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Aurora Natua and the Motu Paeao site: Unlocking French Polynesia's islands for Pacific archaeologists

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The immediate interest of Westerners in the origins of 'Polynesians' – despite the fluid historical definition of this term – is a well-analysed fact (i.e. Chazine 1983; Clark 2003; Di Piazza 2021; Douglas 2010; Douglas and Ballard 2008; Garanger 1982; Kirch 2017). This early focus on Polynesian origins and settlement processes developed exponentially from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, as part of racist theories seeking to understand the astonishing diversity of humanity in its physiological and sociocultural or linguistic traits.

In the islands of Central–Eastern Polynesia that progressively became integrated into the *Etablissements Français de l'Océanie* (EFO – future French Polynesia) (Figure 30.1), approaching the past through material culture studies was quite rare during this period (but see Haddow 2017). Throughout the Pacific, archaeological¹ investigations were first undertaken in the very last decades of the nineteenth century, concurrently with the

1 We define an 'archaeological approach' as follows: presenting the discovery of material culture remains for which evidence of antiquity is recorded and used for the analysis of the finds, and subsequently offering interpretations of the history of Pacific populations based on such remains.

notion of prehistory and the discipline of archaeology being implemented in Europe (Dotte-Sarout and Spriggs 2017; Howes and Spriggs 2019; Richards et al. 2019; see also Spriggs, **Chapter 8**, this volume). In the French islands of Eastern Polynesia, the first archaeological interpretations of material culture remains – in particular of monumental structures – were published at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries by two men working within the French colonial system: the administrator of the Marquesas Islands Dr Louis Tautain (Tautain 1897) and the naturalist Léon Seurat on a mission for the Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle in the Tuamotu-Gambier Islands (Seurat 1905).

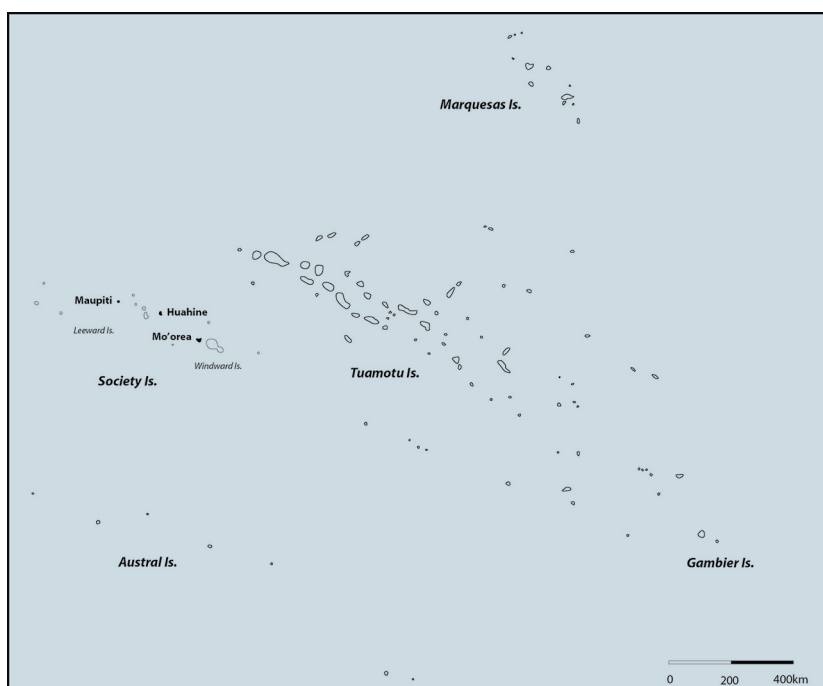


Figure 30.1. Map of French Polynesia (ex-EFO) showing island groups and main islands, including those mentioned in the text.

Source: Map created by G. Molle.

