REPORT AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF NAQELLEVU ATOLL, NORTHEAST FIJI

CHRISTOPHE SAND
Department of Archaeology of New Caledonia, Noumea

FREDERIQUE VALENTIN
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Paris

JACQUES BOLÉ, ANDRÉ OUETCHO AND DAVID BARET
Department of Archaeology of New Caledonia, Noumea

TARISI SOROVI-VUNIDILO
Creative New Zealand, Auckland

SEPETI MATARARABA
Fiji Museum, Suva

The small atoll of Naqelelevu is located on the northeastern fringe of the Fijian archipelago, at the edge of the geographically defined Melanesian culture area. This island, along with the northern tip of Vanua Levu and the island of Cikobia, forms a northeast path to the West Polynesian islands of Futuna, 'Uvea and Samoa (Fig. 1). This link to the east is embedded in the oral traditions of the island, which refer repeatedly to the neighbouring island of Futuna, located approximately 250km to the northeast (Burrows 1936:47, Keletaona 1997:19, Matararaba 1998). This article reports preliminary findings concerning Naqelelevu’s culture history within a regional context, drawing on the archaeological evidence of material culture, local and Futunan oral traditions and historical accounts.

A preliminary archaeological survey of Naqelelevu was conducted over a period of two days in August 1997 as part of a New Caledonian/French/Fijian collaboration (Sand et al. 2000, Valentin and Sand 1998). The primary objective of this project was to investigate the prehistoric chronology of Naqelelevu through its material remains and oral traditions. Our wider aim was to enhance our understanding of former inter-island relationships in this part of the southwestern Pacific. Exchanges between Naqelelevu, Cikobia and Futuna reconstructed on the basis of linguistic data (Geraghty, pers. comm. 1997) and oral traditions (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975, Hocart 1952), as well as the geographic proximity between Naqelelevu, Cikobia, Vanua Levu and Taveuni, suggest a unique historical pattern. More than any other islands, Naqelelevu and Cikobia are geographically at the border between
the two main cultural areas defined by 19th century European scholars as Melanesia and Polynesia (see Clark 2003, Kirch 2000:155-61). Our intent through this project is to study the archaeological data of these "border islands" to investigate possible transitional cultural trajectories melding Fijian and West Polynesian characteristics. Until now, most of the data obtained from the field programme, have remained in unpublished reports (Sand et al. 2000, Valentin and Sand 1998, Valentin et al. 1999).

THE ATOLL OF NAQELELELU

Naqelelevu and its two satellites, Tauraria and Tainibeka islets, are located in the northeast of the Fijian archipelago at latitude 16°05 south and 179°16 west, 115km south/southeast of Cikobia and about the same distance east of Udu Point in Vanua Levu, 130-140km northeast of Rabi and Taveuni and 250km south-west of Futuna. Naqelelevu, about 2km long and 1km wide, (Fig. 2), is a coral limestone mass positioned at the eastern end of a pear-shaped atoll formation that extends to a maximum length of 27km. The island has two main geological components. Its eastern part is formed by uplifted limestone varying in height from 5m to 18m from west to east. On the
Figure 2. Map of Naqelelevu Island at the eastern end of the atoll, marking the location of the sites surveyed.

western side of the limestone lies a coastal sand plain facing a large lagoon (Woodhall 1997). The island is part of the Laucala District, Cakaudrove Province (Northern Division of Fiji). Naqelelevu's language belongs to the East Fijian language group; its closest neighbour is the language of Cikobia (Geraghty, pers. comm. 1997). The population comprises a single yavusa (tribe), divided into two mataqali (clans) named Ra and Yatafu. Most of the people of Naqelelevu are currently Catholic. At the time of our survey in 1997, only three elders lived on the island, while most of the community of around 50 people had migrated to Fatima village at the Wairiki Catholic Mission on Taveuni Island.

MAIN TYPES OF IDENTIFIED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Because of the limited time we spent on Naqelelevu, the survey was conducted by following the main trails under the guidance of Sebasitiano Lilicama, relying on his knowledge of the traditional sites. In all 19 archaeological sites were recorded, numbered in discovery order and preceded by the coding U21 (see Appendix). In this section, we present the main types of sites we identified, detailing the most significant results for each category.
**Former settlement locations**

The simple land formation of Naqelelevu Island will certainly have influenced settlement patterns since first discovery. The protected northwestern (U21-016) to southwestern (U21-004) sand plains facing the lagoon was suitable for permanent settlement, but the large eastern part of the island, consisting of uplifted limestone formations facing the open ocean, had no really attractive spaces for habitation. Hence, it is not surprising that habitation features as well as surface remains of ceramics (U21-002, U21-003) were identified mainly along the sand plains. Only the fortification of Nukuseve (U21-012) does not fit this pattern. It is likely that the main settlement site has always been at Naëvo (U21-001) where the present-day settlement remains, although oral traditions mention the existence of various other villages (Matararaba 1998). The Naëvo site is located at the top of the highest part of the sand dune facing the lagoon, in the southwest of the island. In the eastern part of the village we noted a lower area extending inland and perpendicular to the seashore, which may have been artificially formed. There are gardens at the back of the present-day residential area, along with coconut trees, breadfruit trees and wild hibiscus. We counted nine large old raised house-mounds in the former village area that are partly covered with bush. Abundant archaeological material was collected on the ground around the old settlements, including different styles of pottery, one basalt adze and one *Tridacna*-shell adze. Because some of the surface collected potsherds were characteristic of the Sigatoka tradition (first millennium B.C.) (see Burley 2005, Frost 1979), a one square metre test-pit was excavated at this site. The dating of unidentified charcoal from the lowest archaeological layer (Layer 2) returned an AMS result of 2560±50 B.P. (Beta-109366), calibrated to 815 (785) 525 B.C. at two standard deviations (Calib 93). On this site as well as in nearby site U21-002, paddle-impressed sherds probably dating to the first millennium A.D. were collected along with other ceramic remains. Sherds spanning different chronological periods were also collected on site U21-004, especially in an eroding seashore profile.

