

## HOW MARAE CHANGE: IN MODERN TIMES, FOR EXAMPLE

Paul Wallin

The Kon-Tiki Museum, Institute for Pacific Archaeology and Cultural History,  
Bygdøynesveien 36, 0286 Oslo, Norway

### ABSTRACT

*In the Society Islands, ceremonial sites called marae have been under archaeological observation and investigation for about 80 years. In this paper I explore how these ceremonial sites are used in modern times and how different kinds of factors and events change the structures. Observations and photographs from different time periods show that these structures have changed through both natural processes and human actions. A striking fact is that the most radical change of certain main structures in the Leeward Society Islands is due to archaeological reconstruction, sometimes based on quite far-reaching interpretations. Marae structures are also still in use by different groups, with different interests. Tourists and local people, both in groups and as individuals, visit the sites. Indigenous people also use the sites when they feel the need for religious revival, as well as youths daubing the stones with graffiti. And finally, these remains have, for the last 80 years, been used in different ways by archaeologists. Future archaeological researchers have to be aware of the changes due to different modern uses of these structures, especially when interpreting them. Re-survey is necessary at some exposed sites to document these continuous processes.*

This paper is a result of discussions with Yoshihiko Sinoto of the Bishop Museum, who for many years has been carrying out careful stabilization and restoration work on marae structures in the Society Islands, French Polynesia. When he showed me some pictures at a meeting in the Bishop Museum some years ago, and told me about the recent reconstruction work at Opoa and Maeva in the Leeward Society Islands, it was not difficult to understand that something quite strange had been done to these marae structures. It was from my point of view obvious that serious

misinterpretation had occurred with marae Hauviri at the important religious site of Opoa on Raiatea. Archaeologists who obviously lacked basic knowledge about these structures had created a type of marae that had no parallels in existing Society Island prehistoric remains. Similar problems affected the restoration work at Maeva on Huahine. This led me to think more about recent processes of change among marae, and how these structures are used today. And it is of great importance to vitalize this discussion, or else as Sinoto (2001:261) has pointed out, the nature of the original feature soon will be forgotten and future archaeologists will have a hard time trying to understand these strange marae types.

### PROCESSES OF CHANGE TODAY

Natural processes have continuously worn these structures since the day they were constructed. Some processes are slow, others result in immediate and visible damage, for example hurricanes and tidal waves. Animals can also cause damage, particularly the land crabs that constantly perforate coastal areas by digging their holes, also pigs and larger ruminants.

Building activities also have an impact, already in prehistoric times when small marae structures sometimes were encased in later stepped ahu in order to increase the mana of the monument (Wallin 1993, 2001). Such a process can clearly be seen in the excavated marae at Ta'ata in Tahiti illustrated by Garanger (1975). The same happened when the first missionaries built their churches on top of former important marae sites. For example, in Maeva village on Huahine, the protestant church completely destroyed a marae (Emory 1933:130). On Raiatea, the church in Tevaitoa is built in front of the ahu in the courtyard of the huge marae Tainu'u (Figure 1) (Wallin 1997). There are also several examples of modern houses placed in marae courtyards, for example, at marae Taputapuata at Punauia Point, Tahiti, which was reported by Emory in the 1920s as almost

completely destroyed. Here, two quite old French house foundations (one dated by Emory to 1846) and a modern pig pen occupy the court, and possibly the missing *ahu* stones were used as building materials (Emory 1933:62). The stones of the great *marae* Mahaiatea on Tahiti, today almost completely destroyed, were used for buildings and as road fill during the 19th century (Wallin 1993:110). There are also examples from, for example, Borabora where the coastal road crosses a *marae* courtyard, with an *ahu* located by the shore. Modern houses in *marae* courtyards can also be seen today, for example in Maeva Village, Huahine.