Among those who shared an early interest in ancient cultural sites of Central–Eastern Polynesia, it is noteworthy that an illustrator stands out as being the only woman in this field in the nineteenth century: Adèle Garreau de Dombasle, travelling through the Pacific with her companion Edmond de Ginoux de la Coche during the 1840s (de la Grandville 2001; Jaillet

2021).² This is remarkable as the history of anthropology in general, and archaeology in particular, remains mainly populated by male characters, both because of sociocultural historical constraints that long limited the engagement of women in such fields and because of gender-biased narratives in the history of science (Claassen 1994; Dotte-Sarout 2021; McDonald 2004; Watts 2007). Likewise, the essential role of Indigenous collaborators has long gone unnoticed in the history of archaeology (Spriggs 2019). In French Polynesia, accounts of the history of archaeology are similarly limited in their inclusion of female and/or Mā'ohi personages. However, some of the most significant archaeological collections held by the Musée de Tahiti et des Îles (MTI) contain items of material culture with particular histories that can serve to illustrate the role of one such overlooked key figure in the development of professional archaeology. Aurora Germaine Tetunui Natua, whose life spanned most of the twentieth century, became known as a 'Tahitian scholar' and her professional life was intertwined with the history of Polynesian archaeology and its extended web of connections, from Maupiti to Pape'ete, Paris and Honolulu.

The pendants exhibited at the MTI as part of the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition (see Figure 30.2) are representative of a significant site in the history of Polynesian archaeology: Motu Paeao in Maupiti (see Figure 30.1). Together with the site of Hane in the Marquesas, excavated during an associated fieldwork program (see also Solsvik, **Chapter 29**, this volume), it was assigned a significant role in the new interpretations proposed for the settlement of Polynesia during the 1960s by leading archaeologists Yosihiko Sinoto and Kenneth Emory of the Bishop Museum in Hawai'i (Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1964b; Sinoto 1966). These sites were excavated as part of the Bishop Museum Tahitian Archaeological Expeditions of 1962, 1963 and 1964 (prolonged in 1965) that were largely supported by the North American National Science Foundation and launched in part following the resolutions taken at the seminal 10th Annual Pacific Science Congress establishing the international Pacific Area Archaeology Program (Emory and Sinoto 1964a; Solheim 1961; see also Kahn and Sinoto 2017). By examining the contextual information available for the excavation of the site and the analysis of the finds, we offer a reconsideration of the essential role played by Aurora Natua in this important historical phase of Pacific archaeology. This gives

2 Some of the sketches made by Adèle de Dombasle during her travels in South America and Polynesia are now kept at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (MQB-JC) and available online (collection arts graphiques 'Adèle de Dombasle').

us an opportunity to move from the objects to the making of history, highlighting the professional story of the woman who stands behind these remarkable artefacts and more generally her contributions to the dynamics at play in the mid-twentieth century, a period of exponential growth in the archaeology of French Polynesia.

The Motu Paeao pendants and the writing of East Polynesian archaeology

The pendants found at the Motu Paeao site in Maupiti are made of whale tooth, carved and polished in the shape of a slightly convex point and perforated on each side of the proximal end – sometimes exhibiting a lipped rim, most likely to have been suspended on a necklace (Figure 30.2). The pendants show varied levels of preservation or degrees of alteration – including possible rat-gnawing marks (Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1965) – and range in length from more than 8 cm to less than 2 cm. They were found in association with distinct individual burials, recovered and donated to the Musée de Pape'ete³ over the course of three years, 1961 to 1963 (Emory and Sinoto 1964a:150).



Figure 30.2. The 18 whale-tooth pendants found at the Motu Paeao burial site and now in the collections of the MTI.

Source: Copyright MTI; photo by E. Dotte-Sarout 2018.

³ The Musée de Pape'ete, established at the beginning of the twentieth century, transferred its collections to the newly created MTI in 1974.

Paeao is a small *motu* (islet) located on the northern fringing reef of Maupiti, in the Leeward Islands of French Polynesia. Due to their importance in the Polynesian settlement debates, the excavations and discoveries made at the site of Motu Paeao, together with their regional interpretations, have been extensively discussed (Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1964b; Garanger 1967; Kirch 1986; Sinoto 1963, 1983). The site was later reinvestigated and redated by Anderson and Conte (Anderson et al. 2000). Details of the original excavations and their context are given mainly in Sinoto and Emory's academic articles (Emory and Sinoto 1964a; Sinoto 1963) and unpublished field report (Emory and Sinoto 1965), but also in Kenneth Emory's biography (Krauss 1988) and in two papers published in French by the Pape'ete-based *Bulletin de la Société des Études Océaniques* (BSEO) (Emory 1964; Emory and Sinoto 1964c – both written in 1963, immediately after the last fieldwork session).