**Burial grounds and ritual site**

Two significant burial sites were recorded during the survey in the sandy plain. The first, called Nasavuti (U21-017), is located at the back of the point forming the western end of Naqelelevu's sand dune. One side of the burial ground is mainly a recent cemetery said to be related to Christian times and containing about 20 graves, each surrounded with coral blocks and oriented east-west. Towards the east of the same site we located what may be an older burial area, containing graves marked with cut beach-rock slabs placed vertically in the ground. It is likely that these were cut from the
island’s reef-flat. A partially buried slab-faced rectangle about 6.5m long and 6m wide, contained five rectangular-shaped burials, one of them being inside a larger rectangle (Fig. 3). The largest individual feature is 4m long, the smallest 2m long. The beach-rock was artificially shaped into rectangular slabs, some of which are over 80cm long, 40cm high and 6-10cm thick. The layout indicates mainly successive construction of individual burials. This burial arrangement is similar to the traditional burial style on Futuna during the past few centuries (Frimigacci 1990).

Figure 3. General map of the rectangular burials of the Nasavuti cemetery and one of the raised coral blocks burials.
The second site, Sautaru (U21-018), is an artificial mound known as the collective burial ground of the Tui Naqelelevu title. The mound, about 9m in diameter and 130cm high, has different levels, apparently constructed as steps. Large limestone blocks have been observed on parts of its base and vertically placed slabs have been noticed in the structure of the mound; one cut slab measured over a metre in length. A series of uncut limestone blocks, placed vertically as slabs, may have marked former burials on the flattened top of the mound, which has been partly disturbed by recent activity. Basalt pebbles, of unknown source but necessarily imported, were recorded on the surface of the mound, a trait also observed in nearby Cikobia Island (Valentin and Sand 1998, Valentin et al. 2001). Ceramic sherds and a few European goods have been collected. Our informant Sebasitiano Lilicama thought that no burial had occurred in this site during Christian times.

One site, named Sautaru (U21-002), was identified by Sebasitiano as a pre-Christian temple for the Naqelelevu people. The site, located in the eastern part of the sandy plain, is characterised by a series of slabs and large weathered shells lying on the ground. We noted stone alignments and upright stones, although no well-preserved in situ features were identified. An interesting oral account on the old rituals related to the Sautaru site is known by Naqelelevu’s elders and gives clues to some aspects of their religion before Christian times.

**Horticultural features and field arrangements**

We observed two main patterns of horticultural use, one on the sandy plain and one on the limestone plateau. Former or modern planting areas for bananas, breadfruit trees and other edible crops were observed in gardens along the sandy plains (U21-001 to U21-004, U21-016 to U21-018), but no clear structural modification related to horticultural features was recorded.

By contrast, our survey of the uplifted limestone plateau of Naqelelevu identified many artificial features. There are heaps or low walls of waste, mainly limestone blocks, generated during the clearance of the terraces to create gardens. *Cordyline* is often planted on these former horticultural sites. These features start at sites U21-006 to U21-010 on the eastern plateau after Lake Apea; the identified heaps of limestone blocks sometimes reach 6m in length and over 80cm in height. On site U21-010, a rectangular-shaped pattern has been identified, measuring about 5m in length and with a flat top 25-30cm high. At the back of the northeastern shore we recorded other field systems, for example a walled enclosure about 1.5m long on site U21-013. In the central area of Naqelelevu up to Lake Waicinaci, the uplifted inland limestone flat of site U21-014 of Dako is covered with multiple artificial coral stone heaps and low walls, forming a nearly continuous arrangement in an unorganised
labyrinthine pattern. Some heaps appear to have a small hole without rocks in their centre, possibly resulting from trees or root crops being planted there. Towards the western part of the site, the heaps form small enclosure walls without clear shape, encircling areas of loose agricultural soil without stones. The surrounding area is planted with food producing trees as well as low banyan trees. These enclosures, which may have been progressively formed by piling the waste rocks, form features sometimes less than one square metre in size. No special shape was observed, the arrangements being mainly organised to cover the unusable in situ limestone outcrops. One of the stone heaps reaches about 90cm high and is 2.5m in diameter. There are two rectangular low enclosures nearby oriented north-south and measuring about 1.8m long and 1.5m wide for one and 3m long and 1.4m wide for the other. These two features enclose small plots whose surfaces are cleared of stones. The western-most of these rectangles contains a circle about 50cm in diameter, formed by five Tridacna shells. The use of these specific features and their possible changes over time (burial, ritual area, special horticultural field) has not been determined. Artificial wall arrangements are still present westward of Lake Waicinaci (U21-015), some appearing fairly intact. This may indicate that these parts of the field systems closer to the village have probably been used until fairly recently. The rocky limestone character of the western side of the Naqelelevu plateau near the coastal plain appears to have been less adapted to cultivation.

