CHAPTER FOUR

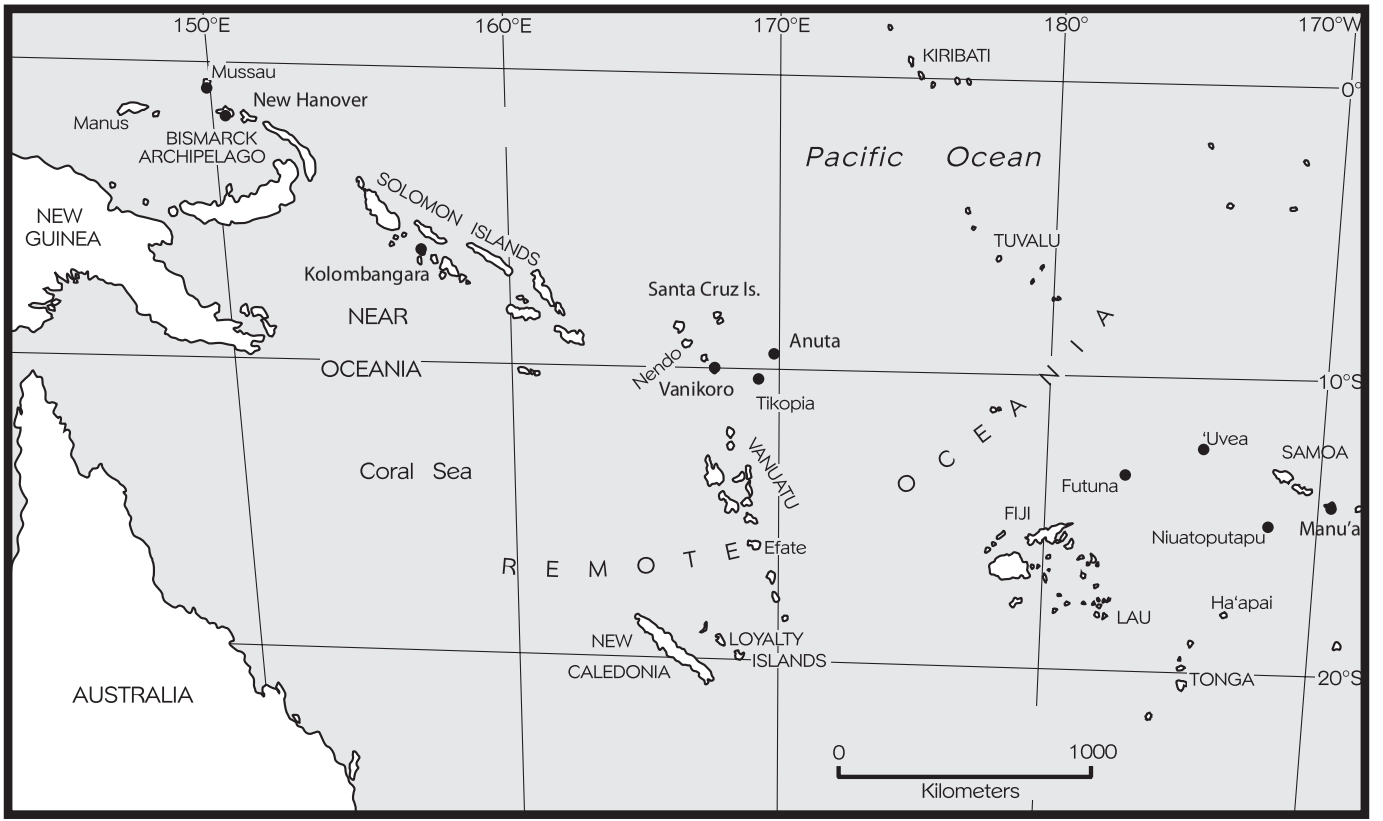
The Smallest Polynesian Island (Kolombangara and Anuta, 1971)

Honiara, the dusty capital of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate on the leeward coast of Guadalcanal, had been the infamous scene of bloody battles between the Imperial Japanese Army and the U.S. Marines in the early days of World War II. Henderson Field, the Japanese fighter airstrip taken at great cost by the American forces, was now the Solomon Islands' international airport. Paul Rosendahl and I arrived there on September 18, 1971, joining Doug Yen who had flown down a week earlier.

Roger Green had shown that the immediate homeland of the Polynesians was in Tonga and Samoa, and in nearby Fiji. But where had their ancestors come from? Answering this question was a major goal of the Bishop Museum's new Southeast Solomon Islands Culture History Project.[1] The obvious place to begin searching was in the cluster of small islands that make up the Santa Cruz Islands, at the juncture of the southeastern Solomons and northern Vanuatu, directly west of the Fiji-Tonga-Samoa triangle (Map 2). Green knew that some of the languages spoken by islanders in the region were closely related to Polynesian, implying a common ancestor. But almost nothing was known of the archaeology of the Santa Cruz group—it was *terra incognita.*

Clues to the earliest Polynesian migrations were thought to lie with sites containing a distinctive kind of pottery, called Lapita. On a hunch, Green had reconnoitered Nendö and the Reef Islands in the Santa Cruz group the previous year (1970). His discovery of several Lapita sites confirmed that he was indeed on the trail of the Polynesian ancestors. But the project that Green and Yen had designed was not just limited to seeking early sites with Lapita pottery. A second focus was on the ways in which island cultures had adapted to the varied environments of the Solomon Islands. Doug Yen was especially interested in the region's traditional agricultural systems. Because we had worked with him on Mākaha Valley's agricultural terraces, Yen was keen to have Rosendahl and me join him in a study of agricultural prehistory in the Solomons.