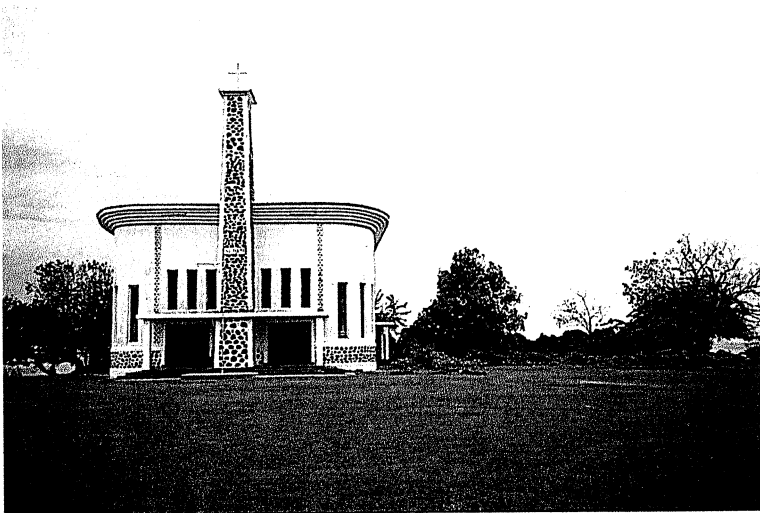


Figure 1: The Christian church at Tevaitoa, Raiatea, built in the courtyard of *marae* Tainu'u.



Figure 2: The restored *Marae Arahurahu*, Tahiti, in 1991 (Photo: H. Martinsson-Wallin).

#### Restoration

Restoration work can be carried out in quite different ways, with different aims, and with different views and basic knowledge about what the monuments should reflect. Restoration work has been carried out in the Societies since the mid 1950s, when the stepped *marae* Arahurahu on Tahiti was restored (Figure 2). A few restorations were carried out by Emory on Borabora and by Sinoto on Raiatea in 1964-65 (Emory and Sinoto 1965). In 1967-1969, Sinoto developed a restoration program for *marae* structures, mainly in the Leeward Society Islands, in prominent locations such as

Maeva village, and Taputapuatea on Raiatea. They were followed up by restorations on Mo'orea (Sinoto 1969), and in the late 1980s, at the inland site of Papeno'o on Tahiti, directed by Maeva Navarro of Musée de Tahiti, and at the inland site of Vahiria on Tahiti, directed by Claudio Cristino of Musée de Tahiti. Reconstruction work at Opoa on Raiatea, and at Maeva, was carried out under the direction of Maeva Navarro and Joseph Tchong (Musée de Tahiti) during the mid 1990s.

The restoration by Sinoto has been done in a careful way, which means that he only stabilized the structures. Fallen stones were raised again and courtyard stones were levelled and placed back in position. His aim has been to keep the structures in shape, in order to stop the continuous destruction and preserve the layout of the latest prehistoric phase. Most other reconstructions also include re-interpretation, and it is this that changes the shapes of these structures. As an example, the restored *marae* Hauviri in Opoa has been furnished with a wall connected to the *ahu* sides, and given an entrance in the front wall. Such features do not occur amongst coastal Leeward Island *marae*. The courtyards in several Maeva *marae* have been raised about 30 cm. Some of the material used for this raising was taken from an ancient wall in the nearby 'Te Ana' area, which means that one monument was destroyed to reconstruct another!

Only stabilization and slight restoration should be done on original sites. If the aim is to reconstruct a *marae*, one should build a true copy or model elsewhere, for example in a local museum or cultural centre, and not make interpretative experiments on the

original structure. If one combines features found in different archaeological sites, the whole *marae* may be turned into a 'time-machine', including different chronological phases within the same structure. Such is neither desirable for science, nor for local people or visiting tourists.

#### MODERN USES OF CEREMONIAL PLACES

##### *Tourist developments and attractions*

The will of the French Polynesian government is of course strong to develop tourism, and cultural or eco-tourism is a fast-growing market. The attractions should, however, be easily accessible or at least within short walking distance, as with the main *marae* sites at Maeva village. These include both easily accessible structures by the lagoon, and others at a short distance up Matairea hill, above the village, where there are several spectacular *marae* structures with wonderful natural views. Other big tourist *marae* sites are to be found in the Opunohu valley on Mo'orea, *marae* Arahurahu on Tahiti (which has been a tourist attraction since the mid 1950s), and the traditional religious centre at Opoa on Raiatea. All these sites have been developed as tourist locations through restoration, and in some cases reconstruction, adapted to the needs of the tourist industry. Some examples of this are the entrance in the enclosing wall at *marae* Hauviri at Opoa, and the raised courtyards at the newly restored sites at Maeva, which make them dry and accessible for tourists even at high water levels. Such alterations should, in my view, not be done on original structures.

