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Ratu Rabici Logavatu and Aubrey Parke: Two archaeological pioneers of the Fijian Administration

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This chapter tells the story of the pioneering archaeological endeavours carried out by two members of the Fijian Administration. The administration was set up in 1944 by the efforts of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna and wartime Governor of Fiji Sir Philip Mitchell as a new system of government for the Native Fijian (*iTaukei*) population of the then British Crown Colony of Fiji and Rotuma. Sukuna was appointed as its first secretary of Fijian affairs or *Talai* (see Spriggs 2019 for background and references).

The first of these pioneers was Ratu Rabici Vuikadavu Logavatu (1924–2005), seconded from the Fiji Administration in 1947 to assist the archaeological expedition of Edward Winslow Gifford (1887–1959) of the University of California at Berkeley, USA. Gifford was accompanied by his wife Delila, who was a noted expert in Pacific marine shells (see Spriggs, **Chapter 27**, this volume, Figure 27.3). Ratu Rabici was the personal choice of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna for the role of ‘minder’. As well as assistant to Gifford he was clearly also assigned to be the ‘eyes and ears’ of the Fijian Administration, to smooth over difficulties and

misunderstandings with local communities and to make sure Gifford's work did not impact negatively upon the *iTaukei* population. He proved adept at all these roles. As Gifford prepared his materials for publication (Gifford 1951a, 1951b) he frequently consulted by letter with Ratu Rabici to check details of places and people.¹ Their warm correspondence continued until Gifford's death in 1959 (Spriggs 2019).

The second archaeological pioneer was Aubrey Parke (1925–2007), appointed to the British Colonial Service and sent to Fiji as an administrative officer in 1951. During his 20 years in Fiji he held many roles in the Fijian and Colonial administrations, including as deputy *Talai* (deputy secretary of Fijian affairs) for a time in the mid-1960s and then commissioner, Northern District.² He had been interested in archaeology from his boyhood in Dorset and had been trained in archaeological techniques before World War II by Sir Mortimer Wheeler and later by Stuart Piggott, two of the foremost archaeologists of their generation. He never held any official position in Fiji as an archaeologist, although he was an honorary ethnologist and sometime trustee of the Fiji Museum. He was, in fact, upon his arrival in Fiji in 1951 the most highly trained archaeologist in the Western Pacific. He pursued his archaeological interests in Fiji and Rotuma during weekends and holidays throughout his time in Fiji, recording many sites and excavating several of them. Ratu Rabici was active in archaeology only in the period 1947–50, and Parke for a much longer period, including return visits to Fiji after independence in 1970.

1 The correspondence between them can be found in the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), Bancroft Library, Department of Anthropology files, Collection CU-23, Series 4, Correspondence 1901–1957. For further details see Spriggs 2019:fn. 2.

2 Some details of Parke's employment in Fiji can be found in Fiji National Archives, PF 3705A/EDP No. 247, Parke, A.L. He had positions as district officer (DO), Ra, in the early 1950s, was twice in the 1950s DO for Lautoka, Nadi and the Yasawa Group, and after that was DO Suva and DO Navua, while in 1964 he was briefly stationed as DO Rotuma. After his time as deputy *Talai* he became commissioner, Northern Division, which included Vanua Levu (Parke 2014:xix–xx).