Our expedition would take us to two distant parts of the Solomon Islands. First, we would voyage to Kolombangara Island in the New Georgia group, in the



Map 2. The Western Pacific. Black dots indicate islands where the author conducted archaeological research.

Western Solomons, where ancient stone-faced irrigation terraces had been reported. Yen hoped these ruins might yield clues to the history of irrigated agriculture in the Pacific. Resupplying in Honiara, we would then sail on a much longer voyage to the remote Santa Cruz archipelago, where Green had made his Lapita finds. Our destination was the most isolated outpost in the entire Solomons: Anuta Island.

The night before our departure for Kolombangara, Yen took us to the Mendaña Hotel for a final "civilized" meal. From the hotel's terrace—where British planters and their wives came for dinner on the weekends—the peaks of Nggela were backlit by the sunset's multihued rays. Some said this view had inspired James Michener's fabled Bali Hai in his *Tales of the South Pacific*.[2] It was not hard for a young man to conjure up visions of Bloody Mary and her beautiful daughter Liat on that island across the sound.

The trip to New Georgia took two days by copra boat, slowly threading our way through the reefs and lagoons that make this part of the Western Solomons so distinctive. At Rendova Island we docked at a ramshackle wharf to drop off a load of seed coconuts. After twenty-four hours on deck we had accumulated a sticky, smelly veneer of sweat and salt spray, mingled with diesel exhaust. The boatswain told us that a small stream was just a short walk up the path. We eagerly headed inland, anticipating a refreshing bath. No sooner were we out of sight of the boat than a ruddy-faced, profusely sweating Englishman came striding toward us, his cane aimed at us like a shotgun barrel. Wearing shorts, shoes with knee socks, and a tattered and stained dress shirt, he was struggling to "maintain standards" on "his" island.

"Private property!" shouted the florid-faced planter. "Back to the boat! Private property!" I waited to see if Yen would challenge this aging holdout of the British Empire. Yen hesitated, then turned; we followed him back to the wharf. Colonial authority had won the day, even if the stakes were nothing more than preventing a handful of unwashed scientists from bathing in the planter's stream.

The boat deposited us at Gizo, administrative center of the New Georgia group of islands. From Gizo we hired a launch to take us to Kolombangara. As we approached the somber-looking island, its massive volcanic cone looming up into the clouds, I was struck by how different this landscape was from my home islands of Hawai'i. Ghatere Village proved to be a motley cluster of thatched huts elevated on poles, just inland of a mangrove swamp. Yen negotiated with the village headman to rent a one-room thatched hut with sago leaf walls. There was no running water; we would cook on a Primus camp stove. The village toilet was a slippery plank extending out into the mangroves.

As soon as we turned off the kerosene pressure lamp that first night, bedding down in our sleeping bags on the split bamboo floor, the thatch overhead came alive with the sound of scurrying feet. The beam of my flashlight caught not just one or two but literally a dozen or more large black rats peering down from the rafters. Soon they were gnawing at our bags of rice and other supplies. Yen—who has a passionate hatred of rats—grabbed a wooden stick and began chasing the fearless creatures around the hut. None of us got much sleep that night. In the morning, a small crowd assembled to gawk at the bodies of dead rats littering the ground outside the hut, victims of Yen's club.

The Ghatere people conversed among themselves in their indigenous Nduke language, but everyone also spoke the Solomon Islands dialect of pidgin English (also known as Neo-Melanesian). Although much pidgin vocabulary consists of English words, the grammatical structure is that of the Oceanic languages. I found pidgin expressions often amusing and easy to learn, rapidly gaining fluency in this lingua franca, which precariously unites a country with dozens of different languages into a single nation-state.

Kolombangara Island, an extinct strato-volcano, is a little less than ten miles across with a central peak majestically rising 5,810 feet above the sea. Ghatere Village lay at the mouth of the Ndughore Valley, alongside a deeply incised, branching stream whose headwaters descend along the southwestern slopes of Mt. Veve. Traditionally, the Ghatere people resided in fortified hamlets on ridgetops, cultivating taro in irrigated fields in the steep valleys. Prior to "pacification" by the famous Charles M. Woodford of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in the late nineteenth century, the New Georgia islanders had participated in an elaborate system of raiding and head-hunting, shunning the coast where they risked being taken captive by raiding parties from Rendova or the Marovo Lagoon.[3]

With several Ghatere men as our guides, we followed the Ndughore Stream inland, leaving the coastal plain and gardens behind. In the dense jungle, Yen pointed out towering *Metroxylon* or sago palms whose starchy pith can be extracted to make a kind of flour. An hour after leaving Ghatere, we arrived at a place called Aghara. Here, on a narrow stream terrace were ranks of stone-faced terraces where the fathers and grandfathers of our guides had once cultivated their taro crops.

We made our bush camp at Aghara. While Rosendahl and I set up our canvas tent, the Ghatere men cut bamboo poles and sago leaves to construct a sturdy lean-to. (Yen returned every night to the village, braving the rats). Over the next several days as the rain fell incessantly, we watched the green mold creep higher and higher up the sodden canvas. After several days we abandoned the tent to its inevitable fate, joining our workers in the comfortable lean-to, with its warming fire and smoke that kept the malaria-ridden mosquitoes at bay.

With the help of the Ghatere men, Rosendahl and I mapped the Aghara ruins. Upstream, a more extensive complex called Ageglai displayed skillfully constructed terraces with stone-lined irrigation canals of which a Western engineer would have been proud. We trenched through the terraces, obtaining charcoal for radiocarbon dating. It was taxing work, because the tropical rains rarely let up. At day's end we would slog down to the camp, shedding mud-encrusted clothes to plunge into the icy stream for a bath. Dinner consisted of a few tins of bully beef or mackerel served over a pot of rice.