##### *Cultural activities, including outdoor theatres*

*Marae* Arahurahu has also been used for tourist presentations of traditional offerings and rituals (Denig 2000:112), and recently also as background scenery for a play about the artist Paul Gauguin (Figure 3). In this case, a stage was built close to the *marae* courtyard as well as a tribune for the audience, who may be both tourists coming to Tahiti and also people, possibly the cultural 'elite', living on Tahiti.

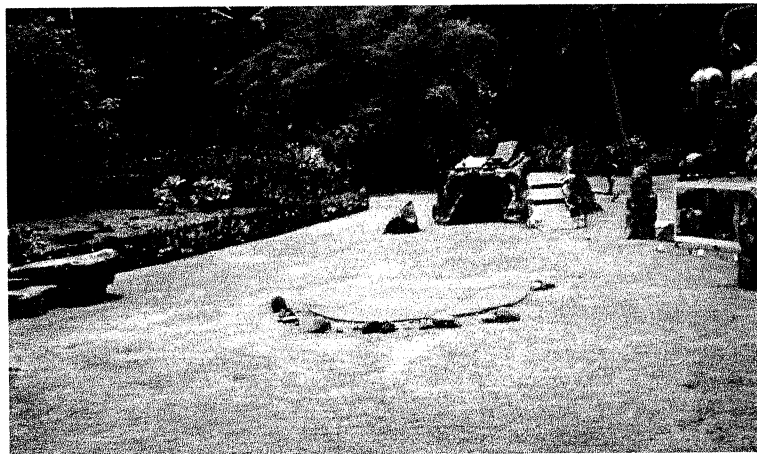


Figure 3: *Marae Arahurahu, Tahiti, used as an outdoor theatre in 1998.*



Figure 4: *Marae Oavaura, Maeva, Huahine, during stabilization work in 1967 (Photo: Y. Sinoto).*

##### *Indigenous Religious Revival*

During the last decade, a growing cultural revival within different Polynesian populations has been observed, partly as a result of the experimental voyages with the double canoe *Hokule'a* (Finney 1994). The success that followed soon developed into the 'Polynesian Voyaging Society', which ties different island populations together into a Pan-Polynesian network. A large meeting of different Polynesian



Figure 5: Marae Oavaura, Maeva, Huahine, in 1991.



Figure 6: Marae Vaiotaha, Maeva, Huahine, during stabilization work in 1967 (Photo: Y. Sinoto).

communities arriving in different canoes took place at *marae* Taputapuata on Opoa in the early 1990s. Such neo-traditional societies also use *marae* as ceremonial centres. This tradition has grown especially strong in Hawai'i. I recently observed a ceremony with songs and chants at *marae* Matairea rahi, on Matairea hill, that traditionally is supposed to have been the original *marae* at Maeva. These groups sometimes make 'restorations' or additions to original structures. Since this is not a result of continuous inherited tradition one can be critical, although such actions are understandable in the name of cultural identity.

#### Graffiti

Some of the *marae*, mainly of the huge slab *ahu* type found in the Society Leeward Islands, have been defaced by graffiti. A centre for such activity seems to be *marae* Pae Pae Ofata, situated on Matairea hill, with beautiful natural scenery. This location is probably the reason why young boys and girls go up there to write love testimonies. The graffiti on the *marae* slabs may be a way of linking with the past or expressing identity or rights/ownership. A local newspaper recently stated that people should not mark the stones with graffiti, so some instead write their name on flat portable stone and place them on or beside the *ahu*. This may be a solution, as long as the flat stones are not taken from the *marae* courtyard.

#### Scientific use

The *marae* structures in the Society Islands were described by early explorers, missionaries and others, as both remarkable architectural monuments and as terrible primitive barbaric places. The scientific investigation of *marae* began in the 1920s with the young Kenneth P. Emory, who made the first surveys (Emory 1933). Thereafter not much happened until the 1960s, when Roger Green and Janet Davidson did their detailed surveys and some excavations in the Opunohu valley on Mo'orea (Green *et al.* 1967), with Emory and Sinoto following up at the same time with re-surveys, excavations and restorations (Emory and Sinoto 1965). Further archaeological work continued in the 1970s and 1980s. The next step involved analysis and quantification of the data, as carried out by Christophe Descantes on the Opunohu data, and by me based on all published sources (Descantes

1990; Wallin 1993). Analysis continued into the late 1990s, when Ethan Cochrane of the University of Hawai'i used my database to carry out new seriations (Cochrane 1998). The most recent use of the *marae* has been the re-construction strategy, mentioned in this paper.