Considering the large area covered by these horticultural features, rectangular low enclosures and heaps, it appears that an extensive area of Naqelelevu’s back-beach limestone flats has been worked intensively in the past to obtain plots of planting soil freed of pebbles and coral blocks. As indicated by an oral account collected at site U21-004, some heaps might also have been land boundaries.

**Nukuseve Fortification**

Oral traditions of Naqelelevu mention at least two fortified areas on the island, Koronaui and Nukuseve (see section on oral traditions below). Only Nukuseve (U21-012) was shown to us during our survey. This traditional fort was built on the flat top of a natural point bounding a roughly north-south oriented fault in the limestone plateau. Its southern side, opening towards the coral plateau, is protected by a double wall. The inside part of the fort, on uneven rocky ground, has several uplifted platforms bounded by stone alignments. A general map is presented in Figure 4. The access to the fort was closed by a first wall at least one metre high, one metre wide and 60m in total length, whose centre had an entrance gate about 1.5m wide, bounded by a 3m wide platform on each side. The inside part to the west is the lowest and
narrowest, the eastern part being wider and flatter. The second wall is a large curved defensive feature, more than 2m high in the west and over 40m long. Its flat top is a 3 to 4m wide platform, with a lower step on the eastern part. Relying on some *in situ* parts of the defensive feature, the face of the wall was nearly vertical. The central entrance was located between the highest parts of the wall, in the eastern area. A 90° angle change towards the northwest, at the most forward of the protective wall, was defended by an additional low wall (today partly collapsed) raised on the top of the platform. At the back of this top wall a stone circle for a fireplace was identified. A second partly collapsed entrance gate was present on the western end, bounded at the limit of the cliff by a small pile of stones.
The inner area of the fort is entirely surrounded by a low but sometimes thick wall. Eight raised artificial platforms are present in this central part of the point. The builders obviously tried to construct their mounds where natural limestone outcrops were already present, leaving the flatter areas free of features, probably to allow easy circulation. The platforms seem to have had irregular shapes and their drawing in Figure 4 was done roughly. In some cases, the in situ limestone was exploited as a natural surrounding, while in other cases a proper alignment of boulders was made. Some platforms are more than 50cm high. At the northern tip of the site, which forms a very narrow point where banyans grow, only one small platform has been identified. We collected a large number of ceramic sherds on the surface, which may testify to the repeated use of the fort. Springs at the bottom of the cliff (especially the brackish water well U21-011) were recorded but have not been examined in detail. The cliff is about 9m high on average.

**Brackish lakes as natural fishponds**

Two of the three main lakes on Naqelelevu’s raised limestone plateau (U21-005 Apea and U21-019 Drano) were identified by Sebasitiano as former natural ponds for keeping live turtles and raising small fish to proper eating size. Mangroves grow on the fringes of the two lakes, and eels are said to live in Lake Apea. These aquacultural practices probably reflect a complex history of reef use and use of the inner lagoon by generations of people living on tiny Naqelelevu.

**Access to brackish water**

People explain the departure of most of the population of Naqelelevu for Taveuni by the difficulty of access to fresh water, although in Futunan traditions the island was “supplied with fresh water” (Burrows 1936:47). Only one potable water source, possibly artificial, was identified during the survey (at site U21-011), located in the fault protecting the fort of Nukuseve (U21-012). The water is brackish, but drinkable. The presence of a wall closing off access to this water source might be a sign of the scarcity of water, necessitating this protective feature. Although no information was recorded during our survey, it is probable that other such brackish pools or accessible water lens exist in other areas of Naqelelevu. This might be the case with Lake Waicinaci (U21-015) in the western part of the island, where a rockshelter is said to exist. Another source of freshwater was the collection of rainwater in troughs dug into the bases of living coconut trees. One of these troughs was observed in an old coconut trunk at the site of Nukuoru (U21-013), a small beach at the back of the fringing reef on the northeastern side of the island.
MATERIAL CULTURE

Most of the data on material culture comes from surface collections made during the survey. Owing to time constraints, only one test-pit (U21-001A) was excavated during our stay on Naelelevu, but it gave enough data to define a first general chronology. The one-by-one metre excavation, located at the back of the statue of the Virgin Mary in Naevo village on the top of the quaternary dune, reached a depth of 120cm, allowing the identification of four main stratigraphic layers. The top Layer 1, from the surface to about 40cm, is a black horticultural soil, containing numerous coral pebbles: two clear features reaching 100cm deep were observed and interpreted as possible post holes. Layer 2, reaching 60cm in most of the square, is a grey-brown sandy layer with beach-rock slabs in some places. Three features reaching 100cm depth are interpreted as post holes, and a small earth oven was identified during the excavation of this layer. Layer 3 is a sterile clear yellow sand ending horizontally at 110cm depth, resting on a more yellow-orange sand only 10cm thick in most places (Layer 4), above the limestone bed-rock, appearing at about 120cm depth.

Ceramics

The main category of portable artefacts is ceramic potsherds. Sherds were found at most sites, both on the sandy plain and on the limestone plateau. Most of the sherds are partly or fully eroded out of the sites, indicating stratigraphic disturbance processes. The fort of Nukuseve (U21-012) was the only site where a significant number of non-eroded large pieces of pottery were collected. This may largely be attributed to the particular function and recent age of the site, which has minimised human-induced processes of fragmentation after the pots were discarded. Naelelevu is very poor in clay, so most of the pottery was probably imported from other islands of Fiji. Consequently, we have adopted the general Fijian ceramic sequence defined by Frost (1979) in our study of the local typology.