As we worked on the ancient irrigation terraces, our workmen told us about the fortified hamlets where their ancestors had once resided, high on the ridges overlooking the valley, in places with exotic names such as Patusugha, Nuskambu, Heriana, Ivivu, and Vavalondu. To understand the settlement pattern of Kolombangara prior to pacification, we would need to explore those sites. Finishing up our work at Aghara and Ageglai, we made plans to visit the ridgetop forts.

There were no trails up to these long abandoned hamlets, but a few of the older men knew how to find them. At Patusugha, on a ridge above Aghara, we found the stone outlines of former houses; test excavations turned up pig bones and shellfish, along with a few glass trade beads. A crypt-like mortuary shrine had been constructed of tabular rock slabs with a heavy capstone weighing perhaps 150 pounds. When the men managed to lift the capstone, the contents of the crypt were revealed: four pairs of human skulls and mandibles, accompanied by an assortment of shell artifacts. There were large rings of *Tridacna* shell, smaller cone shell rings, and elaborate filigree objects, part of a complex system of exchanges between people of the New Georgia Islands. After photographing the objects, we returned everything to the crypt and replaced the capstone.

The most remote site was Ivivu, an exhausting five-hour climb from Ghatere Village up steep, jungle-cloaked ridges. I still recall the spectacular early morning view from our camp on this ridgetop redoubt, swirling mist partially obscuring the Ndughore Valley below us. From Ivivu we were able to reach Hena, a ritual complex whose stone platforms were ornamented with striking anthropomorphic carvings (Fig. 4.1).

Our month-long sojourn on Kolombangara gave us a good idea of the traditional settlement pattern before European pacification. But the glass beads, scraps of iron, fragments of clay pipes, and other trade items told us that these sites dated only to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These sites would not tell us the deeper history of Solomon Islands agriculture and settlement; they would not take us back to the period of the Lapita people. We hoped to have better luck on far-off Anuta.

On October 18 we said goodbye to our Ghatere Village friends, the launch returning us to Gizo. After a welcome hot shower and some cold beers in the little

Figure 4.1. A face motif carved into one of the stone blocks on the facade of a platform at the ritual site of Hena in the interior of Kolombangara Island.

Gizo motel, followed by a good night's sleep on a real bed, we flew by small plane back to Henderson Field the next morning. The *M. V. Belama* was scheduled to sail for the Eastern Outer Islands Province on October 22 and we had to be on board her then.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the *M. V. Belama* had served as the flagship of the High Commissioner for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. In 1971, she was the main vessel used by the British Protectorate to maintain contact with the far-flung islands of the Eastern Outer Islands Province. Every few months the *Belama* would make the long voyage from Honiara, southeastward past San Cristobal and tiny Santa Ana, reaching Santa Cruz Island (Nendö) after three days at sea. There she would pick up the district commissioner to proceed "on tour" to Utupua, Vanikoro, the Reef Islands, Taumako, Tikopia, and, finally, Anuta. Though showing her age, the white-hulled *Belama* was shipshape and run with impeccable discipline by her Kiribati captain.

We were fortunate to have secured a cabin with berths. Most of the Solomon Islanders slept on deck alongside trussed-up pigs and cackling chickens. At four bells (6:00 a.m.) a steward promptly woke us with steaming mugs of strong English tea. We took lunch and dinner in the officer's mess with the captain, district commissioner, and protectorate officials. Protocol was strict but not always obvious to a couple of American graduate students. One afternoon Rosendahl settled down with a book in a comfortable teak deck chair on the fantail. Nothing was said at the moment, but later Yen was reprimanded by the First Officer who informed him that it was a breach of protocol for anyone to sit in the district commissioner's special chair!

After stops at the Reef Islands (where we visited Green's newly found RL-2 Lapita site), Taumako, and Tikopia, the *Belama* dropped anchor off Anuta at dawn on October 30, 1971. Gathered at the rail, we gazed excitedly at the island that would be our home for the next several months. Although we knew that Anuta was small (the land area is 0.4 of a square kilometer, or roughly 0.15 of a square mile), the visual impact of seeing the tiny island in the tropical morning light was startling. To the north a low volcanic hill rose to a height of eighty meters, coconut palms dotting the summit. In the lee of this hill, the low-lying sandy plain was cloaked in vegetation. Smoke wafting up from cookhouses signaled the presence of a village behind the screen of trees.

Before leaving Honolulu, I had scoured the Bishop Museum Library for information about Anuta, one of eighteen "Polynesian Outliers" in the western Pacific, islands whose people speak Polynesian languages but are located outside of the main Polynesian triangle.[4] The Templeton Crocker Expedition had called at Anuta for a single day in 1933, and British anthropologist Raymond Firth had visited for a day in 1952, providing the sum total of knowledge about the island and its people.[5]

Anuta was rarely visited. The Melanesian Mission sent its ship, the *M. V. Southern Cross,* there once a year so the touring priest could baptize newborns, marry couples, and perform Holy Communion. The *Belama* called perhaps twice a year, weather permitting. Neither of these ships stayed more than a few hours. There was no priest, no government representative, no trader, or commercial operation of any kind on the island. Colonialism and capitalism had bypassed the place.

A few months prior to our arrival, the protectorate had placed a shortwave radio on Anuta, powered by a hand-cranked generator. When conditions were good one could contact the Eastern Outer Islands administration on Nendö Island. The Anutan people had been told that a party of scientists would be arriving. It would be the first time since World War II that any Westerners had spent more than a day on the island.

We descended the *Belama*'s rope ladder into the launch. It was an unusually calm day so the boatswain easily negotiated the ridiculously narrow pass through the fringing reef. As the boat approached the beach I was surprised to see just two men. Each wore a tapa loincloth topped by a lava-lava of Western trade cloth; their bare torsos exhibited classic Polynesian tattoo designs. Speaking pidgin English, they introduced themselves as Pu Paone, a lineage elder, and Pu Tokerau, younger brother of the ranking chief. They told us that the island's chiefs awaited us inland. Pu Paone grasped my hand by the wrist, leading me up the steep beach.

