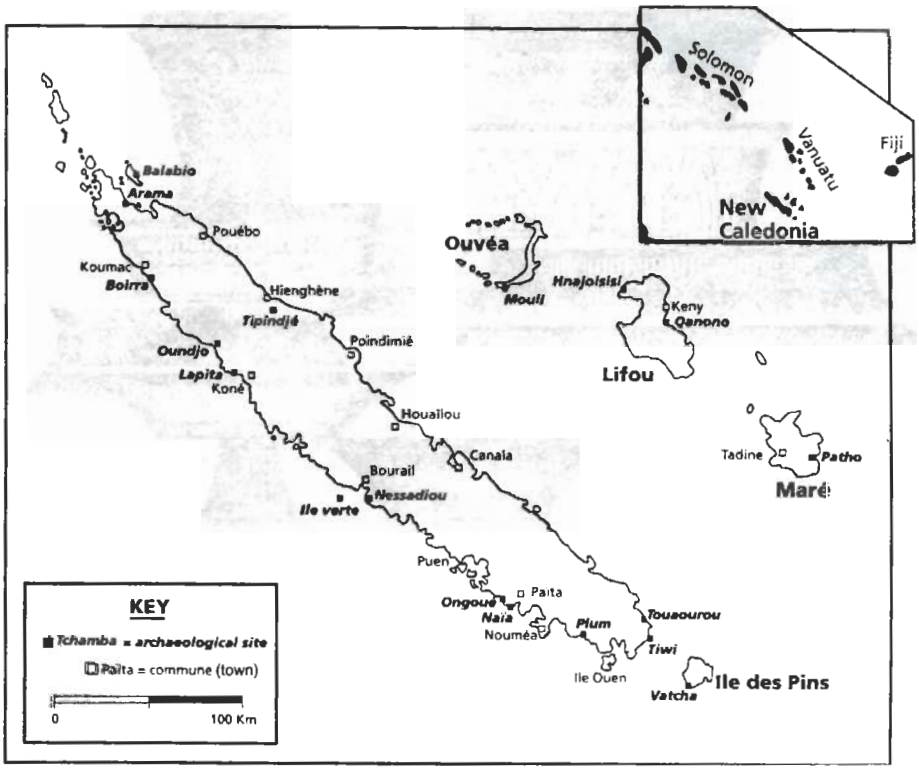

Figure 16.1 New Caledonia

past. We will then provide a summary of the archipelago's prehistoric chronology as we understand it today, to highlight the complexity of pre-European cultural change in Island Melanesia and the impossibility of taking a simplistic approach to historical diversity. This discussion underpins consideration in the final part of the chapter of the difficulty of addressing a nuanced picture of the past in a multicultural society whose representatives do not necessarily share the same origins or political beliefs and projects for the future.

The History of Prehistory: Archaeological Research in a Colonial Context

In every colonial history, researchers can identify different "periods," each characterized by a particular political environment. "Orthodox thinking" during these successive phases can change profoundly, depending on the local as well as the international context. But as we discuss below, often this does not prevent local people from being far slower to accept changes in thinking or ideas. In New Caledonia, three major periods can be identified in the history of the past 150

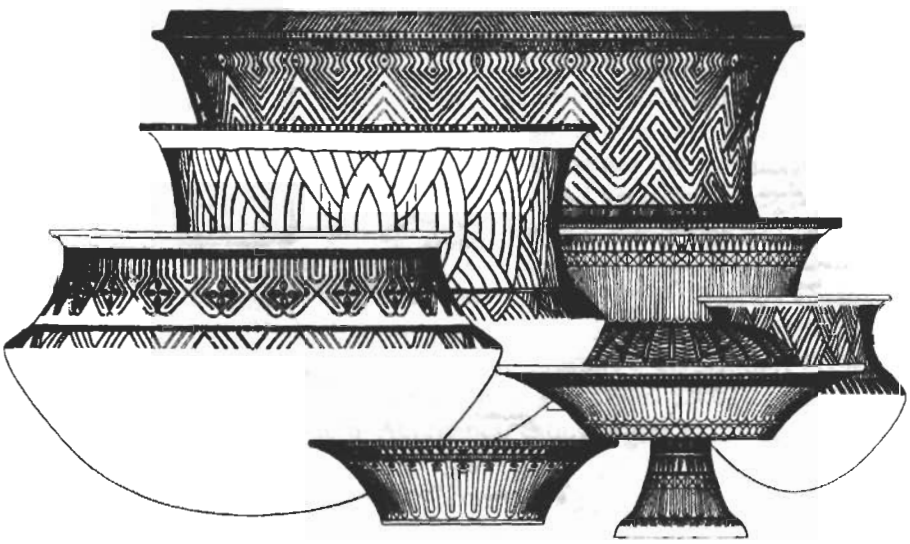

Figure 16.2 Examples of reconstructed Lapita pottery

years: (1) French colonization, (2) the entrenchment of the colonial system, and (3) indigenous revival.

From the seizure of New Caledonia by France in 1853 for use as a convict settlement until the beginning of the 20th century, all writers who discussed the Kanaks considered them to be the first people of the archipelago, though usually not in a positive light. The Kanaks were mostly seen as "part of the landscape," occupying land that would be "much better used" by Western settlers. Things changed markedly at the beginning of the 20th century. The end of convict settlement stopped the regular influx of newcomers and interest in the colony began to fade in metropolitan France. The small-scale arrival of free settlers made for a continuing rise in European numbers though, and political control fell into the hands of a few colonial families. The changing social structure gave rise to the first claims for local but non-indigenous roots. Contrary to expectations, however, the Kanaks had not disappeared in the face of European superiority. In these times of building a local colonial society, which granted civil rights to the Kanaks only after WWII, one of the dangers confronting colonial leaders was the possible emergence of political claims from indigenous groups.