The identification of a few red-slip sherds with a large component of sand temper may indicate the presence of a decorated Lapita component buried somewhere in the vicinity of test-pit U21-001A. However, the earliest clearly established ceramic tradition identified from the test-pit is related to the immediate post-Lapita, defined as the regional Sigatoka Phase (Frost 1979:64-66). The sherds discovered in the excavation for this period appear to have been of two main types (Fig. 5). The first is a simple bowl form with flat or rounded lip and apparently without a flat bottom. The second is an open jar form, with slight differences between individual pots, as the rim typology of these jars appears to be divided into three main types: a collared
rim with an outside protuberance, a straight rim with a flat horizontal top, and a partly incurved rim with an angled lip. Aside from the simple notching of some rims, decoration is limited to the wiping or light paddling of the outer surface with a vegetal fabric, leaving regular deep-grooved striations on the surface of the container. Most of these grooves are fairly large, but on some thin-walled pots, the striations can be very fine. A series of handles of rounded and oval section appear to be related to the late part of this period, with a few square profiles resembling those illustrated for the Lau Group (e.g., Best 1984: Fig.3.58).

The least well-defined Naqelelevu ceramic tradition is linked to the Navatu Phase paddle-impressed wares of the first millennium A.D. elsewhere in Fiji (Clark 1999, Frost 1979:66-68). Different types of paddle-impressed sherds have been identified both in the Naqelelevu surface collection and excavation. Most prevalent are cross-hatched patterns of two types: squares about 10mm wide on medium-thick sherds and very small squares less than 2mm wide on thin-walled pots. The second less prevalent pattern is one of irregular waves, not showing series of parallel ribs on the sherds, as has often been the case elsewhere is Fiji.

Most of the larger sherds of the surface collection are clearly of the type associated with the last millennium A.D. of the Fijian ceramic chronology defined as the Vunda Phase (Frost 1979:68-70). A significant diversity of wall thickness, paste colour and temper types (calcareous and mineral sands)
is apparent in the Naqelelevu collection, indicating that pots were imported from numerous different ceramic production centres to the west and south. On the basis of studies conducted elsewhere in eastern Fiji (e.g., Best 1984, O’Day et al. 2004; also Cochrane 2004), over the past 1000 years, the degree of contact between Naqelelevu and the various centres of ceramic production of the region has certainly fluctuated. Although slight changes in pot-forms certainly characterised this ceramic phase, the main pottery form is the *kuro* type, a rounded or light-carinated jar with straight long out-curved rim, whose lip is sometimes decorated with end-tool or shell impressions. One of the *kuro* from Nukuseve (U21-012) had regularly spaced tri-dimensional nubbins placed on the carination; another from U21-007 was decorated with incised triangular motifs. Major differences in wall thickness are indicative of a wide variation in the size of these pots, with maximum diameters ranging from 15cm to over 35cm. The second main form is the *dari* type, a round-bottom bowl with a large flared rim. A couple of these rims bear three-dimensional decorations (Fig. 6). A single rounded spout of unusual form (G. Clark, pers. comm. 2007) recovered on site U21-012 is evidence that water containers were imported.

The most recent ceramic tradition in Fiji, the Ra Phase developed over the last few centuries, is mainly characterised by the appearance of clay bands forming complex raised patterns (Frost 1979:68). Only two sherds bearing this type of pattern have been identified to date in Naqelelevu, one from site U21-007 and the other from the traditional cemetery of Nasavuti (U21-017). This indicates contacts between the island and regions to the west up to historic times.

![Figure 6. Rim types of Vunda Phase *dari* bowl forms (surface collection).](image-url)
Non-ceramic material

Few non-ceramic items were found during the surface survey. Most are flakes and adzes of basaltic or siliceous material. All these stone artefacts were imported from outside the island, as only calcareous rock exists on Naqelelevu. To date, this collection has not been geochemically characterised. Visual inspection of the basaltic flakes has identified colours ranging from light gray to black, suggesting different types of basalts and possibly indicating multiples geological sources. The siliceous flakes found in the test-pit excavation (U21-001A) are mainly of a dark-red colour, with only a few pieces being lighter brown. Two fine-grained rocks were used as polishing stones. Another flake is probably from an oven stone: part of the pebble’s cortex is evident.

Three broken stone adzes were found, one on the seashore at Naevo and two in the Nukuseve fort. The one from Naevo (site U21-001) is 6.5cm long, has a lenticular section and can be classified as a Type XIA in Best’s Fijian typology (Best 1984:396) (Fig. 7a). The fully polished distal part of a basalt adze from the Nukuseve fort (U21-012) has a quadrangular section and is of Best’s Type V (Fig. 7b). The distal part of an oval-section adze found on the same site allows its classification as a Best Type II.

Figure 7. Stone adzes found in surface collection on Naqelelevu Island.
The shell implements discovered are of only two types. The distal part of an adze made from the ventral part of a Tridacna shell was collected at site U21-001. The section is trapezoidal and the maximum length must have been around 8cm. The presence of this shell adze and the discovery of apparently worked pieces of Tridacna in test-pit U21-001A are testimony to the fact that on the resource-poor atoll of Naqelevu, where there was no rock, people used locally available raw material to produce at least some of their tools. The only other worked shell is the distal part of a Conus, bearing clear polishing marks from the removal of the apex to produce an arm-ring. The waste part of the shell was cut in half, its sides polished before being drilled from the inside, probably to be used as a pendant.