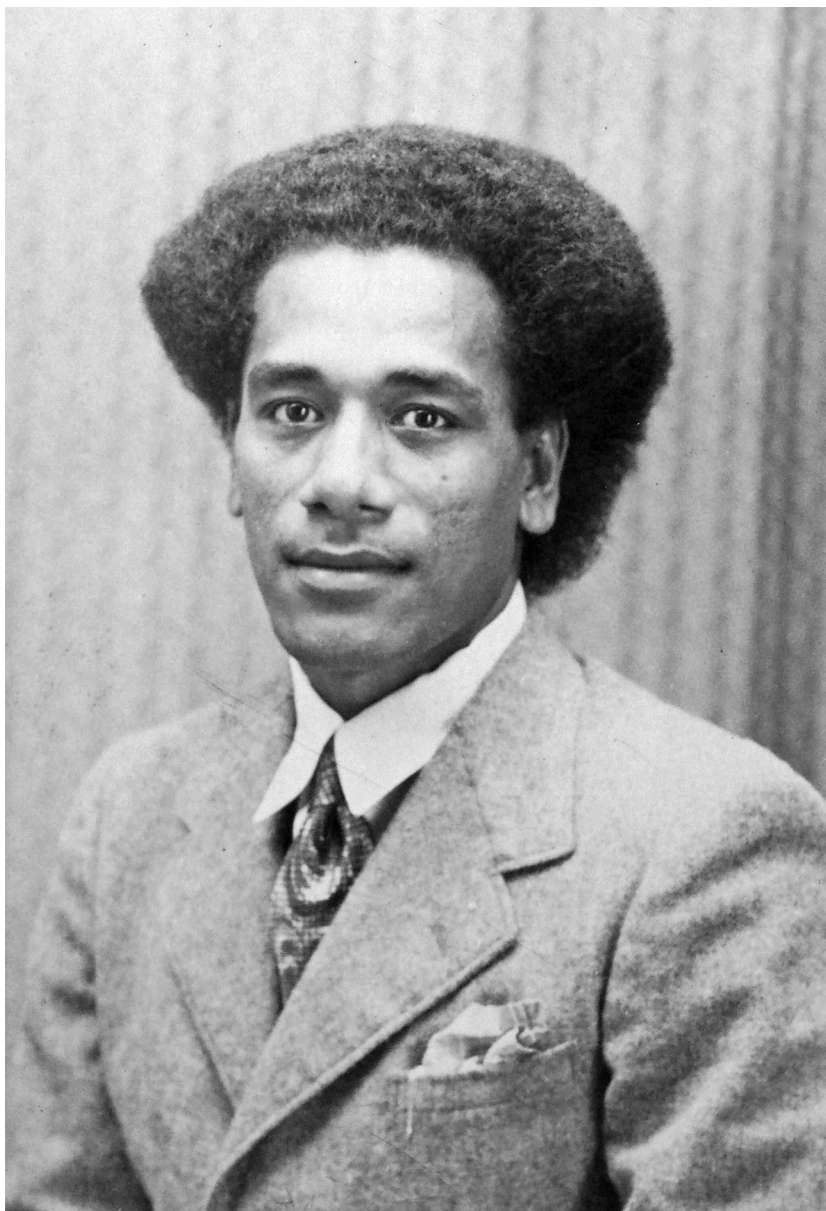


Figure 28.1. Ratu Rabici Logavatu, May 1954.

He sent the photograph to Gifford in a letter of 21 May 1956. The photograph is in the possession of Maureen Frederickson.

Source: Photograph courtesy of Maureen Frederickson.

Ratu Rabici Logavatu

Ratu Rabici (Figure 28.1) was a younger son of Emori Logavatu and a great-grandson of the Tui Dreketi, a signatory of the Deed of Cession in 1874. He had been educated at Queen Victoria School in Suva. The family were from Burebasaga in Rewa District. He joined the Colonial Service in January 1944 as a clerk in training.³ Before Gifford's 1947 expedition he had been an assistant to the chief health inspector but he was then seconded to the Fijian Administration. He was to prove invaluable to Gifford, quickly picking up skills in archaeological excavation, to add to the surveying skills he had been trained in earlier. Gifford also schooled him in photography, which became a lifetime hobby of his, and after the expedition gave Ratu Rabici his first camera. In 1947 Gifford was already 60 years old and was not fit enough to visit some of the cultural sites of interest, so he sent Ratu Rabici to scale the peak of Uluinavatu and for a horseback survey of parts of Nakauvadra on Viti Levu. Rabici's written account of these surveys and associated oral traditions was meant to be included as an eighth appendix to Gifford's monograph *Archaeological Excavations in Fiji* but was cut out at the last moment, presumably by the publishers on grounds of cost (Spriggs 2019:411). Only some of his observations were able to be included in the text of the final publication (Gifford 1951a:194, 211, 218, 221, 245, 249).

Gifford's fieldnotes of the expedition are held in the Hearst Museum and the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley (UCB). Much of Ratu Rabici's work can be found there – maps and surveys of sites, photographs and even perspective drawings of sites, and notes of excavations that Ratu Rabici supervised while Gifford dug elsewhere on the sites of Navatu and Vuda.⁴ Ratu Rabici was key in making sure the correct protocols were followed on entering villages and negotiating access to sites, and in informing local chiefs and communities of the purposes of the work. He was able to smooth over injured feelings when a key landowner's rights were inadvertently infringed upon and when the discovery and removal of a human skeleton at Navatu led to the spirit possession of a local chief and pastor. In this latter case a kava ceremony and the rapid reburial of the skeleton appeased the spirits and brought the pastor back to health.