In a period which saw the full development of racist theories about biological differences and human evolution, when a well-respected anthropologist such as Fritz Sarazin (1924) could publish papers on the relationships between the Kanaks and Neanderthals, it is not surprising to see researchers of this time such as Archambault (1901) deny the Kanaks any relationship with New Caledonian rock art, which he supposed to be too sophisticated for "Papuan races." Similar analyses concerning intricately decorated Lapita pottery (Figure 16.2), complex

adze forms, and extensive terraces for wet taro horticulture were published at the end of the period by geologist Avias (1949, 1950, 1953), who related all the "civilized" components he recognized in prehistoric New Caledonia to a society of probably Japanese Ainu origin, who had the advantage of being "white-skinned."

The repeatedly published idea that there were "pre-Kanak civilizations" in the islands slowly became historical truth, even for Kanaks. Taught in schools, the concept of successions of races and cultures in the human history of the archipelago (Le Borgne 1959) promoted a positive image of European colonization, which was presented as bringing morally as well as intellectually advanced civilization to the Pacific. The unsavory side of colonial history, such as the alienation of Kanak land, was presented as morally superior to supposed earlier invasions, which were said to have seen the forefathers of the Kanaks commit the "uncivilized" crime of exterminating the members of older cultures through cannibalism (see Trotter and McCulloch 1971:60 for a similar case in New Zealand). At the same time, the descendants of convicts voluntarily destroyed most of the architectural and written witnesses to their own forefathers' origins, in order to foster a positive picture of European origins in New Caledonia.

This description of history was strongly attacked by indigenous leaders following the revival of the Kanak culture and the emergence of land claims and calls for self-determination from the 1970s. Knowing intuitively the danger posed by history for the unity of "the people," Kanak thinkers criticized the overall concept of "history," decrying it as a colonial construct used by Westerners to deny indigenous rights (Collective 1983). In opposition they proposed that the Kanak people were the "first occupants" of the archipelago and on that basis held all rights to land. This clear-cut political division of New Caledonia's society, from the late 1970s, between "the indigenous first occupants" claiming all the rights, and all other communities of later arrivals identified as "invaders," led to a profound civil crisis in the archipelago.

Aside from the political consequences of the division, which ultimately led to periods of undeclared civil war, the whole concept of history had to be reanalyzed. Interestingly, this was first done by left-wing French anthropologists supporting Kanak claims. Their writings transformed New Caledonia's history into a simplistic two-step scenario beginning with a monolithic Kanak prehistory where everything was peaceful and well organized, much like European misconceptions of the Australian "Dreamtime" (see David, this volume). This state of natural grace was suddenly destroyed by the irruption of Western invasion (e.g., Bensa 1990). This "Kanak-centric" history, promoting a timeless, idealized pre-European society which was able to remain unchanged indefinitely even when absorbing groups from elsewhere in the Pacific, became the new orthodoxy in the 1980s. For some writers, even the colonial period was to be analyzed only in terms of the resistance of indigenous people to their domination by intruders (e.g., Guiart 1983).

No one anticipated the enormous demand that this complete shift in New Caledonia's received history would create for historical reconnaissance among the other cultural communities of the archipelago, which were frustrated at being marginalized in what they consider their own country. Since the end of the 1980s,

numerous local non-Kanak historians have conducted high-level university research on convict settlement (Barbançon 2003), free settlers (Terrier 2000), the history of the Japanese in New Caledonia (Palombo 2002), the contribution of the archipelago to WWI (Boutin-Boyer 2003), post-WWII political changes (Kurtovitch 1999), and so on. The New Caledonia Department of Archaeology has even been able to start archaeological excavations on historical sites such as convict settlements, something that was unthinkable 20 years ago. The complete absence of equivalent research conducted by Kanaks on their history (apart from our archaeological team) reveals how difficult the indigenous community finds it to replace a simple account with a more complex version of the nearly 3,000 years of human history in the archipelago (Angleviel 2003:244).

Faced with the very real dilemma of having to navigate between opposing claims presenting cultural changes as either successions of people or Western colonial scientific constructs, archaeologists working in New Caledonia tried until the late 1980s not to engage in the political debate, focusing mostly on the reconstruction of a ceramic chronology, seen as a simple "archaeological artifact" (Frimigacci and Maitre 1981; Galipaud 1992). When we three local archaeologists created the Department of Archaeology in the early 1990s, we thought it time to propose a more complete analysis of the prehistoric sequence of New Caledonia, by taking into account cultural dynamics, political transformation, and landscape intensification processes, as well as historical archaeology (Sand 1995, 1996a). The sharing of work, information, and analysis among the members of our team, comprising two Kanaks and one Caldoche (European of local descent) of different cultural and political backgrounds, facilitates the presentation of conclusions that take into account, as much as possible, the sensibilities of each major community. This has led to the integrated historical chronology presented in the next section.

The Prehistoric Chronology of New Caledonia: An Integrated Synthesis

The "first settlers": Lapita and its evolutions

Like all the other islands of the world, New Caledonia was discovered by navigators. This means that the first settlers arrived with cultural baggage conceptualized in a point of origin elsewhere in the region. First discovery of the archipelago appears to be related to the spread of people of the "Lapita Cultural Complex" at the end of the second millennium B.C. (Green 2003; Kirch 1997; Spriggs 1997; see also Denham, Galipaud, Leavesley, Lilley, Pavlides, and Walter and Sheppard, this volume). The immediate origin of the navigators was probably Vanuatu, but on archaeological grounds the spread of people was very rapid across the New Caledonian archipelago, with all the major settlements founded in just one century (Sand 1997a, 2001).