ORAL TRADITIONS AND HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

During our stay in Naqelevu, and at Fatima village on Taveuni, Sepeti Matararaba recorded oral traditions about Naqelevu related by Sebasitiano Lilicama. Four of the accounts have been transcribed and published (Matararaba 1998). One of these accounts tells of the settlement of Naqelevu by a party from nearby Cikobia Island, led by one of the sons or grandsons of the founder-leader Manaoneata. Manaoneata came from Laucala in Cakaudrove and his son Iri-ni-buno settled on Cikobia. He or one of his sons decided to move to Naqelevu, where people were already living. After a stay at a place called Nabenuciwai, he attacked the village of the local inhabitants and destroyed it along with the sacred area. The losers fled to the fort of Koronaui, which they had earlier constructed, and Iri-ni-buno settled in their abandoned village.

Two stories tell of relationships with eastern Fiji. One speaks of two men from Rabi Island who came to Naqelevu to steal an old man to eat him. The other tells of Adi Filo, a wife of the Tui Cakau (Cakaudrove), who fled with her Futunan lover Samu Lelua to Naqelevu. The ties between Naqelevu and Futuna are explained in another story by the marriage of a Naqelevu woman into this West Polynesian island. The marriage prompted regular visits between the inhabitants of the two islands. The oral account explains that the settlement of Futunan families in Naqelevu led to tensions, which prompted the ancestral god Matavalu to close access to the landing place of Nukuoru (site U21-013), leading to the decline of voyaging between the two islands.

Oral traditions collected in other islands mention Naqelevu. From Cikobia, Bruce Biggs (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:9) recorded an oral account about Sau Mata-i-walu, a chief from Verata in Viti Levu, who discovered Naqelevu after having spent some time in Cikobia. His oldest
son Tui Agaifo is said to have discovered Futuna with his brothers, before the return to Naqelelevu of the youngest brother Vakaovea. Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs (1975:12-13) also mention other more recent traditions of regional contacts, along with a myth recorded by A.M. Hocart in the early 20th century, telling of the Naqelelevu tevoro (‘devil’) named “Mata-walu” who was of Futunan origin. Interestingly, in the “Native Lands Commission Records” of 1929, Matawalu is presented as being of Futunan ancestry, returning to Futuna with his son Fakawelikelea and leaving behind his sons Silivocetaki and Feke.³ In these records, Vakaovea is said to have been from Vunicau in Laucala. Coming to Naqelelevu from Cikobia, he would have taken the chiefly title after a war against Silivocetaki.

Oral traditions of Futuna confirm links with Naqelelevu. The local protective goddess Finelasi sometimes received visits from a “spirit” of Naqelelevu (Burrows 1936:47), while Matavalu is identified in Futuna as a Futunan god (Keletaona 1997:19). In the first half of the 19th century both Naqelelevu and Cikobia (called Nakele Lelevu and Tchecombia by Keletaona [1997:19]) is said to have belonged to the chief of Sigave, Samu (Petelo) Keletaona. The possible Fijian origin of Keletaona is highlighted by the comment made by a “Fijian King” (probably Tui Cakaudrove), who offered him “Tikopia [Cikobia] which your ancestors abandoned” (Burrows 1936:47). The title Tui Takau (for Tui Cakau of Cakaudrove, although Burrows did not make this identification at the time of his study) is mentioned in another oral tradition as being “the Futunan who made peace with the Fijians” (Burrows 1936:56). S. Keletaona used Naqelelevu as a coconut plantation to produce copra, as the island was “rich in coconuts” (Burrows 1936:47) (see Appendix, site U21-004). Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs report (1975:13) that in the end “Keletaona had traded (Naqelelevu) for a cargo of sawn timber with which a house was built in Futuna”.

Early European accounts about Naqelelevu are scarce. Even if Naqelelevu lies just north of the island of Nukubasaga, the first Fijian land observed by Europeans in 1643 (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:4), the area with its reefs and low sand-keys was treacherous for navigation, and it was outside the main sailing routes, so the atol attracted only passing comment in most navigation charts. Among the few exceptions are the note in a mid-19th century publication about Fiji that Naqelelevu was settled by only ten people (De Rienzi 1846:281), and the Catholic missionary de Marzan mentioning in a letter to the ethnographer A.M. Hocart in November 1911, that “à propos des pierres pour faire le vent, voici les endroits où je les vis autrefois. (…) à Naqelelevu et à Cikobia, il y a la pierre du ‘Toka Lau’ et la pierre du ‘Ceva’. On frappait sur ces pierres pour obtenir le vent désiré” (Valentin 1999).⁴
ANALYSIS

The two days spent on Naqelelevu only allowed us to have a very general first overview of the island’s prehistoric heritage. Nevertheless, several preliminary findings can be outlined. On the evidence of surface ceramic collections, the first test-pit and one radiocarbon date, it appears that Naqelelevu was settled no less than 2800-2700 years ago and that the first occupations probably centred on the sheltered west coast of the island. The fairly undiversified Naqelelevu environment did not allow for a wide variation in land occupation throughout its pre-contact history and we suspect that the permanent settlements must have been mainly restricted to the dune area for most of this time.

One of the main discoveries of the preliminary survey on Naqelelevu is the identification of a former large-scale development of horticultural features on the limestone plateau. It appears that most cultivable areas were emptied of their coral blocks and pebbles, leading to the formation of nearly continuous low field-walls of waste material on the in situ limestone outcrops. In other places, the waste appears to have been used to build heaps as protective surrounds for the plants growing within them. Oral traditions confirm this practice, recording that the fields “of Naqelelevu are found in an enclosure with limestone wall built around the garden area. When the people were working in their gardens they are always hidden inside the enclosure, but from the outside you could be easily seen” (Matararaba 1998:160).