Following a path shaded by towering *tamanu* trees, we emerged at a sandy plaza flanked by a cluster of thatched houses. Pu Paone led us to the base of a gnarled *Barringtonia* tree. To our left several old men, their bare chests intricately tattooed, sat cross-legged on *tapakau* mats. To the right sat a crowd of men, women, and children, all clad in barkcloth, the women bare-breasted with skirts, the men in loincloths. Everyone was silent; even the children were hushed.

Then, from behind one of the houses, a remarkable procession appeared. Two well-built, middle-aged men staggered forward, bearing on their shoulders a robust individual with a bushy head of wiry hair. All three wore fine mats over their loincloths, their chests and shoulders glistening with yellowish-red *renga,* turmeric dye, a sacred pigment in Polynesia. The two *maru* (as I later learned they were called) set the Ariki i Mua or first-ranked chief (also known as Tui Anuta) gently down on a *tapakau* mat directly across the plaza from us. Then a second set of *maru* appeared bearing a somewhat older man with a full chest tattoo, similarly anointed in turmeric. This was the Ariki i Muri, the "chief behind" or second ranked of the island's hereditary leaders (Fig. 4.2). I remember thinking to myself, "This is like a scene out of Captain Cook's voyages."

Pu Paone muttered that I should watch closely what he was going to do and then follow suit. Releasing his grasp on my wrist, Pu Paone got down on all fours and crawled across the sandy plaza toward the two chiefs, with the four *maru* standing guard behind them. Pu Paone kept his head low as he approached Tui Anuta. I recognized this as a gesture of respect, given Polynesian concepts about the sanctity of the head. I saw Tui Anuta grasp Pu Paone and pull him up, then pass him to the second chief. Seating himself a short distance from the chiefs, Pu Paone signaled that it was my turn.

Dropping to my knees, I did the same all-fours crawl across the sandy plaza to the waiting *ariki,* keeping my head bowed as I approached Tui Anuta. The burly chief grasped my shoulders, pulling me up; we pressed noses and gazed into each other's eyes. This was the classic Polynesian greeting of *ongi* (known as *honi* in Hawaiian). Tui Anuta then passed me to the Ariki i Muri, who likewise pressed

Figure 4.2. The two chiefs of Anuta in 1971. The Ariki i Mua, also known as the Tui Anuta, stands on the right, smoking his pipe. The Ariki i Muri, on the left, has a full chest tattoo.

his nose to mine. I then crawled over to Pu Paone who seemed pleased that I had correctly followed the protocol.

After everyone had gone through this ritual greeting, we were escorted into Tui Anuta's house. Built low to the ground, Anutan houses look like they have a thatched roof surmounting low walls of sago leaf. These "walls" are actually blinds, which can be propped open by sticks during the day to let in light and air. The roof is supported by four stout timber posts lashed with coconut sennit to an intricate framework of beams and rafters.

Speaking in pidgin, Yen described our project to the two *ariki.* Pu Tokerau, the younger brother of Tui Anuta, translated. Yen told them that we had brought our own food so as not to be a burden on the island. When this was translated, Tui Anuta broke out in a broad grin and shook his head. Pu Tokerau told us that when the chiefs had received the radio message that our group would be arriving, they had convened a council of elders. Polynesian hospitality dictated that the islanders would feed us. Every evening, it would be the responsibility of one of the *patongia* or households (there are nineteen of these) to host us. Yen protested, reiterating that we did not wish to be a drain on the island's food supplies. The *ariki* would have none of it.

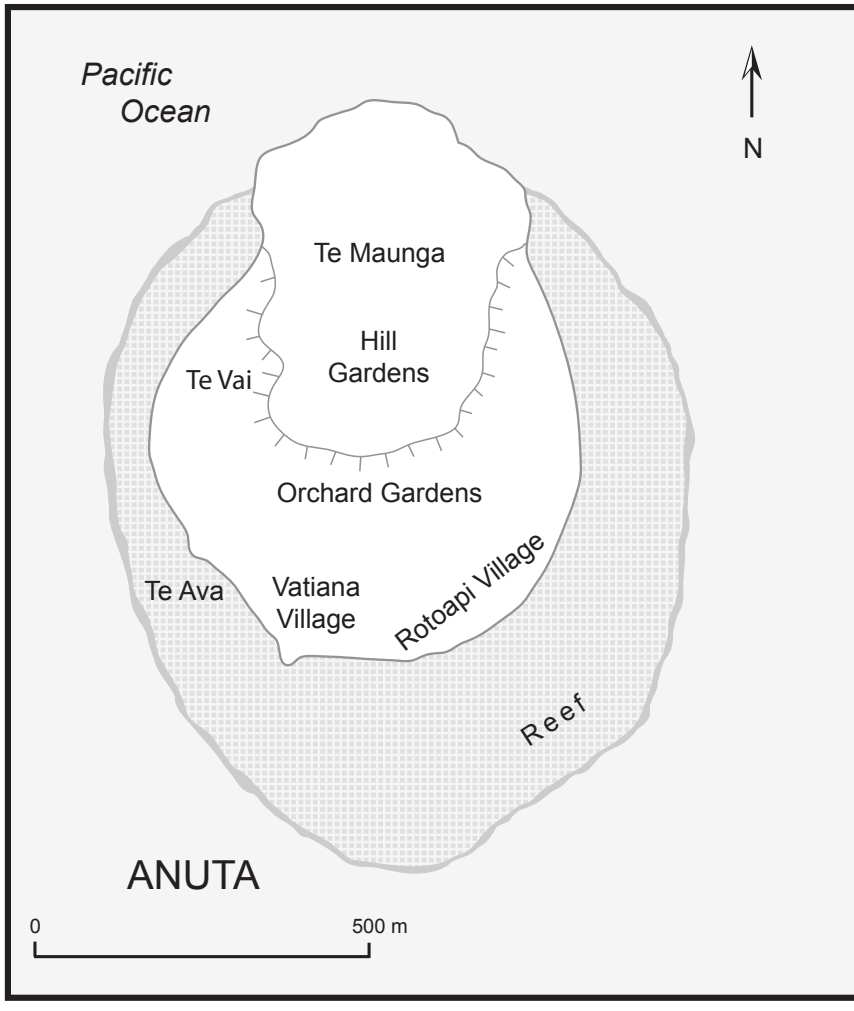
As it turned out, this was a wonderful arrangement. Being guests of a different *patongia* every night meant that we got to know and socialize with everyone. Each evening we were escorted to a different house, taking bags of rice, packages of biscuits, and tins of beef or fish, giving these as gifts in exchange for the taro puddings, breadfruit, manioc, and fish prepared by our hosts. The Anutans were happy to indulge in the canned foods that for them were a special treat. After the meal we would all chew the mildly narcotic betel nut, chatting and socializing long into the evening.