At the very beginning, the cultural characteristics of the first settlers were very close to those of other Lapita groups living elsewhere in the region. The existence

of some form of regional interaction can be identified on the one hand by the early import of obsidian sourced to the region of Talasea in New Britain, nearly 3,000 kilometers to the north (Sand and Sheppard 2000; also Pavlides, this volume) and on the other by the export of dentate-stamped pots produced in New Caledonia to localities at least as far as Malo Island in northern Vanuatu (Dickinson 1971). In this early period, it is not surprising to see close relationships in pottery form and design motifs in the ceramics produced throughout the newly discovered and hitherto uninhabited region of southern Melanesia, from the Reefs/Santa Cruz Islands near the main Solomons to the Isle of Pines off southern Grande Terre. Very rapidly, however, probably only a few generations, the Austronesian-speakers of New Caledonia started to diversify their traditions, boosting the production of some pottery forms and decorative motifs, nearly abandoning others, and developing a whole range of specific characteristics that allow us to identify the emergence of a distinctive "Southern Lapita Province" (Sand 2000a).

This process led to the local development alongside classical Lapita of paddle-impressed utilitarian ceramics known as Podtanéan ware (Sand 1999a; cf. Galipaud, this volume). Other changes did not take exactly the same path across the whole archipelago. This can be seen, for example, in the divergence of Lapita motifs between Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands immediately to the east. In the first region, we clearly see the maintenance for more than 200 years of a predominantly dentate-stamped set of designs, while the second region sees the rapid appearance of a whole series of non-dentate-stamped motifs (Sand et al. 2002). These changes, which clearly do not relate to any decline of inter-site contact, are vivid testimony to the processes of cultural diversification at work in the first centuries of Austronesian settlement in southern Melanesia. This divergence of cultures, also evident in nearby Vanuatu (Bedford 2000), stands in marked contrast to the regionally integrated transformations that can be identified in the Fiji–West Polynesian region further east (Burley and Clark 2003).

"Transforming the landscape": Austronesian settlers take root

Internal cultural change saw Lapita pottery slowly drop out of the ceramic kit between 850 and 750 B.C., along with a whole series of distinctive shell ornaments. In the meantime, the descendants of the first settlers started to move inland. Archaeological data show that first exploration of some of the major inland valleys was conducted during the initial discovery period, but the first substantial inland settlement was probably delayed in most places for a number of generations. Although it appears that Austronesians had an impact on the flora in the first generations of their presence in some low-elevation valleys near the shore (Stevenson 1998), the start of forest clearance in the inner valleys, more than 10 kilometers from the coast, seems to have started only at the very end of the Lapita period and to have developed on a large scale mostly during the second half of the first millennium B.C. (Sand 1999b).

The slow spread of people into the different environments of Grande Terre and the Loyalties was probably related primarily to natural demographic increase. But it was also linked, in social terms, to the cultural diversification which attended the gradual transformation of navigators into horticulturists. Although population densities in a landmass as large as Grande Terre was probably never high during the first millennium B.C., the distances separating different groups certainly encouraged the eventual diversification of languages and the ever-greater differentiation of regional cultures. This can, for example, be seen in the emergence of two major types of ceramics on Grande Terre during this time (Sand 1995, 1999a), in parallel with the complete abandonment of pottery-making in the Loyalties. In the south, the development of post-Lapita ceramics led to the appearance of mostly small, incised globular pots of the Puen tradition, and the apparent abandonment of relations with the Loyalties. In the north, Podtanéan paddle-impressed pots – some traded with the Loyalty Islands – seem to have been more prolific, with the gradual advent of new forms of incurved pots of the Pindai tradition by the end of the millennium (Sand et al. 2001).

The progressive diversification of local cultures had a massive impact on the local environment. The landscape of Grande Terre is an old and fragile ecosystem of Gondwanaland origin, which developed strong local endemism in its flora and fauna over millions of years. The appearance of small groups of hunters, but certainly even more the introduction of pests such as the Pacific rat and the increasing use of fire to clean the forested landscape, led to an identifiable loss in species diversity as well as a change in landscape characteristics during the first millennium of human presence. Important endemic animals which encountered the first Austronesian settlers, including the megapode fowl *Sylviornis neocaledoniae*, the land crocodile *Mekosuchus inexpectatus*, and the horned turtle *Meilania mackayi*, along with a monitor lizard (*Varanus* sp.) and various species of birds, had almost completely disappeared less than a millennium later (Balouet and Olson 1989). Landslides and erosion, linked to forest destruction and cleaning of hillsides for cultivation, led to the progressive loss of fertile soils on upper hills, and the infilling with alluvial deposits of lower plains and parts of swampy seashores. In some areas, several meters of alluvium built up over the centuries, profoundly changing the characteristics of the local landscape (Sand 1999b).

"Times of conflict": socio-cultural diversification

As long as population numbers remained low, the development of field systems using simple but destructive slash-and-burn horticultural techniques was not much of a problem. The area of arable land was effectively unlimited, and there was plenty of time for environmental recovery in long fallow cycles after a planting season. But New Caledonia is outside the range of the deadly malaria which limits population growth further north in Melanesia, so natural demographic expansion over the centuries eventually led to unprecedented stress on the landscape.