This significant landscape modification, to our knowledge unrecorded in any other small island in the region, indicates a long-term process at one or various times during the island’s history, resulting in a radical transformation of the terrestrial environment for economic needs. The former use of two brackish water lakes (U21-005 and U21-019) as fish and turtle ponds suggests that special attention was given to the preservation of the lagoon environment and the intensification of marine production. In addition, the presence of at least two fortified areas in the central part of this tiny island implies the presence of internal conflicts and/or external incursions. Comparisons between the Nukuseve site located on limestone flats and other fort sites in the region are difficult, because most Fijian forts studied to date are located on hill-tops, ridges or in flat alluvial areas (see Best 1984, 1993; Field 2003; Parry 1977, 1987). Even though there were certainly fluctuations in the demography on Naqelelevu over time, the archaeological data suggests the existence of a rather large population during at least one part of its history. Today’s near abandonment is but the temporary end of a long and complex settlement history.

One of the major archaeological questions of the regional prehistoric chronology remains the sharp divide between Fiji and West Polynesia, especially in terms of ceramic traditions. Arising from a common origin
in the Eastern Lapita Cultural Complex (see Clark 2000, Sand 2007), the chronologies of the two regions separated at the beginning of the first millennium A.D.; pottery disappeared altogether in West Polynesia (Burley and Clark 2003), while in Fiji ceramics developed into a paddle-pressed tradition (Navatu) during the first millennium A.D., followed by incised traditions (Vunda then Ra) during the second millennium A.D. (Frost 1979).

At the core of the regional differentiation process lies the question of the regional homogeneity of the Fijian chronology, a topic still widely debated (see Burley 2003, Clark 1999, Cochrane 2004). One of the foci of our Naqelelevu project was to determine where the island (and its neighbour Cikobia) fit in the regional ceramic chronology. Because the ceramic chronology of Vanua Levu is still poorly known, the results obtained in these northeasternmost islands of the archipelago appear of major importance. Although clearly not enough excavations were carried out on Naqelelevu to build a solid ceramic chronology, the limited data, both ceramic and non-ceramic, from the test-pit and the study of the surface-collected sherds seem to fit with what is known elsewhere in Fiji. The chronology starts with ceramics developing from the Lapita tradition. These are exemplified in test-pit U21-001A mainly by open jars with brushed bodies and bowl forms. This first tradition, common to Fiji and West Polynesia, is progressively replaced by paddle-pressed pottery of wider Fijian affinity. Finally, the great majority of the surface-collected ceramic material is medium-thick and well-fired, probably dating to the last 1000 years. The ceramic types are mainly of a series of large bowl forms (dari) and of jars with necks and outcurved rim (kuro). Some sherds show a diversity of surface decoration, including incised, impressed and relief patterns. Specific decorations seem to be associated with particular shapes. All these data classify the last two thousand years of Naqelelevu’s ceramic sequence clearly within the Fijian typology and far different from the West Polynesian sequence after the first millennium of settlement.

The cultural relationship of Naqelelevu with the rest of eastern Fiji is primarily indicated by imported basaltic items, but also of significance are a series of archaeological features. Typological relations are found in burial architecture, with burial grounds mostly characterised by oval-shaped low walls of a classic last millennium B.P. Fijian type, as observed in nearby Cikobia (Sand et al. 2000, Valentin et al. 2001) and also in the rest of Fiji. The progressive building-up of the large collective chiefly burial at Sautabu (U21-018)—related in oral traditions to the Tui Naqelelevu title—as well as the ritual use of the Sautaroro site (U21-002) for religious practices that were probably related to the worship of the ancestral god Matavalu must be connected to the island’s last pre-contact period, before conversion to Christianity changed some of the cultural practices. It is worth noting that
the term *Sautabu* is used on Moala Island to characterise “large, platformed, multiple graves” for chiefs, “while lesser people must rest in small single graves” (Sahlins 1962:190). The step-profiled feature of site U21-018 fits well with this description.

One of the most fascinating findings comes from the survey of the Nasavuti cemetery (U21-017) where rectangular upright beach-rock slab burials of a type similar to those known in Futuna were discovered (Fig. 8). The location of this specific burial area, at the margin of the main Fijian-type burial ground, may signify a burial area reserved for strangers that was progressively expanded around a first grave. Such practices have been identified in other islands, e.g., ‘Uvea, and are testimony to long term settlement by a group of foreigners (Sand 1986). Whatever the local perception concerning this unique part of the Nasavuti burial ground, the typological relation with Futuna must be an indication of former relationships and influences between Naqelelevu and this neighbour island. These will need to be more precisely dated through future studies since these features present a clear archaeological example of regional influence from West Polynesia to Eastern Fiji.

Oral traditions and historical accounts tell that, at least in the first half of the 19th century, Naqelelevu was the property of a Futunan leader, Keletaona, and had a number of Futunan inhabitants (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975, Keletaona 1997:19). Moreover, beyond historical data, Biggs and Veremalumu-

![Figure 8. Close-up view of the beach-rock slab faced burials of site U21-017 at Nasavuti, interpreted as Futunan burials.](image-url)
Biggs point out that at the beginning of the 20th century the inhabitants of Naqelelevu still spoke the local Fijian language as well as Futunan. The presence of burials of unmistakable Futunan affinity in Naqelelevu provides archaeological confirmation of the oral data testifying to a major influence by Futuna in this island during the recent past. The story of “Mata-i-walu” possibly refers to older relationships between the two islands.