Two small thatched houses not far from the plaza, normally occupied by a few bachelors, were cleared out for our use. By midday our gear and supplies had been offloaded from the *Belama* and carried up the beach by many willing hands. Long before the sun set we watched the *Belama* steam away. It began to sink in that we were isolated on one of the most remote islands of the South Pacific. The antiquated hand-cranked radio would be our only means of contact with the outside world. It was just the three of us and precisely 177 Anutans.

For a few days we explored our tiny island home, familiarizing ourselves with the layout of the two contiguous villages, Vatiana, where Tui Anuta resided, and Rotoapi (Map 3). With our hosts, we bathed at the spring (Te Vai), the island's only source of freshwater. Paths led inland to the cookhouses and then up the steep slope to the gardens cloaking the hill, Te Maunga (Polynesian for "mountain"). Standing on the highest point of Te Maunga, endless ocean extended to the horizon in every direction.

Yen was keen to begin studying the island's agricultural system, the most traditional he had ever witnessed. The leeward, sandy plain was cloaked in a random riot of coconut, breadfruit, sago palms, *Areca* (betel) palms, *Antiaris* trees that provided barkcloth, and an understory of *Cyrtosperma* swamp taro and yams. In contrast, the volcanic hill was precisely laid out in a reticulate grid of dryland taro and manioc gardens, interspersed with bananas and yams. This closely managed and highly productive system supported the tiny island's dense population.

Yen realized that Anuta presented a unique opportunity to observe the functioning of a traditional Polynesian agricultural system. Other islands had once had such systems, but virtually everywhere else they had succumbed to the inroads of colonialism, replaced by cash-cropping and commercial plantations. To properly record the Anutan agricultural system, Yen needed detailed spatial data on how much land was in tree crops and how much in short-fallow rotation of taro and manioc. But there was no map of the island, not even the most basic outline. Today



Map 3. Anuta Island, with localities mentioned in the text.

with GPS technology and Google Earth imagery, it would be a trivial task to construct such a map. In 1971, those technologies were decades in the future.

Aware of my surveying skills, Yen asked me to map the island. I had brought a plane table and alidade along, but I had never mapped an *entire* island before—even if it was a small one. Starting on the low-lying plain, I began mapping the

villages. I numbered every house and cookhouse, along with the house names and the number of occupants, resulting in a census that would be useful for Yen's study. I also plotted in the canoes, *vaka,* pulled up between the houses and protected with woven coconut fronds. Each *vaka,* I discovered, had a proper name, as did the dwelling houses.

The Anutans were fascinated by the mapping. They were even more surprised when I let them look through the alidade's eyepiece, and they saw that the world was upside down! (The Gurley instrument I used was not "right reading.") There were always people standing around as I worked away at the plane table, eager to tell me the name of this or that house or canoe, how many people lived in that *patongia,* and so on. My notebook from those first weeks in November 1971 also contains long lists of Anutan words and phrases; I was rapidly acquiring an extensive Polynesian vocabulary.

Up on Te Maunga, I mapped every one of the 242 garden plots, recording which *patongia* owned each plot. Yen later added data on the crops. Yen spent a lot of time with Pu Notau and his wife Nau Notau[6] and their children, learning about the techniques of Anutan gardening. They showed him how they prepared their fields and planted taro and yams, weeding and tending the plants as they matured. Yen carefully recorded the hours that the Notau family spent in various kinds of agricultural activities.

Meanwhile, we were fitting into the rhythm of village life. Before long we knew almost everyone on the island by name. They called us "Mr. Heni," "Mr. Paul," and "Mr. Pat." We tried to get them to drop the honorific "Mr.," but they refused, probably because in their own language they insist on using the polite honorifics "Pu" and "Nau" before the proper names of married men and women.

Being so remote and isolated, Anuta was entirely self-sufficient. Although some people had a little Western cloth, mostly they still wore *mami* barkcloth beaten out by the women from *Antiaris* bark grown in the island's orchards (Fig. 4.3). The women spent much time weaving *Pandanus*, sleeping mats, and coconut frond floor mats. Men worked at carving wooden food bowls or repairing the canoes so essential for fishing. Everyday on Anuta we witnessed ancient Polynesian crafts and activities that had long since disappeared from most other Polynesian islands.