3 Details of Ratu Rabici's career can be found in the Fiji National Archives, NPP426-1 and NPP426-2, Ratu Rabici Logavatu.

4 Ratu Rabici's collaboration with Gifford is fully referenced in Spriggs 2019:409–412, from UCB, Hearst Museum and Bancroft Library files.

There was definitely ‘covert control’ exercised by Sir Lala Sukuna over the places visited and excavated by Gifford (Spriggs 2019). It seems that Ratu Sukuna’s interest was in seeing if the archaeology could provide evidence in relation to various land issues. Both Vuda and Navatu, the two sites excavated in some detail by the expedition, were important in traditions of the arrival of the first ancestors of the Fijians. After visiting the excavation at Navatu, Sukuna concluded that archaeology could not answer the questions that interested him. Although he remained helpful and supportive of Gifford, his subsequent *Annual Report* made no mention of the research; Sir Lala had many other things on his mind as 1947 drew to a close.⁵ During the expedition Ratu Rabici was independently reporting on progress of the expedition to the deputy *Talai*, the anthropologist George Kingsley Roth (1903–1960). Only one of Rabici’s letters to Roth in Fijian can be found in Roth’s archives in the Cambridge University Library in the UK, but there were clearly more (Spriggs 2019:402, 411 fn. 37).

After Gifford returned to the USA in September 1947, he corresponded regularly with Ratu Rabici as analyses of the pottery and other finds progressed and as Gifford prepared his major monograph for publication. The preceding chapter here (Spriggs, **Chapter 27**, this volume) reports on the serendipitous find of the first Lapita pottery in Fiji by Ratu Rabici, at the time a provincial scribe, and the acting district medical officer for Nadroga-Navosa, Lindsay Verrier, both based at Lawaqa. Lapita pottery was the style used by Fiji’s earliest inhabitants and the find was later to prove important in working out the distribution of this widespread pottery style. It was found on a visit to the Sigatoka Sand Dunes in May 1948, showing that Ratu Rabici retained an interest in archaeology after Gifford’s departure. Verrier sent the pottery to Gifford in time for the latter to include photographs and a description of it in his monograph (Figure 28.2). The find by Rabici and Verrier was later to inspire a major series of excavations at Sigatoka in the 1960s through to the 2000s (summarised in Dickinson et al. 1998; see also Burley and Dickinson 2004), making the Sigatoka Dunes one of the most famous archaeological sites in the Pacific.

5 Secretary for Fiji Affairs, *Annual Report 1947*, Legislative Council, Fiji, Council Paper no. 52, published 1948, Government Press, Suva. A copy in the Cambridge University Library, Roth Collection, Add. MS. 8780m Box 1, item 3 was consulted. For the varied tasks that Sukuna was involved in in 1947 see also Spriggs 2019:401. Similarly, the *Annual Report 1951* (published 1953) made no mention of the publication of Gifford’s research.



Figure 28.2. The Lapita pottery discovered by Ratu Rabici and Lindsay Verrier.

Source: Copyright © Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California, photograph from Gifford 1951a:Plate 19 (Accession No. Acc. 916).



Figure 28.3. Meeting the Logavatu family.

Left to right: Ratu Rabici's second daughter, Bulou Salata Seniloli Logavatu Ratukalou, Bulou Vularewa Colata (Rabici Gifford's wife), and Ratu Rabici's second son, Ratu Rabici Gifford Vuikadavu meeting with Matthew Spriggs, Suva, Fiji, October 2019.

Source: Photograph by Rosemary Leona.

Ratu Rabici wrote to Gifford on more personal matters for another decade; the last known letter is from 1957, detailing his marriage and the birth and upbringing of his children, and sending photographs of them to Gifford and his wife Delila. Gifford regularly sent Ratu Rabici new issues of US postage stamps for his collection. The second son of Ratu Rabici was named Rabici Gifford Vuikadavu and the first daughter Varanise Delilah. Gifford's family kept up some communication with the Logavatu family for a while through Varanise Delilah, who migrated to the USA, and one of Gifford's granddaughters attempted unsuccessfully to find Ratu Rabici during a visit to Fiji in the 1970s (Maureen Frederickson pers. comm. 2015). The author re-established archaeological contact with Ratu Rabici's children in 2019 in preparation for the exhibition at the Fiji Museum. The 'digital repatriation' to the children of correspondence and photographs sent between Gifford and Ratu Rabici has been a particularly satisfying part of the Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific (CBAP) Project (Figure 28.3).