The burial site of Motu Paeao was first discovered in 1961 by a local planter, referred to as 'Mr Pofatu' by Sinoto and Emory, while digging postholes for fence construction (Emory and Sinoto 1964a; Sinoto 1963; see also Kraus 1988). Mr Pofatu then discovered a skull and two of the whale-tooth pendants, together with an adze. Just one year before, archaeologist Yosihiko Sinoto had visited Maupiti as part of a general survey of the Society Islands (Sinoto 2016),⁴ led in collaboration between the Bishop Museum of Hawai'i and the French institution for scientific research in overseas territories, the ORSTOM⁵ (Sinoto and Verin 1965). Although they judged the returns of their efforts as 'disappointingly meager' (Emory and Sinoto 1965:3), the local population (and the French Administration) had then been made well aware of the American scientists' interest in ancient remains found in the islands. Mr Pofatu, after reburying the skull, hence passed on the artefacts to the medical practitioner posted on the island, Bruno Schmidt, who had met with Sinoto on Maupiti in 1960.

In his biography of Kenneth Emory, journalist Bob Krauss related the serendipity of the archaeologists' first observation of the artefacts, leading to the excavation of what would become a key archaeological site in Polynesia: 'the discovery met Yosi walking down Pomare Boulevard in Papeete'. Sinoto, having arrived back in Tahiti three days earlier for the

4 Sinoto was by then a recent employee of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Hawai'i, working as the assistant of archaeologist Kenneth Emory, while finishing his doctorate with the University of Hokkaido.

5 The abbreviation ORSTOM is derived from the French name for the institute, Office de la recherche scientifique et technique d'outre-mer.

new Tahitian Archaeological Expedition, 'was out for an evening stroll on May 20 [1962] when a voice called' (Krauss 1988:379). Schmidt insisted that the archaeologists have a look at the objects. In their report to the Bishop Museum, they recorded having examined 'M. Bruno Schmidt's artifacts from the Maupiti burial ground' on 21 May 1962 (Emory and Sinoto 1965:5). With excitement, they noted 'the remarkable similarity of the pendants to those found in necklaces worn by Moa-hunters of New Zealand' (Emory and Sinoto 1964a:144) and the possibility that they could represent an early common phase of Polynesian cultures (Emory and Sinoto 1964a; Krauss 1988:379–380). Three weeks later, when Sinoto arrived on Maupiti to excavate the site at Paeao, he was accompanied by 'Miss Aurora Natua' and 'Mr Tihoti Russell' (Emory and Sinoto 1965:5). Both Aurora Natua and Tihoti Russell had become local assistants to the Bishop Museum team during previous visits, working especially closely with them during the 1960 surveys (Krauss 1988:370–375) and providing an essential official collaboration with the local institutions responsible for the management of cultural heritage on the islands: the Musée de Pape'ete and the Société des Etudes Océaniques (SEO).

This learned society based in Pape'ete was founded in 1917 by a group of local notables (French residents or government representatives and Tahitian royal or *Demi* families),⁶ with the aim of studying every anthropological aspect (including archaeological ones) of the local Polynesian people and of urgently gathering, preserving and protecting 'the last evidences of the Maori civilisation'.⁷ Together with the creation of the society, a *Bulletin* was launched and the project to establish a local research centre comprising a library and a museum managed by the SEO was highlighted, eventually materialising in the early 1920s. At the same time, a decree was passed forbidding any export of historical objects out of the EFO islands, while the governor put each island's administrator in charge of protecting cultural sites, documents or objects and of encouraging local owners of such objects to contact the Musée de Pape'ete, 'the only one authorised to acquire those', for any donation (cited in Mu-Liepmann 2017:76). Clearly apparent was also the will to counter the scientific enterprises then led in

6 *Demi* denotes families or persons with mixed European and Polynesian heritage, descendants from higher or chiefly lineages and still positioned today among the higher strata of society in French Polynesia.