Some evenings, especially when there was a moon, everyone gathered in Rotoapi Village for communal dancing. There was excitement in the air when a dance was to be held. People plucked the fragment white blossoms of the *tiare* (*Gardenia taitensis*) growing near the houses, putting them into their pierced ear lobes and stringing them into garlands and headbands. They gave us flower garlands to wear as well. Anutan night dancing is performed in parallel rows of men and women (children join in as well), strutting back and forth while swinging one's

Figure 4.3. An Anutan woman and her daughter beating out strips of *mami* barkcloth, using wooden mallets against a hardwood anvil.

arms to the deep beat of wooden sticks striking an old canoe plank. Everyone chants the words to well-known songs, and the beat grows increasingly frenetic until the final crescendo is reached.

Sometimes, after we had returned from our evening meal or the dancing, the three of us would sit by the glow of our kerosene pressure lamp and talk. We were aware that we were experiencing one of the last truly traditional cultures in the Pacific. Of course, some Anutans such as Pu Paone and Pu Tokerau had spent time in the main Solomon Islands; they had learned pidgin English and experienced life outside of their little island. But on tiny Anuta daily life continued as it had for countless generations. It was as though we had entered a time machine, transported back to a lifestyle that had long since vanished from almost every other Polynesian island.

By mid-November I had completed the island map, leaving Rosendahl and me free to begin archaeological work. When had people first discovered and settled Anuta? Were those first settlers Polynesians, direct ancestors of the present population? Or had they been related to some other, possibly Melanesian, cultural group? Would we find evidence of Lapita pottery? We wanted to answer these and many other questions.

The Anutans have their own oral history, passed down from generation to generation. Several of the elders told us a tradition about the first people to inhabit the island, the Apukere or "Earthsprung" people.[7] The story goes like this:

> The Apukere were the original inhabitants of Anuta, with two chiefs, Ariki Apao and Ariki a Pakakana. Then Pu Ariki, a chief of nearby Tikopia Island, came to visit. The two chiefs of Anuta argued with Pu Ariki about who possessed the greatest *mana,* spritual power. The Anuta chiefs boasted that they never suffered from cyclones or drought. Pu Ariki told them he would return to Tikopia, and they would then feel the strength of his *mana.* After he left a fearful cyclone lashed Anuta, uprooting the trees; storm surges broke over the lowlands. Then months of drought followed. Their crops destroyed, the Anutans were starving and dying of thirst.
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> Pu Ariki sailed back to Anuta and found the Ariki Apao drawing his last breath. The land reeked with the stench of corpses. Pu Ariki buried the bodies, saying: "Sleep then in this land." He blocked the spring (Te Vai) with a stone. Pu Ariki planned to return later and give the island to one of his sons.
>
> Some time later Pu Ariki returned to Anuta. To his surprise he found people living there, people who had come from Tonga and from 'Uvea. When Pu Ariki confronted the newcomers, they claimed that they were the true people of the island, that their ancestors had always lived there. "If that is so, show me the water source," Pu Ariki challenged them. They showed him holes they had dug in the sand to get brackish water to drink. Pu Ariki then took them to Te Vai. Removing the stone, he showed them the true spring of sweet water. The newcomers from Tonga and 'Uvea were forced to acknowledge Pu Ariki's primacy in the land.

While fascinating, there was no way to tell if this tradition memorialized fragments of a "real" history or whether it was simply a kind of mythic charter. Nonetheless, the importance given to cyclones and drought—two disasters that the Anutans greatly fear—was noteworthy. The tradition also hinted that some of their ancestors had come from such Polynesian islands as Tonga, 'Uvea, and perhaps Samoa.

The elders showed us Pare Ariki ("Chiefly House"), near the eastern end of Rotoapi Village, which had been the island's principal *marae* or ritual center in pre-Christian times. The rectangular stone gravesites of nineteen deceased *ariki* lay just inland of an alignment of four god-stones where kava had been offered to the ancestors. The elders also took us to Tu Ariki, where a sacred house had been dedicated to the gods Rapu and Tukureo; to Te Pae, a former *marae*; to Paito

Karae, a *marae* where turtle and porpoise sacrifices were once made; and to Nuanga, a place near the spring where sacred turmeric dye had been extracted. These sites were fascinating, but none was likely to date back more than a couple of centuries.

The leeward, sandy plain was the most likely place to search for buried archaeological deposits. We started digging test pits, searching for traces of ancient occupation. After initial disappointments, we decided to test a location inland of Rotoapi Village, where we had found many *Tridacna* and *Cassis* shell adzes on the surface.

The first hint that we had hit an important site came in Test Pit 27, where about one meter below the surface we found the first reddish-brown earthenware sherds. Pottery was unknown to the Anutans, and our workers were surprised to see these potsherds. It seemed likely that we were into a layer with considerable antiquity. When we opened up the adjacent square to go deeper, a dark gray, charcoal-rich layer appeared a meter and a half below the surface. Many potsherds now turned up in the sifting screens as well as one-piece *Turbo*-shell fishhooks, coral and sea-urchin spine abraders that had been used to make the hooks, adzes and chisels of *Tridacna* shell, and ornaments of cone shell, *Spondylus* shell, and *Trochus* shell. We expanded the excavation, recovering more than one thousand artifacts from ten square meters.

The Anuta potsherds lacked the dentate-stamped decoration that Roger Green had found on the Lapita pottery in the Santa Cruz Islands. Mostly plain with a reddish-brown slip, only a few sherds had incised lines or other simple decoration. But the techniques of manufacture and the vessel forms showed undoubted similarities with Lapita. Clearly, the deeply buried pottery and other artifacts represented an ancient period in Anuta's past. Just how ancient we would discover when we later received radiocarbon dates from charcoal samples within the deeply buried midden. Three samples returned ages of 2,590 ± 90, 2,616 ± 90, and 2,830 ± 90 years before present (BP). The oldest of these indicated that the first people on Anuta arrived between about 1165 and 765 BC, not long after Lapita people had settled Roger Green's sites in the Reef Islands.