#### ARE-SURVEY OF MARAE STRUCTURES AT MAEVA, HUAHINE

A re-survey of the *marae* at Maeva was carried out in October-November 2001 by me, assisted by my PhD student Reidar Solsvik (Wallin and Solsvik 2002). This was done to

record modern changes to the *marae*. The first notes on these structures were taken by Emory almost 80 years ago. Additional notes were made and stabilization undertaken by Sinoto in 1967-69. New notes and observations were then recorded by me in 1985, 1991, and 2001-2002. Comparing photos from different times makes it clear that these structures constantly seem to change. Some change is due to natural processes, as can be observed at *marae* Oavaura (compare Figures 4 and 5). The court here seems to have been covered by silty material during flooding.

Another comparison clearly shows the result of recent reconstruction work at *marae* Vaiotaha. Comparing pictures from 1967 and 1991 (Figures 6, 7) indicates that not very much happened during these 24 years. But when one examines a photo taken in 2001 (Figure 8), one is astounded by the difference, due to raising the court by about 30 cm. This reconstruction is not based on archaeological facts. The latest addition, not confirmed archaeologically or ethno-historically, occurs at *marae* Rauhuru, where *unu* planks and offering altars (Figure 9) were planted directly into the archaeologically uninvestigated and possibly early double *ahu*, and also into the paved courtyard. Holes about 50 cm in diameter were dug without archaeological supervision. Such reconstruction work is to be deplored.

## CONCLUSIONS

One can conclude this paper with the statement that future archaeologists have to be aware of change, due to the different modern uses of these structures. Re-surveys are necessary at exposed sites in order to record these changes. But reconstruction and interpretative expressions should not be undertaken on original structures, whether by archaeologists or local activists. *Marae* models may be built for educational and tourist purposes, but on non-archaeological sites. Original sites should in my view only be carefully restored to retain the 'magic' feeling associated with ancient remains. These structures belong to humanity in general. Nobody should have the right to alter original sites, since the traditional methods of reconstructing *marae* for ceremonial purposes were forgotten long ago. Any restoration should be based on careful observation and



Figure 7: Marae Vaiotaha, Maeva, Huahine, in 1991.

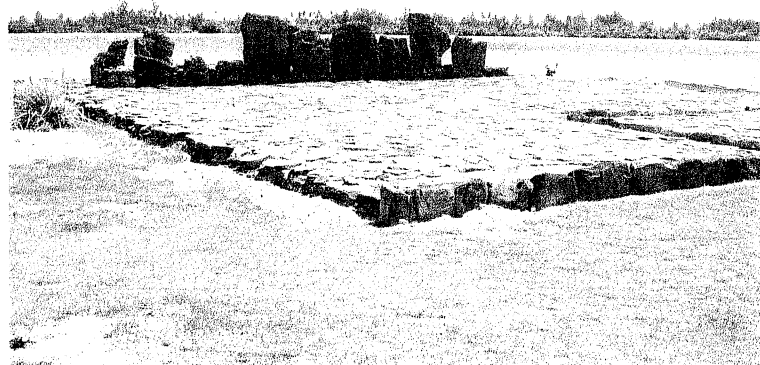


Figure 8: Marae Vaiotaha, Maeva, Huahine, in 2001.

documentation, and I am sure this is the recent policy of the Service de la Culture et du Patrimoine/Musée de Tahiti et des Îles.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My recent involvement at the Maeva site in Huahine, Society Islands, was in collaboration with Yosi Sinoto, Eric Komori and Elaine Rogers Jourdane. I thank them all for sharing





Figure 9: Unu planks and wooden altars at marae Rauhuru, Maeva, Huahine.

their great knowledge of this site with me. A special thanks goes to Yosi Sinoto, who inspired me to write this paper. I am also grateful to Marshall Sahlins from whom I have paraphrased the title of his book 'How "Natives" Think – About Captain Cook, for example' (1997). This book has been another source of inspiration for me, to look at *marae* structures from different points of view and interests. Finally, I would also like to thank Helene Martinsson-Wallin and Peter Bellwood for constructive comments on this paper.

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