7 'Maori' in this case should be understood as 'Mā'ohi' (i.e. Polynesian). Quote from the Decree of January 1st 1917 taken by Governor Gustave Julien. The decree details that the society is to 'locally study all questions relating to the anthropology, ethnography, philology, archaeology, the history and institutions, mores, customs and traditions of the maoris of Eastern Polynesia' (Article 1er, Arrêté du 1er Janvier 1917, *Journal Officiel des Etablissements Français de l'Océanie*) (see Julien 2017:340–342).

the region by Anglophone institutions such as the Bishop Museum of Hawai'i and the Polynesian Society of New Zealand, and to regulate their developing interests in the French islands of Central–Eastern Polynesia. By the 1960s, the museum and library of the SEO were located together in a dedicated building in Pape'ete's city centre. For more than 15 years, both had been under the management of an experienced, extremely knowledgeable and well-connected local figure: Aurora Germaine Tetunui Natua (Figure 30.3). Natua is cited as one of the most 'prominent among local residents' who assisted Emory and Sinoto during their first mission together in French Polynesia, in 1960 (Emory 1962:117), and she was considered a local correspondent of the Bishop Museum from 1959.⁸ Russell, working with the SEO on *marae* restorations, had been 'trained' by the Bishop Museum team to collaborate especially on surface collection and proper identification of cultural artefacts after encountering Sinoto on Ra'iatea in 1960; he collected many of the items eventually deposited at the MTI (Lavondès 1973; Krauss 1988:383).



Figure 30.3. 'Aurora Natua at Papeete Museum', 1960.

Photo by Yosihiko H. Sinoto.

Source: Published with the authorisation of the Bishop Museum Archives (Image ID SXS_215221). Copyright Bishop Museum.

⁸ As stated in the exhibition *100 ans d'une histoire commune – Musée de Tahiti et des Îles, Société des Etudes Océaniques*, MTI, Pape'ete, 25 juillet–31 décembre 2017.

During their short 1962 fieldwork season on Paeao (15–17 June), Sinoto, Natua and Russell excavated the burial discovered in 1961, unearthing a number of artefacts (adzes, pearl shell fishhooks, a human tooth pendant and an additional whale-tooth ornament). These finds confirmed Sinoto and Emory's first observations of Mr Pofatu and Schmidt's artefacts: the material culture associated with this burial was similar to that found a few years earlier at the Wairau Bar site in New Zealand (Duff 1956), interpreted as a first settlement site and associated with the 'Moa-Hunter' or 'archaic Maori' culture (Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1964c, 1965; see also Brooks, **Chapter 9**, and Spriggs and Howes, **Chapter 26**, both this volume). A second field season was organised in May 1963 'over four weeks of intensive digging' (Emory and Sinoto 1964a), with Emory joining the team and seven (unidentified) local men employed. The extensive excavations led to the discovery of 14 other burials and more associated ornaments, including 18 more whale-tooth pendants.⁹ All of the skeletons were reburied while the artefacts were donated to the Musée de Pape'ete (Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1964c). Based on the morphology of the whale-tooth pendants, fishhooks and adzes, and on the orientation of the burials, Emory and Sinoto proposed that the Motu Paeao site marked a 'pre-Moa Hunters' culture, representative of an archaic Polynesian culture in Central–Eastern Polynesia and displaying close affinities with the material culture of Western Polynesia – hence supporting the idea of 'an ancient current of civilisation moving from Western Polynesia to Eastern Polynesia' (Emory 1964:379; see also Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1964b, 1964c). They further relied on a stylistic comparative analysis of these diagnostic artefacts to establish their settlement model of Eastern Polynesia, one with a significant legacy in the region's archaeology (Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1964c; Sinoto 1963, 1983; see also discussions in Anderson et al. 2000; Kahn and Sinoto 2017).

Aurora Natua: The indispensable key collaborator

As the curator and librarian of the SEO, Aurora Natua would definitely have been a central collaborator for collecting and curating the artefacts, as well as for their initial analyses using the museum's collections and library. In their 1965 report, Emory and Sinoto recorded several work sessions

9 Today the MTI retains 18 of the overall 21 pendants unearthed. Ma3G13-2, Ma3C15-1 and Ma3E12-10 (evidently from the 1963 excavations) appear to have been taken away to the Bishop Museum.