Ratu Rabici's early involvement in archaeology in Fiji had been almost completely forgotten by his family. It does not seem that his interest continued past completion of Gifford's work in 1951. He continued, however, as a hard-working member of the Fiji Administration. In March 1953 he was appointed assistant Roko Tui Ba, or assistant governor of Ba Province. In May 1957 he was promoted to serve as Roko Tui Rewa and for a time as acting Roko Tui Lomaiviti. He was sent on secondment to the UK in 1959 to gain further administrative experience. Amusing letters to his boss back in Fiji detail him adjusting to the cold climate and strange habits of the English. He returned to take up his governorship of Rewa again in 1960 and, in addition, was appointed as Fijian magistrate for Rewa in January 1964. Very sadly, in 1967 when driving on official business he had a serious road accident and, after a long spell in hospital recuperating from spinal injuries, he had to retire on medical grounds the following year. He passed away in 2005, leaving nine children by his first and second marriages. His interest in photography was passed on through his family, and two of his grandchildren are today professional photographers (Ratu Rabici Gifford Vuikadavu Logavatu pers. comm. 2020).

Aubrey Parke

Aubrey Parke (Figure 28.4) was born in Moreton, Dorset, England, attended Winchester Public School and during World War II served in the Royal Air Force as a navigator/bomb aimer.⁶ As a young teenager he worked on the iconic Maiden Castle excavation of an Iron Age hillfort in Dorset that had been stormed by the Roman legions during the Claudian conquest begun in AD 43. The excavations were directed by the celebrated archaeologist Mortimer (later Sir Mortimer) Wheeler. Parke continued his archaeological interests during the war when he excavated an ancient earthwork in 'difficult wartime conditions' (Bowen 1990:21). In fact, the adjacent airfield was being strafed by German fighter planes at the time! After the war he took a degree in 'Greats' (Greek and Latin) at Lincoln College, Oxford, and continued his archaeological interests and training. He even directed his own excavations at a bell barrow (burial mound) in Dorset while training for the Colonial Service (Parke 1954).

⁶ For the biographical detail on which this account is based see Spriggs 2014.

He arrived in Fiji as an administrative officer in 1951 and quickly involved himself in the administration of the Fiji Museum and in archaeological surveys, often in later years accompanied by his wife Tamaris. He met Ratu Rabici soon after his arrival and communicated with E.W. Gifford about having done so: ‘I like him immensely and we tour together’ (UCB, Bancroft Library, Department of Anthropology files, CU-23, Box 118, Parke to Gifford, 22 December 1953, Gifford to Parke, 28 December 1953).⁷ He also noted he had borrowed one of Gifford’s publications from Ratu Rabici, and at his request Gifford sent Parke offprints of nearly all his Fijian papers. Although Ratu Rabici and Parke had further official dealings in later years, there is no record of any joint archaeological endeavours. In his December 1953 letter to Gifford, Parke noted that he had been district officer in Ra Province, but was now district officer for Lautoka, Nadi and the Yasawa Islands. Parke’s first home leave back to the UK was in 1955–56. During that furlough he directed an excavation in Dorchester, Dorset (reported in Farrar 1957), and also met and married Tamaris.



Figure 28.4. Aubrey Parke aged nearly 81, at his PhD graduation ceremony in hospital in Canberra, 21 October 2006.

Source: Photograph courtesy of John Parke.