It turned out that some version of the Anutan origin story was correct. There had indeed been an original population—probably people descended from or related to Lapita pottery makers—who settled on the island in the early first millennium BC. After several centuries, a major cyclone devastated the island, resulting in a thick accumulation of beach sand, burying the original midden site. Anuta was then uninhabited for a long period, although it was perhaps periodically visited by people from Tikopia. Eventually, the island was resettled by Polynesian voyagers who came from several different islands to the east, especially Tonga and 'Uvea, at some time in the second millennium AD.[8]

Figure 4.4. The Tui Anuta with his outrigger canoe. The hull is carved from a single *tamanu* log with washstrakes added to increase the free board. These canoes are essential in allowing the Anutuans to fish the rich banks surrounding the island.

Living on Anuta was like stepping back in time. True, people used metal fishhooks, wore scraps of trade cloth, and lit their houses with kerosene wick lamps. But they still manufactured and mostly wore barkcloth, made their houses in the traditional way, fished on the reef with nets and spears, and went out to sea in sturdy canoes hewn from *tamanu* logs (Fig. 4.4). Their society was organized by rules of kinship, while their political leaders were hereditary chiefs. Although they had converted to Christianity about fifty years earlier, a few of the old men had participated in the pagan rites as young men. Rather than reading about Polynesian life in the musty stacks of the Bishop Museum's Library, on Anuta I was experiencing a vibrant Polynesian culture.

The tattoos gracing the bodies of the adult men and women fascinated me. Tattooing had once been widespread throughout Polynesia; indeed, the English word "tattoo" is borrowed from the Tahitian *tatau,* picked up by British sailors in the late eighteenth century. On most Polynesian islands, missionaries suppressed the practice. On Anuta, the Melanesian Mission priest forbade tattooing about two decades before we arrived. Thus none of the young people were tattooed, whereas all of the mature adults exhibited the blue-gray geometric patterns on their chests, backs, and arms. Only a few of the higher ranking men,

such as the Ariki i Muri, had a full set of chest tattoos. I drew sketches of these designs in my notebook, recording the names of the motifs.

Toward the end of November Tui Anuta made a surprising proposition: Why didn't the three of us get tattooed? We replied that, it having been forbidden by the church, we thought the art was now lost. "No," replied the chief. "Pu Rangovaru and Pu Akonima are tattoo experts. They have their bone needles. They will tattoo you if you like." Yen, Rosendahl, and I decided that we would each be tattooed on our upper arms with traditional Anutan motifs.

On the appointed morning Pu Rangovaru arrived with a small, tattered coconut leaf basket holding four different needles, a few bamboo tubes containing black soot from burned *tamanu* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) nuts, and a coconut half-shell in which the soot was mixed with water to prepare the ink. The needles, carved from frigate bird wing bones, had a comb-like business end with three or four sharp points, mounted perpendicularly to a wooden shaft and lashed with fine cord. Pu Rangovaru carved out two small mallets from green coconut fronds, each about six inches long. They would be used to drive the needles into the flesh, by sharply tapping on the wooden shaft.

After choosing the motifs that each of us would have indelibly inscribed into our flesh, Pu Rangovaru and Pu Akonima set to work (Fig. 4.5). To receive my tattoos, I lay on my side on the coconut-frond floor mats with my arm cocked and held tightly to my chest. Sitting cross-legged facing me, Pu Akonima drew out the design using a piece of coconut midrib dipped in the black ink. Holding the needle's shaft in his left hand, he positioned the teeth just above the mark then with a deft flick of his right wrist brought the mallet down crisply. Four sharp teeth, previously dipped into the ink, penetrated my skin, carrying the pigment down into the subcutaneous layer. The process was repeated, over and over, until the line became continuous and distinct. The pain of the needle was less than I had anticipated, probably because my endorphins quickly suppressed the nerve signals. Nonetheless, I began to feel a dull ache across my upper arm.

The entire process took several hours. While this was going on Tui Anuta and the other elders kept up a cheerful banter. When all was finished, we emerged out into the sunlight to admire our new body ornamentation. We had not anticipated that this would be just the first step in a two-day process of formally bringing us into Anutan society. Traditionally, young men and women were tattooed when they reached puberty, part of the "rites of passage" into adulthood. After receiving his first tattoos (which also took place at the time of circumcision) a young man could now sit on the *matapare* or seaward side of the house and go deep-sea fishing in the outrigger canoes.

Figure 4.5. Pu Rangovaru tattooing; he holds a small mallet in his right hand, which he is using to tap the tattooing comb held in his left hand. He wears a circlet of *Gardenia* flowers around his head.

Tui Anuta decided that we would be treated as young men would have been after their first tattooing. But first our wounds, oozing blood and lymph, had to be treated. Several women were waiting near the chief's house, having prepared large wooden bowls (*kumete*) of warm water scented with aromatic and medicinal leaves. While we sat on some coconut grater stools, the women dipped green *ti* (*Cordyline*) leaves into the warm water, then gently rubbed them over the newly tattooed flesh. This treatment finished, each of us was handed a fresh loincloth of *mami* bark and then given a fine mat woven from *Pandanus* leaves to wear around our waists. The women daubed sacred turmeric (*renga*) on our arms and chests,

Figure 4.6. Paul Rosendahl, Doug Yen, and the author on the day we were tattooed, after being dressed in barkcloth and fine mats and daubed with turmeric. The Tui Anuta stands between Rosendahl and Yen, and the Ariki i Muri stands between Yen and the author.

placing garlands of *tiare* flowers around our necks and heads. When we were properly decked out in feasting attire (Fig. 4.6), they led us to the plaza where the village population awaited for a feast of special puddings, washed down with green drinking coconuts. Large sprays of betel nuts had been harvested for chewing after the meal. I sat down with the *patongia* of Pu Akonima who was now my *tau soa,* or bond-friend. We had exchanged names, linking us and our families.