and meetings with Natua at the Musée de Pape'ete throughout the three missions between 1962 and 1964. Even more importantly, she would also have been a key person for establishing relations with the local community and the traditional owners of the lands, appearing as a complex process in the details given throughout the published and unpublished records of the excavations. As discussed below, she had filled the role of interpreter and assistant to other international scientific teams before and, crucially, she originated, from her father's side, from Maupiti (Aurima-Devatine 2017; Margueron 2017). Indeed, Emory is said to have 'sent Yosi to Maupiti along with Aurora Natua to act as an interpreter' (Krauss 1988:380) and both archaeologists regularly acknowledged the participation of Natua, 'conservatrice of the Papeete Museum', in their publications and report (Emory 1962; Emory and Sinoto 1964a, 1965).¹⁰ They also explained how, on their first visit to the site in 1962 with Aurora Natua, Mr Pofatu had to be 'persuaded to take them to the spot of the discovery and to allow its excavation' (Emory and Sinoto 1964a:144). In a preceding paper, Emory had insisted on the fact that conducting excavations in French Polynesia was long and complicated because land owners had to (be convinced to) give their authorisation in advance, which 'involved lengthy explanations that required the presence of someone fluent in the Tahitian or French language' (Emory 1962:118) – someone who could explain the value of archaeological work and gain the trust of local inhabitants. At this time, Natua was the only person able to fill this role as she had both extensive experience with the Western academic world and deep personal connections with local inhabitants, in addition to her expert knowledge of Tahitian language¹¹ and material culture (Natua 1992).

While helping the researchers to gain access to the lands, she might also have secured a form of local control of their work, ensuring that excavations were not done without prior written consent given by the traditional owners, and that all collected artefacts were to be deposited with the Musée de Pape'ete – as per the statutes of the SEO. Again, Emory and Sinoto detailed how they could not remove any human remains from the burial ground, 'in the interest of maintaining good relations with the inhabitants' and in the face of their sensitivity about the removal of the bones (Emory and Sinoto 1964a:147). Further, Emory lamented

10 Though interestingly her participation is not mentioned in the two 1964 papers of the BSEO.

11 She was recognised as an expert in Tahitian language and oral traditions, and her only authored book (written in 1982 and published the year of her death, in 1992) was written entirely in Tahitian – a study of all available sources to reconstitute the history of the land of Ariitia (Punaauia district on Tahiti) and of the 'royal' Marae Taputapuataea of Arahuru that existed there until the early nineteenth century.

the lengthy process they had to undertake in order to gain written legal permission from the landowners before returning for their extensive excavations in 1963 (Emory 1964). The team wrote about the signatures they had to obtain from nine landowners of Motu Paeao, certifying their agreement 'to leave all the artefacts in the permanent care of the Papeete Museum, in the name of Teriinofo a Puihi, the ancestor from whom the present owners hold their claim to the land' (Emory 1964:156).

The 1965 report shows that a similar process was to be undertaken for all the sites excavated in the Society Islands as part of the same mission, and it records the presence of Aurora Natua during initial surveys and excavations on Huahine, Ra'iatea and Mo'orea from 1960 to 1964 (Emory and Sinoto 1965; see also Krauss 1988:370–390). The report on the associated fieldwork undertaken in the Marquesas even states that the team played 'a tape narrated in Tahitian by Aurora Natua about Bishop Museum and our work' to the workmen employed for the excavations (Sinoto and Kellum 1965:Appendix A).

Overall, Aurora Natua was hence present in the archaeological operations from the very beginning – as negotiator and supervisor of the land access for fieldwork – to the final stages of conservation and analysis of the artefacts discovered – as recognised scholar, librarian and curator. She was a necessary collaborator, both as a representative of the local institution in charge of managing and controlling all matters related to cultural heritage in French Polynesia, but also as an Indigenous expert able to translate between the Western researchers and local communities: a key person in the literal sense of the word, opening the doors of Polynesian archaeology to outsider scientists.

In fact, the precious collaboration of Aurora Natua in anthropological research conducted in French Polynesia is traceable in a long trail of acknowledgements, in references to her name and to her collaboration found in several published and unpublished outputs produced between the 1950s and 1980s. For instance, in the publication of the Pacific Science Board's 1952 Coral Atoll Expedition in the Tuamotu island of Raroia she is thanked for her 'invaluable services' as the assistant of anthropologist Bengt Danielsson (Danielsson 1954:1) and acknowledged as the 'Tahitian scholar' who aided him in negotiations between expedition members and Raroia inhabitants (Newell 1954:3). Danielsson, who helped and advised Emory and Sinoto during their 1960s archaeological expedition in French Polynesia, might have recommended Natua as a collaborator for the Bishop Museum team. It is also possible, however, that Emory had met her during