Tensions over the control of limited land probably began first in the smallest islands. In the Loyalties, excavated layers dating from around A.D. 200–300 to the end of that millennium contain almost nothing from Grande Terre, unlike the preceding as well as the following millennium (Sand 1998). This indicates a breakdown in exchange relations for hundreds of years. Tensions among the islanders are also illustrated by the construction of massive stone fortifications (Sand and Ouetcho 1993). But it is probably not correct to reduce the rationale for these great forts simply to episodic warfare. Such sites also signal the development of strong political entities on islands such as Maré and Lifou, leading to the appearance of prestige rivalries (Sand 1996b). It is probably in that direction that we must seek the reason for raising such massive walls rather than narrower ones which would have been just as efficient in war.

Friction over the control of land, in what was probably the worst period of landscape change owing to the impact of slash-and-burn agriculture, certainly also led to episodes of stress on Grande Terre. Apart from the patterns of change in ceramic chronology (Sand et al. 2002), this part of the chronology is poorly known at present, but it appears that a need for better boundary identification led to an explosion of petroglyph production on the large island, with engraving being concentrated on natural frontiers like riverbanks, hilltops, and watershed divides between valleys (Monnin 1986; Monnin and Sand 2004). Increasing isolation allowed the diversification of languages and other cultural characteristics, already started in the preceding millennium, to advance further. It also led to the differentiation of local phenotypes between island populations and socio-cultural groups, distinctions which survived until European contact. Studies of human remains indicate the presence of physiological stresses, testimony to a period of episodic food shortages and limited life expectancy (Valentin and Sand 2003).

"The Kanak path": the rise of Kanak societies

Archaeologists have long debated the causes and dynamics of socioeconomic intensification in the Pacific (see Kirch 1984 for a review). For New Caledonia, it appears from modern data that a combination of high population density and landscape exhaustion owing to excessive burning, as well as the rise of stronger political systems, led to a gradual intensification of activity (Sand 1995). On horticultural grounds, intensification is at first characterized by the use of walls and mounds to protect fertile soils from erosion. The two major techniques developed from the end of the first millennium A.D. on the Grande Terre of New Caledonia were irrigated terraces – mainly for wet taro – and long, high mounds for dry yams (Figures 16.3 and 16.4) (Sand 1999b). In an archipelago located on the southern edge limit of the tropics and subject to droughts as well as long periods of rain, these two developments attained a level of complexity unprecedented in Oceania (Kirch and Lepofsky 1993; Walter and Sheppard this volume).

Over the next millennium, hundreds of hills became transformed by tens of thousands of taro terraces, flushed with fresh water by numerous artificial water

Figure 16.3 Abandoned taro terraces, La Grande Terre

Figure 16.4 Abandoned raised yam fields, La Grande Terre

channels, some several kilometers long. This massive restructuring of the landscape, through a highly demanding horticultural system needing control, repair, and attention every day, indicates the presence of a large population during this last millennium before first European contact (Sand et al. 2000). A similar conclusion can be reached when studying the extensive dry-land systems developed on the flat plains of Grande Terre, as well as the numerous raised horticultural mounds built in the hills. In the Loyalty Islands, which lack hills and regular water sources, it was the development of varieties of large yams, sometimes over two meters long, that characterized intensification. Only on Ouvea were people able to develop wetland planting, by removing thousands of cubic meters of sand to reach the water lens at the back of the sand dunes, in which they raised their wet taro in artificial compost (Sand 1995).

The gradual emergence of these intensified horticultural techniques led to different sociocultural groups becoming progressively more closely tied to particular landscapes, leading to what ethnobotanist Barrau (1956:56) called "agricultural sedentism." Increased sedentism fostered the emergence of more permanent settlements, characterized by elevated round house-mounds often organized in precise patterns around a central alley (Sand 1997b). Political structures also changed, with the advent of chiefdoms which controlled large regions, though without functioning as pyramidal hierarchies (Sand 1999b). Changes in material culture occurred as well, with the appearance of new pottery traditions, new ceremonial adze types, particular forms of traditional shell money, and so on. All these new objects continued to develop until the advent of the Europeans, and characterize what the present-day indigenous societies of New Caledonia consider to represent "Kanak culture." It was from the end of the first millennium A.D., though, about two-thirds of the way through the prehistoric chronology, that the cultural, social, and political specificities that are characteristic of the "indigenous" societies of the archipelago appeared. These new developments are clearly not related to the massive arrival of new populations, but merely to the gradual transformation of island societies over the preceding millennia, leading to adjustments and shifts that created the "Traditional Kanak Cultural Complex" (Sand 2002a).

The development of intensified horticultural techniques, the settlement of the population in permanent villages through a process of sedentarization, and the advent of new types of chiefdoms developing more ritualized wars to prevent massive field destruction led to the reopening of regular contacts between different parts of the archipelago. Interestingly, the new trading routes developed in completely different directions from those which existed one millennium before, supporting our hypothesis that there was a moderately long period in the chronology without exchange. During the second millennium A.D., the south of Grande Terre was in contact with Maré and Lifou, the island of Ouvea being a gateway to the northern part of Grande Terre (Sand 1998). Specific objects, like the rounded ceremonial *ostensoir*-axe in nephrite, were traded and exchanged between these islands in a "Kula-like" circle (Kasarherou 1990). The new ties created by these exchanges, and reinforced by marriage between chiefdoms, led to the creation of an archipelago-wide set of cultural traditions and customs, without seeing the disappearance

of local cultural characteristics and languages. This opening-up to others, which can be identified throughout the southwestern Pacific during this period, led to the periodic arrival of new groups, mainly from Vanuatu, Fiji, and West Polynesia. The newcomers often put down roots in existing political systems and over the generations lost their cultural specificities. Only some Polynesians retained their languages until the end of the millennium (Carson 2002).