After the feast, the dancing began. First were the men's dances, performed with carved wooden paddles. Such dances are now virtually forgotten in Polynesia, but in the Bishop Museum I had seen grainy black-and-white movie footage from the Templeton Crocker Expedition taken on Bellona and Rennell Islands in the 1930s of harvest festival dances similar to these. Communal dancing continued long into the night.

The next morning Tui Anuta and Pu Tokerau woke us early. It was time to venture out in canoes for deep-sea fishing, again part of the puberty rites for a young man. Three outrigger canoes were being readied at Rotoapi. Anutan canoes have proper names, just like houses; these were named Puinga, Marataútemanga, and Vaovaomoana. About twenty feet long, each hull was carved from a single massive *tamanu* log; gunwales and washstrakes lashed on with sennit increased the freeboard. Five booms (*kiato*) joined the hull with its outrigger (*tautau ama*). The

heavy canoes were hauled from their storage places near the houses down the beachfront using log rollers; they were then floated over to the beach in front of the two tiny channels through the reef, Te Ava Rai and Te Ava Ti.

Tui Anuta assigned each of us to a canoe, along with four paddlers and a steersman. I was to sail in Vaovaomoana. In single file, the canoes negotiated the narrow pass, riding up and over the oncoming breakers and gliding out onto the deep sea. For a couple of hours our little fleet paddled steadily away from the island, until Anuta was a blip on the horizon. By mid-afternoon we arrived at a submerged bank where the bottom was about twenty to forty fathoms deep. Letting down baited lines, we soon pulled up enough groupers, squirrelfish, and emperors to feed the entire island for a couple of days. The sun was getting low in the sky and it was time to return.

With the wind in our favor, we hoisted sails for a speedy return (Fig. 4.7). During the day a sizable swell had come up, and coming near the island we watched as six- to eight-foot breakers crashed down on the reef. The worried expressions on the crew's faces signaled that getting the canoes back through the pass was

Figure 4.7. Anuta Island as seen from a canoe after returning from a fishing trip to the banks surrounding the island.

going to be a challenge. The trick was to maneuver each canoe as close as possible to the reef edge without getting into the break. At the precise moment, the steersman has to call for his crew to paddle with all their strength to take the canoe in on the back of a wave, riding the high water. We watched as Puinga went first—a cheer arose as it successfully glided through Te Ava Rai. Then Maratautemanga made it through without mishap. Now it was Vaovaomoana's turn. We were so close to the reef that I could see the razor-sharp coral branches through the slack water behind the foaming break.

Pu Parekope aimed the bow at the narrow channel, shouting for his crew to dig in their paddles. Sitting near the stern, I watched four sinewy backs put all their strength into the task. But Pu Parekope was a couple of seconds too late. Rather than ride the back of the wave we hit the trough of low water between incoming breakers. I heard and felt the dull thud and shudder as Vaovaomoana's hull hit the coral and stuck fast in the narrow pass. Turning around, I watched an eight-foot wave crest directly over us.

Figure 4.8. Farewell scene on the beach at Anuta. The author is in the center with a *tiare* garland around his head, pressing noses with an Anutan woman.

I felt the rushing force of the wave and heard the sharp crack of five stout *kiato* booms snapping. No longer attached to its outrigger, the heavy timber hull began to roll over, pushed along by the wave's incredible force. I jumped to port as the hull rolled to starboard. Somehow—miraculously—no one was injured. We had managed to avoid getting caught between the rolling hull and the razor-sharp corals, a fate that would have meant mutilation, broken bones, and probable death. My only serious loss was my camera, still in my daypack tied to a thwart.

Vaovaomoana's scarred but not irreparably damaged hull was hauled up the beach. The *kiato* and outrigger would be repaired; it would sail again another day. The following day a special oven of food was made and shared by the canoe's *patongia*. Then the women gathered around Vaovaomoana, wailing for the injured canoe. They sang dirges and sobbed, tears and mucus flowing freely, just as they would have mourned for an injured kinsman. Had this accident not occurred, I would never have appreciated the way in which traditional Polynesians regard their canoes as embodying living spirits.

By now it was mid-December. Via the shortwave radio we received news that the *Belama* had engine problems. A much smaller ship, the *Coral Princess,* would divert to pick us up. Word came to be ready by December 16; we packed our gear and the boxes of archaeological specimens. That evening we had a farewell meal with Tui Anuta and his family. Everyone was in a melancholy mood, knowing that we would soon depart, most likely never to see each other again. Before dawn on the 16th we heard whoops and cries from Te Maunga; several young men had spent the night on the hill, keeping a watch on the horizon. The arrival of a ship was a major event, occurring only a few times a year. "*Te vaka! Te vaka!*" the cry went up. Within an hour the *Coral Princess* was offshore.

Every man, woman, and child on the island assembled at our hut—a couple of dozen packed inside and everyone else seated on the ground outside, looking in through the raised screens. Wailing dirges went up. "*Aue! Aue! Aue!*" Tears flowed and hands flipped streams of mucus from runny noses. After a half-hour of emotional wailing, everyone began to carry our gear down to the ship's launch. There were more tearful farewells on the beach and much pressing of noses (Fig. 4.8). Then we were into the launch, through the channel (thankfully calm that morning), and clambering up the ship's side. I lingered at the rail until Te Maunga's coconut palms sank below the horizon. I think all of us knew that never again in our lives would we experience another island society quite like that on Anuta.