his numerous stays in Tahiti since the 1920s, or through his wife's local family.¹² In any case, Aurora Natua figures prominently in the 1960s Tahitian chapters of Emory's biography, where she is noted for her 'encyclopaedic knowledge of Tahitian families, genealogies, and island history' and described as 'indispensable' to Emory and Sinoto's work (Krauss 1988:371–372, 384–385). She appears to have become close to the archaeologists, visiting when their families came to stay on the islands or hosting them in her own family in Tahiti (Figure 30.4) (Krauss 1988:375, 381). Emory is also said to have secured some financial support¹³ that 'subsidized Aurora's labors for Bishop Museum' in 1963, when her small salary at the Musée de Pape'ete appeared to be threatened (Krauss 1988:385).



Figure 30.4. Kenneth Pike Emory, Marguerite Emory and Aurora Natua at Hitiaa, Tahiti, French Polynesia, 1960.

Source: Published with the authorisation of the Bishop Museum Archives (Image ID SXS_215220). Copyright Bishop Museum.

Later on, in the works of Anne Lavondès on the collections of the MTI, her essential collaboration, expertise and legacy in preserving and cataloguing ancient artefacts are recognised and valued with a lot of

12 On his first stay in Tahiti, in 1925, Kenneth Emory had met and married Marguerite Thuret, a descendant, on her mother's side, of Tahitian and Huahine royal families (Krauss 1988).

13 Through an anonymous donation of US\$1,000/year from a private benefactor and friend of Emory's.

respect; Lavondès states finally that ‘only she, to tell the truth, knows these objects perfectly’ (Lavondès 1979:447; see also Lavondès 1973). Indeed, her work as the longest serving curator and librarian of the SEO, from 1946 to the late 1970s, was foundational for the SEO and the collections of the future MTI. Her essential contribution to research activities conducted in French Polynesia has recently been celebrated locally; she has been recognised as ‘the living memory’ of the SEO (Guehenec 2017), an expert with ‘exceptional knowledge about the ancient Polynesian culture’ (Margueron 2017), ‘informant, collaborator, outstanding adviser, whose contribution to scientific research in Polynesia was established, massive, fundamental: sharing her personal notes, elements of knowledge gathered over her life’ with the researchers she chose to help (Aurima-Devatine 2017:190). She has also been described as ‘very independent, austere, solitary’, even ‘dreaded’ and ‘very demanding’ (Aurima-Devatine 2017:188).

Aurora Natua’s connections to archaeological and anthropological research in French Polynesia can be traced back to her mother’s family and its early involvement in the SEO: the Drollet family, an ancient and respected family of *Demis*. Alexandre Drollet – interpreter and expert in Tahitian language (O’Reilly and Teissier 1975:151), one of the original members of the SEO upon its creation in 1917 – was the uncle of Pauline Drollet, Aurora Natua’s mother. Born in Pape’ete in 1909 in such an important family with strong Indigenous links to Tahiti and Maupiti, a respected social position and scholarly tradition, Aurora Natua may well have benefited from quality education and been raised with a strong awareness of the traditional past of her islands. Biographical elements are scarce, but in 1928, a 19-year-old Aurora Natua was recorded among the few visitors to the newly established Musée de Pape’ete managed by the SEO (Babin 2017:84). She appears to have remained in Pape’ete until the late 1930s; she assisted Alfred Métraux during his 1935 visit to Tahiti (Mu-Liepmann 2017:79) and was living in Punaauia in 1937 (Natua 1992:11).¹⁴ She is said to have ‘spent the war [World War II] in France’ (Margueron 2017) and is listed among the new members joining the Parisian Société des Océanistes in its first official year of existence, in 1945 (certainly one of the

14 Based on the French translation of the text by John Martin, typescript kept at the Service de Documentation du Musée de Tahiti et des Îles.

very first Pacific Islanders to become a member).¹⁵ There, she would have been in direct contact with some of the figures from the French academic circles who were instrumental in developing francophone archaeology in the Pacific: Paul Rivet, director of the Musée de l'Homme, as well as Pastor Maurice Leenhardt and Father Patrick O'Reilly, respectively president and general secretary of the Société des Océanistes.¹⁶