"New boats on old shores": European arrival and its consequences

New Caledonia was one of the last large archipelagoes in the western Pacific to be put on a map by Europeans. Captain Cook "discovered" northern Grande Terre in September 1774. Unfortunately, the second ship on the voyage was waiting for him in New Zealand, so he stayed only briefly in the archipelago. We thus have far less information on the indigenous societies at the time of first European contact than is the case in other places where Cook stopped (Beaglehole 1961). Over the next three decades, New Caledonia was irregularly visited by other European ships. It was only with the development of Sydney Harbour in Australia from the end of the 18th century and the emergence of the China trade that contacts multiplied, the archipelago being located directly on the sailing route to Asia. The advent of whaling, and then of the sandalwood trade, led to the first long-term Western settlements in the region, and with them the introduction of iron adzes, glass, new trading items, and finally firearms, alcohol, and tobacco (e.g., Shineberg 1967).

Until very recently, historians considered that these irregular early encounters with Europeans led to very few changes in indigenous societies prior to the appearance of Christian missionaries in the 1840s and France's takeover in 1853 (e.g., Doumenge 1994). The "traditional" Kanak societies described in the second half of the 19th century were seen as the direct descendants of the "prehistoric" societies seen by Cook nearly a century before, with fewer than 50,000 people living at low density in small semi-nomadic clans directed by low-level chiefs (Guiart 1983). For a century, these characteristics were considered to be the basis of "traditional" Kanak social and political organization. But such descriptions are now strongly criticized by archaeologists, who can clearly identify through field surveys the existence, during the last millennium before European contact, of a densely populated landscape based on labor-intensive horticulture (e.g., Sand 2000b).

This latter image of "traditional pre-contact" Kanak societies contrasts strongly with the situation witnessed by the French during the second part of the 19th century, and leads us to suspect that there was massive demographic and cultural disruption between first contact and the French takeover nearly 80 years later (Sand et al. 2000). We believe that in New Caledonia, like everywhere else in the Pacific (e.g., Miles 1997), Europeans introduced – mostly unwittingly – new diseases such as tuberculosis, smallpox, and dysentery. These diseases became deadly epidemics in Oceanic populations, which had no immunity to these scourges. Massive population collapse in the generations after Cook led to the failure of the large,

strong chiefdoms, the rise of endemic warfare and cannibalism, and the rapid transformation of large sedentary clans into small semi-nomadic family groups regularly changing their habitation sites (Sand 1995).

It was these much-diminished Kanak societies, profoundly affected by decades of population decline, demographic restructuring, and political stress, that witnessed the arrival of missionaries in the 1840s and the progressive expansion of the first French settlers across Kanak lands during the late 1850s. The creation in 1864 of a penal colony on Grande Terre changed the situation dramatically. Aiming to copy the Australian example, Paris decided to create an Antipodean convict colony. Over the succeeding 35 years, more than 30,000 French, Italian, Spanish, and North African prisoners were sent to New Caledonia. Agricultural land had to be taken from the Kanaks of Grande Terre, who defended their settlements and field systems from spoliation in several episodes of war against French soldiers. Convinced that the Kanaks were going to disappear altogether in the succeeding decades owing to continuing demographic collapse, colonial officials moved indigenous clans from their land and placed them on reservations, mostly located on poor soils (Saussol 1979). The settling in New Caledonia of Europeans (Merle 1995) but also of Asian, Melanesian, and Polynesian workers over the following century created an ethnic melting pot in the archipelago, structured around a basically Western society.

It was not until the end of World War II that the Kanaks were given free movement and voting rights, leading to a period of apparent shared development toward an autonomous polity (Kurtovitch 2000). But it was only in the 1970s that lands began to be given back to indigenous people. By that late stage, the Kanaks had started demanding independence and rejecting claims for rights on the part of more recently settled groups. The political upheaval led to a period of undeclared civil war in the mid-1980s, until the signing of what can be called a peace treaty in 1988. This brought strong autonomy to the three provinces of New Caledonia, balanced to a degree by the political desire to create a common future for all the different cultural groups living in the archipelago. Today the provinces decide what archaeological projects they want conducted on their land, as per their differing political agendas.

Archaeology and Contemporary Politics: What Written Past for a Common Future?

Finding common trends to build a peaceful future is a real challenge in an archipelago with such a complex history and such a diversified cultural as well as ethnic background. But the challenge has been dictated by the particular political future imagined by local political parties and the French government since 1988 (Mohamed-Gaillard 2003). To win the battle against cultural, ethnic, and political partition, the children of New Caledonia need to share a set of common principles as well as traditions and roots. The way history is constructed and taught is today

one of the cornerstones of the integrative process that is under way (Collective 1992). History has always been about politics, and the writing of historical facts is linked to a larger understanding of the way a society needs to perceive its past. New Caledonia, like the rest of the Pacific, is no exception to this rule. What differentiates the inhabitants of our archipelago from the surrounding countries, however, is the multiplicity of their origins and cultures, with different groups promoting different agendas for the future. It is therefore not surprising that perspectives on history as a whole, as well as on specific points in the chronology, depend upon the group(s) or people(s) concerned (Sand et al. 2003a, 2003b).