* * *

Our brief archaeological survey in the atoll of Naqelelevu has produced a preliminary study of the multiple connections that forged the long-term history of this remote northeast Fijian island. The discovery of an early settlement probably related to the Late Lapita phase is well in line with interpretations proposed elsewhere in Fiji and West Polynesia. These models suggest a fairly rapid occupation of the most attractive seashores of the region in the generations following first discovery (see Clark and Anderson 2001, Burley et al. 2001:102). Furthermore, the close affinities observed between the early ceramic sequence of Naqelelevu and Futuna/Uvea, as well as the discovery of a Lapita sherd originating from Udu Point at the northeastern tip of Vanua Levu in the ceramic remains of Mulifanua in Samoa (Petchey 1995), point to the possible existence of a northeastern route into West Polynesia, different or concomitant with the Lapita “voyaging corridor” from Tonga to Samoa 2850 years ago (Anderson 2001, Burley 2007, Sand 2007:207). In this regard, and as already noted (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:13), the oral traditions about “first traditional settlement”—evidently different from Lapita period settlements—imply movements of people upwind in search of land.

Unquestionably, these early cultural affinities did not continue after about 2000 B.P. From this time, the ceramics of Naqelelevu resemble those of the archipelago-wide Fijian cultural sphere for the rest of its chronology. It was probably during these next two millennia that the complex artificial horticultural field systems were developed on the limestone flats of the island. Episodic relationships with Futuna in West Polynesia appear to have occurred over the last centuries, sometimes maintained by strong family connections and chiefly lines over a few generations. Two-way voyages are repeatedly mentioned in the oral traditions, and 19th century accounts indicate that Naqelelevu and Cikobia were landfalls for castaway canoes leaving Futuna (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:82). Probably the best image of the socio-political significance of the triangular linkage between Cikobia, Naqelelevu and Futuna is represented by the story of the sons of Mata-i-walu. In the Fijian tradition, Ligalevu remained in Cikobia with Roko Suka at Mata-i-walu’s departure, Tui Aagafo settled in Futuna after having discovered the island, Vakaouvea came back to Naqelelevu and Fugalalo, the
middle son, proclaimed: “I will have the ocean, so that when we sail about on it no harm will come to any of our kin there. If anyone should come to grief it will be my business to fetch him to land” (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:48). These linkages did not lead to massive Fijian influence in the Futunan culture (Burrows 1936:231-32) or to a major Futunan input into the Fijian traditions of Cikobia and Naqelelevu, aside from the ability of the Naqelelevu people to speak the West Polynesian language for some generations (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:12).

A large amount of work remains to be done on Naqelelevu and its two neighbouring islets before a detailed cultural chronology of the atoll can be proposed. This first study of the past of a small remote northeast Fijian island has nevertheless shown the significant contribution that oral traditions and archaeology can make in disentangling the various degrees and kinds of interaction that have been at play over the longue durée in the Fiji-West Polynesian triangle during the last three millennia. The main conclusion of this first synthesis is that, even if significant interactions did occur at different points in time between Naqelelevu, Futuna and Cikobia, the cultural boundary separating Fiji from West Polynesia has been strongly defined for the last two millennia. There was no “transitional” cultural trajectory in any of these islands marking the frontier, a conclusion that has important theoretical significance for the general study of the Melanesian-Polynesian divide.

NOTES

1. The recording code appearing in previous publications was NAQ. Here we follow the coding system of the Fiji Map Index, used by the Fiji Museum for its survey catalogue.
2. A similar burial practice known from West Polynesia is called by various cognates of the term kilikili (Sand 1998:104).
3. The name Fakawellikele is doubtless referring to the title Fakavelikele in Futuna (today named Tui Agaifo). Feke, the octopus, is one of the primordial gods of Futuna (Keletaona 1997: 20, 32). The term might also relate to the title Fale Tolu of Futuna, which appears to have a Samoan connection (Burrows 1936:27, Sand 2006:9).
4. Translated by us as: “Concerning the wind-stones, here are the places where I saw them in the old times. (...) in Naqelelevu and in Cikobia, there is a stone called “Toka Lau” and a stone of “Ceva”. The stones were beaten to obtain the desired wind direction.” Toka Lau is the northeast (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:82) or northwest (Hocart 1952:191) wind, and Ceva is the southeast wind (Biggs and Veremalumu-Biggs 1975:82).
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REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

*Archaeological sites of Naqelelevu recorded during the survey*

U21-001 NAEVO

Present-day village composed of a few wooden houses and some old traditional house-mounds. Different types of pottery as well as stone artefacts were collected on the surface. This part of the island has probably always been the main settlement of Naqelelevu.
U21-002 SAUTARORO
Site located about 80m from the beach, containing a series of slabs forming stone alignments, upright stones and large shells. The shells are weathered, probably an indication of some antiquity. According to the information provided by the oral stories records, this site was the pre-Christian temple of the village. Among ceramic remains collected on the surface, paddle-impressed sherds were identified.

U21-003 LEVUKA
Site on the eastern part of the lagoon-side sand dune marked by Cordyline. Numerous potsherds were discovered on the surface, especially at the eastern end of the area. A human skull was once found in an ‘ugavule (coconut crab) hole at this location.