In 1946, Aurora Natua was back in Tahiti: she became a member of the SEO, immediately starting in her position as librarian and curator of the MTI, presented as follows by the new president of the SEO, Pastor Rey-Lescure:

Our new archivist-librarian, Miss A. Natua is known by many among you since she is from a local family [...] Miss Natua, who has just spent the war years in France, was able to get in contact with the directors of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, to which our Society should become annexed, with such a patronage we could go far. (Rey-Lescure 1947)¹⁷

Importantly, it was also during this meeting that another woman entered the committee of the society for the first time: Miss Janine Laguesse (from another longstanding local family, in this case of settlers) as archivist-secretary. This arrival of women in some of the management roles of the society was a little revolution:

The statutes might not have anticipated the introduction of ladies to our committee, but electors like us, they must receive our solicitude; let's offer them a place before they demand some, the gesture will be on our side. (Rey-Lescure 1947)

Both Aurora Natua and Janine Laguesse became the longest serving members of the SEO (more than 30 and 50 years, respectively). Although it is difficult to establish the degree of mutual support between these women who were the first to venture into a very male-dominated intellectual and

15 List of members in July 1949 (Société des Océanistes 1949:175–184); a 'Miss Tetua Nalua' (Natua?), candidate to become a member of the society under the patronage of Maurice Leenhardt and Mme Peaucellier (of Tahiti), appears in the minutes of the 21 December 1945 meeting of the SO (Société des Océanistes 1946:209–213).

16 Further research is needed to investigate her participation in the meetings and activities led by the society or its preceding group, the Centre d'Etudes Océaniques du Musée de l'Homme, active during the war under the patronage of Paul Rivet.

17 Probably not incidentally, she was presented to the SEO by Rey-Lescure himself, the nephew of Maurice Leenhardt, who had just supported her membership of the Société des Océanistes in Paris the year before.

elite world, it seems pertinent that, nearly 20 years later, Aurora Natua supported the membership candidature to the Société des Océanistes of a young archaeologist from Mo'orea – the very first woman to write and publish a thesis on East Polynesian archaeology: Marimari Kellum.¹⁸

Conclusion

The Motu Paeao pendants are emblematic of a site that proved critical in the history of archaeological theories about the settlement of Polynesia. Investigating how these objects came to be excavated in the first place, how they could be examined and the site accessed reveals the important role played by a Mā'ohi woman scholar whose contributions to anthropological research in French Polynesia deserve to be re-established in the history of our discipline. Aurora Natua's collaboration was indispensable to the archaeologists throughout the whole process of their field research, from access to the site and community support to conservation and analysis of the artefacts. As an Indigenous collaborator, she provided the necessary translation – of language *and* concepts – between the scientists and the local communities, while ensuring some form of local ownership or control over the scientific work and the cultural heritage discovered. As a woman, she paved the way for a younger generation to become more openly and directly involved in Polynesian archaeology. Remarkably, in the early 1960s her path crossed those of the first young women who would graduate as archaeologists in Polynesia. Indeed, at that time in the French Polynesian islands not only was Aurora Natua working alongside archaeologists Kenneth Emory and Yosi Sinoto, but also Marimari Kellum as the assistant of Sinoto (and a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i), as well as Janet Davidson and Kaye Green as the assistants of Roger Green (and graduate students at Auckland University, see also Sheppard and Furey, **Chapter 33**, this volume)¹⁹ (Green et al. 1967; Kellum-Ottino 1971; Sinoto and Kellum 1965). Personal life trajectories and long-term historical dynamics seem to have converged towards

18 Minutes of the meeting of 22 November 1963 (Société des Océanistes 1964:99).

19 Ann Rappaport (then a graduate student at Columbia University) was also engaged in excavations with husband Roy Rappaport at this time, as original members of the Bishop Museum expedition assigned to the associated American Museum expedition led by Roger Green, but their expertise lay mainly in environmental studies and cultural anthropology. They also benefited from the collaboration of Aurora Natua (as documented in photos from the University of California San Diego digital collections of Roy Rappaport papers, MSS 0516).

the small island of Mo'orea in particular, where the itineraries of these pioneering women intersected between 1961 and 1962, in a striking moment of history.

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Objects highlighted in this chapter were on display at the Musée de Tahiti et des Îles – Te Fare Manaha in September 2020.

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