Differences in historical perspectives between modern archaeology and indigenous traditions

Modern archaeology is about dates, chronologies, cultural evolution, and social transformation. What it tries to achieve above all is an understanding of the dynamics of history (Renfrew and Bahn 1996). This vision of the past, stemming from Judeo-Christian tradition and structured over the past three centuries by Western philosophical developments, looks for "facts," for "truth," for "testimonies" or "witnesses" in each period and culture. Conceptually far distant from this perspective, most non-Western and traditional societies around the globe have seen history – or millennia – as a means to validate contemporaneous situations and to root political, social, and cultural systems in the medium of "tradition." The intellectual scope is different from the very beginning, so it is to be expected that modern archaeologists in different parts of the world come into conflict with indigenous societies about the way to construct and write indigenous history (e.g., Nicholas and Andrews 1997; Watkins 2000). The main criticism of archaeologists in this context is that they do not take into account the "indigeneity" of the people they are studying, putting too much emphasis on historicizing the past through the identification of "changes" and "transformations" in the "stable" structures that in indigenous perspectives provide the basis for historical rights.

Although partly linked to a real difference in the way in which history is conceived in the Western world and in non-Western societies, these divergent perspectives have been profoundly deepened by the way Western ethnographers – followed today by indigenous leaders – have presented a lot of indigenous societies over the past 100 years. Mistakenly believing that "traditional" societies were stable, "cold" systems, trapped in their customs without any chance to change and thus doomed to remain "without history," ethnographic writings have led to a synchronic vision of indigenous histories (e.g., Kirch 1990). Because archaeology today underwrites a diachronic view of indigenous histories, some indigenous people feel very strongly that this "return to history" betrays their past and undermines their historical rights. Political considerations are thus a central issue in this debate, as oral traditions in every non-literate society tell of stories of fights, changes of chiefs, shifts in residence patterns and alliances, all clearly illustrating the dynamic nature of all past cultures (e.g., Bensa 2000).

The Lapita problem: accepting the evolution of prehistoric cultural traditions in Oceania

In the western Pacific, one of the major points of contention in the pre-European chronology concerns descriptions of first settlement and its consequences. As mentioned earlier, colonial discourse, here like elsewhere, has identified pre-traditional archaeological remains as testimony to other "races" which came before the traditional indigenous occupants (e.g., Avias 1949, 1950). These "former occupants" have been depicted with far more pleasant characteristics than the inhabitants encountered by European colonists. This colonial construction of history, based on the idea that indigenous societies do not change and that every observable cultural shift is the sign of a new "invasion," was regularly echoed in local oral traditions concerning "mythical" pasts peopled by all sorts of individuals: small or large, dark or pale-skinned, with long or very short hair, and so on. But what oral traditions justify most of the time through references to such "aliens" are complex sets of creation myths. In the western Pacific, most of these myths tell of the creation of the "first man" in situ on the island or archipelago. This is clear in an anecdote described by noted Polynesian scholar Te Rangi Hiroa (Sir Peter Buck) in the 1930s, on the day Hiroa presented the concept of a migration of Asians into the Pacific to a local community:

> Influenced by mythology and local legends, the Samoan regards himself as truly autochthonous. At a kava ceremony in Tau, I was welcomed by a talking chief in the stilted phrases of his office. In my reply, I alluded to the common origin of the Polynesians somewhere in Asia and the wonderful voyages our ancestors had made in peopling Polynesia. The talking chief replied, "We thank you for your interesting speech. The Polynesians may have come from Asia, but the Samoans, no. We originated in Samoa." He looked around with an air of infallibility, and his fellow scholars grunted their approval. In self-defense, I became a fundamentalist. I said, "The good book that I have seen you carrying to church three times on Sundays says that the first parents of mankind were Adam and Eve, who were created in the Garden of Eden." In no way disturbed, the oracle replied, "That may be, but the Samoans were created here in Manu'a." A trifle exasperated, I said, "Ah, I must be in the Garden of Eden." I took the silence which followed to be a sign of affirmation (Buck 1938: 286-87).

It is with some difficulty in this context that indigenous people hear archaeologists today speaking about "first settlement" and the arrival, in empty islands, of sailors who had other cultural backgrounds but who at the same time are said to be their ancestors (see also Cauchois, this volume). The discovery of Lapita sites dated around 3,000 years ago in the whole southwestern Pacific, crossing the cultural boundary between "Melanesia" and "Polynesia," and characterized by types of finely decorated pots (Kirch 1997) different from everything produced in the region over the past 200–300 years, has created over the past 30 years a contentious debate about the concept of origins (Sorovi-Vunidilo 2003). The questions that invariably arise can be labeled as "Were these our ancestors?" and "Why didn't our ancestors

continue to produce these beautiful pots instead of replacing them with coarser ones?"

Although never clearly expressed, the main question that these discoveries raise in indigenous people's minds is: "How can we correlate scientific discoveries with the origin myths that justify our local societies?" The question is important, but it certainly cannot be resolved by archaeologists alone. The identification through excavation of changes in pottery types, of a human impact on local fauna and flora leading to ecological transformations, of evolutions in the settlement of a landscape through time, of the creation of localized languages, political systems, and cultural traditions, are topics unrelated to what most indigenous societies feel is their own history. As told by Fijian archaeologist Tarisi Sorovi-Vunidilo after confronting her chiefs: "They challenged me more on the fact that our social structure in Fiji is based on the Kaunitoni Migration. Meaning that if the archaeological research contradicts with the migration story, then our social structure will collapse or will be of no use" (Sorovi-Vunidilo 2003; see also Cauchois, this volume).

But the integration of a dynamic history into modern Pacific societies is also a way for present-day Oceanians to demonstrate that they have not been "outside history" and that their ancestors have played a part in the great history of humanity (see Lilley, this volume). Everything depends on the way this history is related through archaeological action and writings to contemporary indigenous groups. By identifying and recognizing clear historical links between past cultures and modern societies, archaeologists can create conceptual ties with this distant past for indigenous groups, securing a feeling of relationship which can bypass culture-historical differences. This type of linkage was felt in August 2002 on the eponymous site WKO013A at Lapita in New Caledonia, when representatives from all the nations of the southwest Pacific gathered for a customary ceremony celebrating their shared Austronesian origins, while at the same time recognizing their present-day differences (Sand 2003).