U21-004 VALEMATAU
Traditional plot of land planted with Cordyline and banana trees, whose beginning is marked by an engraved sign in a coconut tree. According to our guide, the mark is recent and related to the copra exploitation, whereas in older times land boundaries were marked by a pile of limestone blocks. Potsherds were collected on the surface and in an eroding profile on the seashore, showing a shallow stratigraphy.

U21-005 APEA
Saltwater lake at the back of the dune, about 250m long and 120m wide, fringed by mangrove. Eels are known to live in the lake, which was in the past used as a natural fishpond where small caught fish were put to grow. Potsherds were collected on the lake’s shore.

U21-006 MATANIBA
This three-part site is on the southeastern part of Naqelelevu, where the first horticultural coral heaps appear on the raised limestone plateau, covered by a shallow surface soil layer. The number encompasses three plots of land from west to east: Mataniba, Vakalutusiga, which is located near the coral point of the seashore, and Maisoea, which is without trees and just on the reef.

U21-007 NA TOKALAU
Area at the eastern point of the island, bearing the same name as the east wind. The landscape is characterised by low forest canopy (owing to the wind) growing on uplifted coral. Shallow dark soil areas are covered with coral gravels around artificial coral-block heaps marked by Cordyline growth, testimony to horticultural use of the site. Potsherds were collected on the surface.

U21-008 SAMASI
Land parcel towards the north of the island, composed of the same type of landscape as the previous sites. A series of coral-block heaps appears to mark former horticultural features, today planted with Cordyline and Pandanus. One of the heaps is 6m long, 5m wide and 25cm high. Some of the potsherds collected on the surface are bowl-rims with a large decorated lip.
U21-009 FAREFENO
Land parcel towards the north containing old banana tree plantations. Coral-block heaps are still present, some reaching more than 50cm high.

U21-010 NUKUSEVE
Plot on uplifted coral with little soil towards the inner part of the island, covered by dry low vegetation and forest trees. Where soil is present, coral-block heaps are numerous and regularly laid, some reaching more than 80cm high, with Cordyline growth. The best defined have a rectangular shape and are flat, measuring sometimes 5m long and 25-30cm high. Some potsherds were collected on the surface of this site.

U21-011 NUKUSEVE well
At the boundary of the sterile uplifted coral area, a deep natural fault reaching 9m in total depth formed in the limestone and closed at its southern end by an artificial wall. Its northern end lowers in steps to a rounded flat bottom whose hollowed centre contains brackish water resurgence, tied to the tides. The rounded shape of this water source might indicate a man-made feature, although this has not been demonstrated with certainty.

U21-012 NUKUSEVE fort
Traditional fort of the eastern part of Naqelelevu’s limestone plateau, on a natural point overlooking a fault. Two successive walls protect the southern entrance, the inner side of the point preserving a series of raised artificial platforms. A large amount of pottery was collected on the surface. See text for detailed description.

U21-013 NUKORU
Land plot located along the trail following the highest part of the limestone plateau towards the east, before its down-slope towards the sea. The name of the land starts at the beginning of the down-slope. Among the cultivable soil areas of the site was identified a small coral-block enclosure, about 150cm long. At the back of the seashore is a sand dune supporting old coconut trees, some of them still bearing artificial holes on their trunks to collect rain water. One of the last hurricanes had eroded the sand beach to a height of up to 2m in some places, the former sand level being clearly visible on the limestone outcrops. This place is connected to an oral tradition linking Naqelelevu and Futuna.

U21-014 DAKO
Inland site located on the limestone flat in the central part of the island up to Lake Waicinaci, containing numerous artificial features of horticultural fields marked by multiple coral-stone heaps and low walls. These form a nearly continuous pattern around natural limestone outcrops. Some features appear more regularly laid-out, forming neatly arranged rectangles. The presence of useful planted trees as well as symbolic trees (Banyan) were recorded; shells and a few ceramic sherds were collected.
U21-015 WAICINACI
Natural tidal lake located in the limestone plateau on the western part of Naqelelevu, laying in a roughly north-south direction. A rockshelter is said to be located at the southern end of the lake and can be reached by swimming. Artificial wall arrangements continue on the western side of the lake, with some features still fairly well preserved. The most western part of the limestone plateau, before the seashore, appears to have been too rocky to allow for planting, so the field arrangements stop before reaching the northwestern back-beach of the island.

U21-016 NARAKAVI
Seashore area and beginning of the dune forming the western corner of Naqelelevu, located nearly in front of Tainibeka islet and Tauraria, the large islet known as a nesting place for fruit bats. Potsherds, as well as a shell ornament, were collected on the surface of the site. The area is a former cultivation planted with banana trees, breadfruit trees and large Cordylines.

U21-017 NASAVUTI
Traditional cemetery located at the back of the western sand dune, comprising two main types of burials. Most are of oval shape, surrounded by coral blocks and oriented east-west. In the eastern part of the site five rectangular enclosures defined by beach-rock cut slabs placed vertically in the ground are very different from the others. The arrangements of this specific area of the cemetery are reminiscent of traditional burial practices in Futuna.

U21-018 SAUTABU
Collective burial ground of the Tui Naqelelevu title, composed of a mound organised in successive steps, faced by large limestone blocks and slabs. Individual burials are visible on the flattened top of the mound. Imported basalt pebbles placed on graves were part of the funerary ritual. No burial seems to have occurred in this site since Christian times.

U21-019 DRANO
Long and narrow saltwater lake with mangrove growing on its margins. The natural formation sits at the boundary between the dune area and the uplifted limestone plateau. Turtles and juvenile fish were raised to proper size in the lake in the old times.