He carried out many surveys of sites on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, as official duties permitted, and deposited the finds in the Fiji Museum (Parke 1965, 1971, 1972, 2000a, 2001a, 2003a). The first professional curator of the museum, Bruce Palmer, was appointed in 1963 and transformed it into a major research institution. In his first *Annual Report* for 1963, Palmer thanked Parke for his ‘useful preparatory research’ (Palmer 1963). In 1964 came the opportunity to visit Rotuma as relieving district officer from the end of February until the start of June, during a campaign of clearing bush to plant coconuts (Parke 1964). Parke’s posting on Rotuma

⁷ Surprisingly, there is no trace of any further correspondence between the two.

allowed much time to investigate the archaeology and oral traditions of the island group, leading to several significant publications (Parke 1969, 2000b, 2001b, 2003b). The artefacts recovered during surveys and the excavation of chiefly tombs – work carried out with permission of the Island Council – are now in the Fiji Museum collections (Figure 28.5). When the Navatanitawake ceremonial mound on the island of Bau was to be refitted as a Council House in 1970, Aubrey led a salvage excavation team to recover details of the mound's earlier use (Parke 1993, 1998).



Figure 28.5. Artefacts from Rotuma collected by Aubrey Parke, 1964 and now in the Fiji Museum.

Source: Photographs by Tristen Jones.

Most of Parke's publications appeared after he left Fiji just after independence. He became the administrative officer at Canberra College of Advanced Education, later to become the University of Canberra. He also enrolled at The Australian National University (ANU) and did a master's degree in linguistics in 1981. He progressed to a PhD and carried out further archaeological fieldwork in Fiji in the 1990s but ill-health in later life meant it took him until 2006 to complete it. But complete it he did, and the degree was awarded to him in his hospital bed during his final illness. He was the second oldest person to be awarded a PhD at the ANU. Aubrey Parke passed away early in 2007.

The PhD thesis dealt with the history and traditions of 123 *yavusa* or major descent groups, concentrating on Rakiraki in the north-east and Vuda/Nadi/Nawaka in the west of Viti Levu, and on the western archipelago of the Yasawa group, based on information very largely collected during Aubrey's time as a government officer. The thesis was published posthumously, edited by the author and Deryck Scarr, as *Degei's Descendants: Spirits, Place and People in Pre-Cession Fiji* (Parke 2014). Available for free download, it remains one of the most popular works in the ANU Press catalogue, with many of the downloads coming from Fiji (Figure 28.6).