Kanak indigenous societies and archaeology: historical perspectives

As we have noted, ethnographic data appeared to provide in-depth knowledge of the Kanak societies observed by Europeans from 1774 onward (e.g., Guiart 1963, 1992), but the intrusion of archaeological knowledge concerning the late prehistoric period has recently made the picture more complex (Sand 1995). Proper ethnographic studies of the indigenous societies of New Caledonia started at the very end of the 19th century, over a century after the first encounters, leading to profoundly stereotyped reconstructions of "traditional" Kanak culture trapped in a never-changing customary world (e.g., Collective 1990). By not taking into account the very particular historical context in which their information was collected, namely one marked by oppressive Western colonial rule, ethnographers created a model which over the past century became the orthodox picture of pre-colonial Kanak society. It was toward this historically ill-founded model that Kanak leaders

turned in the 1960s and 70s, to support claims for the restitution of their ancestral rights and lands (e.g., Tjibaou 1976; Tjibaou and Missotte 1976).

Unexpectedly in New Caledonia as in all the other Melanesian islands where late prehistory has been studied in some depth, archaeological researches have shown that far more complex societies existed before first European contact than was hitherto believed. Probably the most important differences with the orthodox model flow from the reconstruction of intensified landscape use and complex political systems, illustrating the existence of large populations with highly diversified patterns of sociopolitical organization. In other words, the whole picture of "simple Melanesian societies" has been turned on its head by archaeology (Sand 2002b; see also Walter and Sheppard this volume), necessitating a complete rethinking, by the modern-day indigenous groups, of what their "traditional" societies might have been like.

It is in this connection that divergence is most apparent between the historical perspectives of scientists – acknowledging that no society has ever stopped its development at one particular stage to become "traditional" – and islanders trying to reconstruct their past. Elements of a cultural tradition, like rituals, craft production and technology, are maintained in societies over long periods of time and form the core of distinctive "cultural complexes," while other elements, such as settlement rights, political positions and alliances, are far more volatile and normally change at a faster rate. It is the subtle difference between these two sides of culture that allows us to place a clearly existing "Traditional Kanak Cultural Complex" in an appropriate historical perspective.

This type of analysis (Sand et al. 1998) leads to a profound dilemma in modern Kanak society, as it requires people to accept that there were shifting political structures over the centuries, changing chiefdoms and alliances, and episodes of indigenous war, destruction, and despoliation, all of which created renewed competition amongst different clans over land. These conflicts inside the community are a far cry from the political ideals of the Kanak freedom movement, which seeks to create a unified "Kanak people." It is thus not surprising that the archaeological model of a dynamic pre-colonial Kanak society, which takes into account field data as well as oral traditions, is rejected by some cultural and political leaders, who prefer to develop a postmodernist approach to "traditional" Kanak history. This approach is identifiable in the New Caledonia Museum in Nouméa, where Kanak objects from the 18th and 19th centuries are presented without chronological background, as well as in the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, where no "Kanak history" is put forward at all.

From "first discovery" to new religions: 19th-century transformations and their present-day consequences

The marked differences observed by archaeologists between the late prehistoric situation and the simple "traditional" Kanak societies of the colonial era are directly related to changes caused by European contact. Contrary to what has been written

on the subject for generations, there appears to have been a drastic change between the end of the 18th century and the middle of the 19th century, primarily owing to the demographic impact of introduced diseases. We will probably never know the precise number of Kanaks in New Caledonia in 1774, but the population was certainly far larger than the 50,000 people acknowledged by history (Kasarherou 1992; Rallu 1990). This means that the currently accepted demographic decline of around forty-three percent by the beginning of the 20th century (Shineberg 1983) has to be increased by a substantial degree, as it must have been more like the eighty to ninety-five percent reported elsewhere in the Pacific (e.g., Miles 1997; Stannard 1989).

This adjustment means that indigenous societies had lost nearly all of their members by the time the first detailed ethnographic studies were conducted. The effect of this central point cannot be overemphasized. It means that the indigenous societies of New Caledonia at the time of the first permanent settlement of some Europeans in the early to mid-1840s were not in their "prehistoric" condition, but rather had changed profoundly, losing most of their sophisticated high chiefdoms, leading to the progressive abandonment of the most complex intensified horticultural systems, with the development of warfare, cannibalism, and the constant movement of people through landscapes that were slowly being emptied of human life (Sand et al. 2000).

The Kanaks clearly understood the links between the development of new diseases, the rapid disappearance of a large part of the indigenous population, and sporadic contacts with Westerners. In a revealing work, the anthropologist Illouz (2000) has shown how the new Christian God brought by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries was soon raised on Maré Island to the title of *Hma-kaze*, the "big killing dead body." It was not in a move toward an enlightening new religion that most islanders converted to Christianity, but rather traditional alliance-seeking, aimed in a customary way to slow down the effects of the epidemics.

While their numbers were being so massively diminished, the Kanaks of Grande Terre from 1855 onward had also to confront occupation by the French colonial army, which was sent into the valleys and hills to push back the villages and planting grounds to gain land for European colonists (Dauphiné 1989). The process was a long and devastating succession of low-level ambushes, the torching of Kanak houses, and random shootings, sometimes leading to organized Kanak rebellion resulting in the killing of Europeans and the destruction of their houses before the colonial army was sent back in to reestablish order (Saussol 1979). When the clans were put onto small reservations, the complex historical processes experienced by the Kanaks over the preceding century had already led to confusion about indigenous land rights amongst conflicting chiefdoms. Over the succeeding three generations, this confusion was deepened by the development of diverging oral traditions between separated groups claiming the same land. At the same time, the colonial power officially named new high chiefs in opposition to the customary chiefs, and, through a subtle system of forced labor, made the traditional chiefs nominate the people in their villages who would be forced to work for the Europeans (Mohamed-Gaillard 2003:174). This destruction of customary sociopolitical relations led to a

perverse situation based upon the manipulation of tradition and reality in most aspects of indigenous society.

This construction of the early "post-contact" and colonial periods explains the historical processes that have led to the major issue facing Kanak society today: the legitimation of clan-based land claims and the representativeness of the chiefs. Unfortunately, although they demonstrably explain the present situation, the historical dynamics we have described are not usually accepted because the identification of manipulation of traditional land and political claims conflicts directly, in New Caledonia like everywhere else, with contemporary belief in the unassailable primal "truth" of indigenous oral traditions. Although an apparent unity joins the Kanak claims in parts of Grande Terre where land has not been given back, community conflict has emerged everywhere that restitution has been made over the past 30 years. This position is exacerbated by the fact that the descendants of European colonists and convicts feel legitimately that the land they inherited from their parents is theirs, legally bought from recognized government institutions and cultivated over the generations with no small sacrifice (e.g., Brou 1973).

Conclusion: What is Archaeology for in the Pacific?

How do we reconcile different cultural and ethnic groups, each with its specific understanding and perception of history and historical processes, in a political project to create a nation? How do we write a balanced history acknowledging the contributions of each community, the positive and negative side of each period, without favoring one group against the others? How are we to conduct rigorous archaeology in an archipelago such as New Caledonia, when each conclusion brought forward, whether concerned with ancient or more recent history, has immediate consequences for the people whose past is in focus as well as for those who live around them?

These questions, which confront the archaeological community throughout Oceania with increasing intensity, are most directly of concern to the indigenous and non-indigenous native archaeologists working in their own lands. Local archaeologists are today in the uncomfortable position of being between two extremes, two opposing political projects, each of which needs to write history in a particular way. In New Caledonia, promoters of a future limited to the "indigenous" groups want to promote an idealized vision of "traditional times" and a simplistic one-dimensional picture of the massive disruption and pain of the colonial era. Promoters of permanent French control of the archipelago, on the other hand, emphasize the benefits of European colonization and the "progress" it brought to the islands over the past 150 years. Much the same situation obtains in many other parts of Oceania.

As their results demonstrate time and again, archaeologists know that historical reality lies between these two poles (Sand et al. 2003a). But in writing about their homeland, about their own history, they have to deal directly with criticisms of their own cultural and ethnic groups, as they appear to develop concepts and ideas at

odds with majority opinion in those communities. Putting forward, on the basis, for example, of oral tradition, the idea that different clans settled a particular place at different times, appears to resurrect internal conflicts about the historical rights of each family on the land (Mapou 2003). At the other end of the spectrum, excavating historical sites from the convict period can be perceived by some people of non-Western origin to glorify the non-indigenous past and the depth of European roots in the archipelago, with archaeologists appearing in this case to promote non-indigenous rights (see also Smith this volume). It is thus not surprising that local archaeologists are often criticized for expressing non-orthodox ideas which are considered to be subversive by political leaders of all stripes (Sand et al. 2003b).

Such perceptions of archaeological research show how much each result gained from the past can become a contentious contemporary issue and on that basis in danger of being politically manipulated by non-archaeological vested interests. Although an impossible goal, we often wish we could disconnect archaeology and politics. This was certainly the case recently in relation to our use of the term "Kanak." The term, derived from a Polynesian loan introduced by the missionaries to mean "working boy" when in fact referring to men, became an insult, but since the 1960s has been used by indigenous political leaders to mean "man." Today, the term is synonymous with "the indigenous Melanesians of New Caledonia" (Angleviel 2002). Culturally, the roots of traditional Kanak societies developed from the end of the first millennium A.D., building on transformations throughout the preceding millennia. In historical terms, the advent of the "Traditional Kanak Cultural Complex," that is, the emergence of cultural traits that the indigenous populations of New Caledonia identify today as their own, demonstrably started around 1,000 years before first European encounter (Sand et al. 2000).

Although in archaeological terms this point is readily understandable, the simple use of the term "Kanak" to name this period of time implies for some that indigenous people "were not Kanaks" in earlier times. This idea is totally unacceptable in today's political climate (Sand 2003), underlining the difficulty of relating culture-historical facts, which are necessarily dynamic over the entire span of human history, with political claims based on totally different worldviews. The term "Kanak," applied to a specific historical trajectory unfolding over millennia, takes a different meaning from that attached to the same term by an ethnic group claiming control as indigenous inhabitants of their political rights while confronted by the presence of other cultural and ethnic groups on their soil.

To help resolve such misunderstandings between archaeology and politics, it seems obvious that we need to encourage and support the emergence of new generations of indigenous archaeologists conducting scientific research on their own past (see Cauchois, Dugay-Grist, and Mandui, this volume). The creation of local archaeological institutions in different archipelagoes of the Pacific has shown that it is not only necessary to provide physical infrastructure: It is also vital to have well-trained scientists who are given the financial, legal, and technical tools to do archaeology properly. Although times are currently hard for locally conducted archaeology in the Pacific, with great political pressure in every archipelago to prevent development of locally constructed dynamic historical models, we hope the

time will soon come when the voices of local archaeologists in Oceania will be strong and they will be able to write the past history of our region in their own words.

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