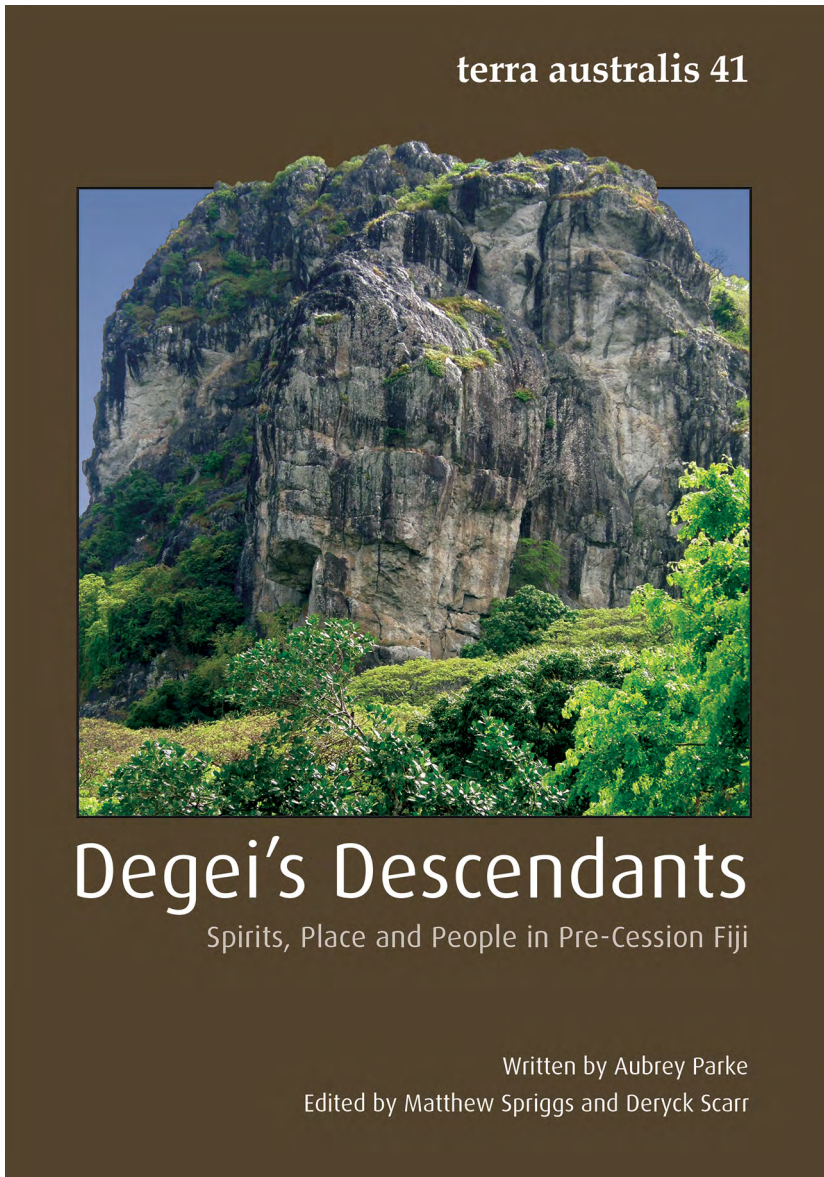


Figure 28.6. The front cover of Aubrey Parke's *Degei's Descendants*, *Terra Australis* 41.

Source: Courtesy of ANU Press; original photograph of Uluinavatu by Matthew Spriggs.

In the final decades of his life Aubrey was a prolific author on the linguistics, ethnography and archaeology of Fiji, perhaps realising that his time was short. Several further manuscripts remain in various libraries and collections, attesting to his considerable knowledge and understanding of things Fijian. Parke also assisted other researchers working on Fijian topics, such as Robert Dixon who fulsomely acknowledged this in *Grammar of Boumaa Fijian* (Dixon 1988). At his funeral in Canberra the coffin was carried from the church by *iTaukei* bearers, showing the considerable regard in which he was held by the expatriate Fijian and Rotuman community in Australia.

Aubrey Parke was technically an ‘amateur’ in that he was never employed specifically as an archaeologist. However, in terms of those living and working in the Western Pacific at the start of the 1950s he was without doubt the most highly trained person in the discipline of archaeology. He was in touch with those, such as Professor Gifford, who were kick-starting archaeology in the region after World War II, and he was among the pioneers of an archaeology informed by oral traditions that is only now really coming back into its own, after a period when such oral sources were largely disparaged. He operated entirely in local languages wherever he worked and was evidently a gifted linguist as well as archaeologist. He has been largely ignored in the history of archaeology in the region until now because the vast majority of his publications came long after he had left Fiji, particularly in the years between 1993 and 2003 and culminating in his 2006 thesis.

Conclusion

Both Ratu Rabici and Aubrey Parke were Fiji-based archaeological pioneers, and both worked for extended periods for the Fijian Administration, from the 1940s in the case of Ratu Rabici and the early 1950s in the case of Aubrey Parke. Neither of their stories is well known within Pacific archaeology, but both played significant roles in bringing Fiji’s ancient past to light. Edward Gifford very much relied on Rabici’s skills and assistance during his 1947 expedition and during the preparation of his major publications on Fiji. Ratu Rabici’s senior administrative roles in the Fijian Administration from the later 1950s until his retirement in 1968 meant that he had no further opportunity to pursue any archaeological interests he may have had. Similarly, Aubrey Parke clearly played a significant supporting role in establishing the Fiji Museum as a major

research institution in the 1960s. But again, his time in Fiji was spent primarily as a senior administrator, rising to the rank of deputy secretary of Fijian affairs by 1965. His archaeological career blossomed after he left Fiji in 1971, when he had the time to complete several major books and papers based on his earlier observations. This meant that he was never as well known in Fiji for his research contribution as he perhaps should have been, and some of his important research remains unpublished.

Acknowledgements

Detailed acknowledgements are given in earlier publications (Spriggs 2014, 2019), but I would particularly like to acknowledge the encouragement and friendship of Ratu Rabici's family during and subsequent to my October 2019 visit to Fiji, and also the continuing interest of Aubrey Parke's son, John Parke. The assistance of the Fiji Museum through Director Sipiriano Nemani and the archaeologist Elia Nakoro is also acknowledged, as is the gracious help of the National Archives of Fiji, particularly its former director, Opeti Alefaio.

The Fiji Museum is planning to redisplay its archaeological collections once the COVID crisis there passes, and will incorporate CBAP research into Rabici and Parke, as well as Parke's artefacts repatriated to Fiji from ANU.

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