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# Polynesian Outliers

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## **Kapingamarangi**

**Takuu**

**Luangiua**

**Sikaiana**

**Bellona**

**Tikopia**

**Anuta**

**West Futuna**

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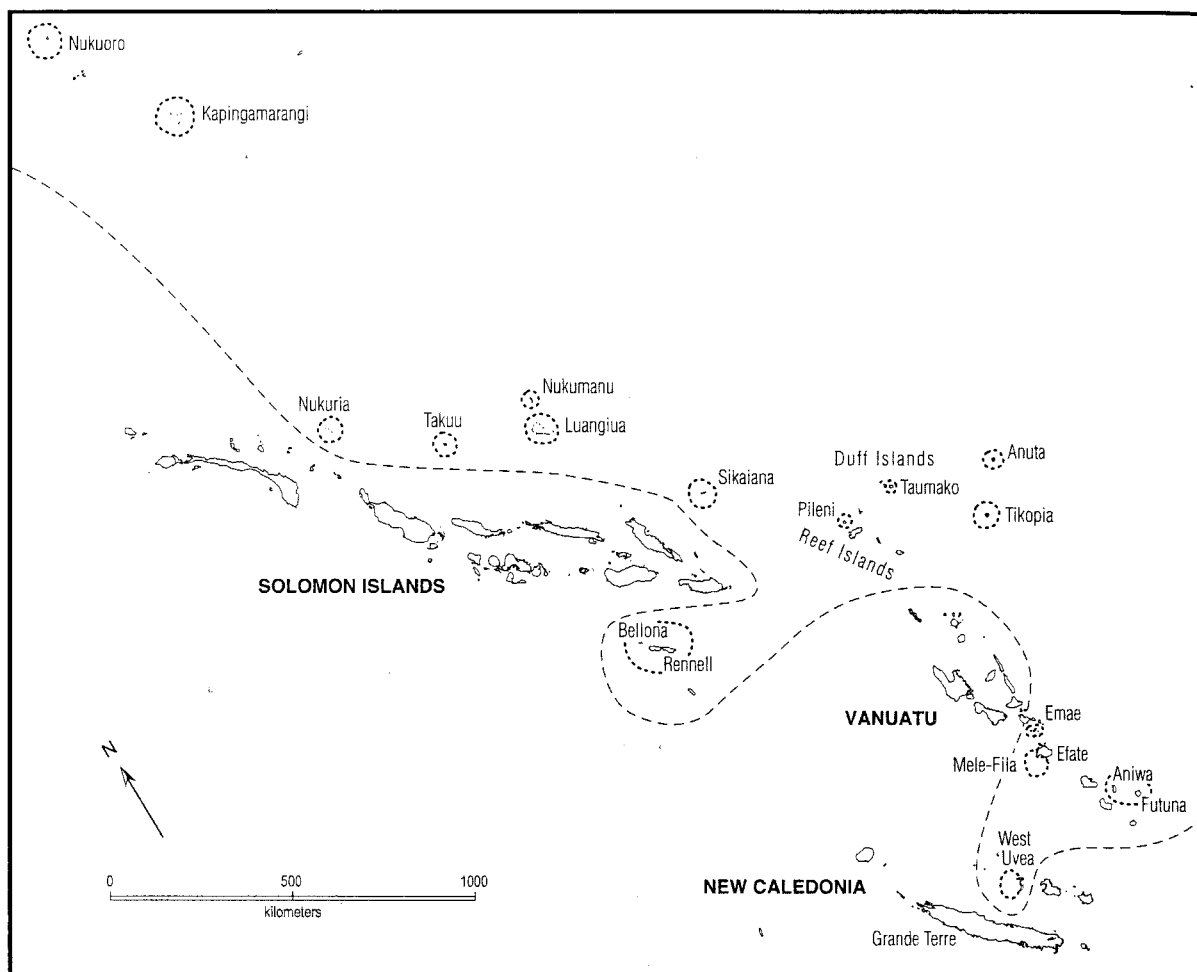
The Polynesian outliers comprise about eighteen communities scattered along a northwest-southeast arc across Micronesia and Melanesia (see map). The people of these communities all speak Polynesian languages, in contrast to the people of surrounding societies, who speak non-Polynesian Oceanic languages. In social structure and culture, outlier societies have few traits in common, and other than for classificatory convenience, they do not form a distinct cultural area. Archaeological investigations, conducted in about half the outlier communities, have found evidence that prehistoric patterns of settlement were comparable among them.

## **Geography**

The northernmost Polynesian outliers are the tiny atolls of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi, which lie south of the Caroline Islands and are politically integrated into the Federated States of Micronesia. Farther south, Nukuria, Takuu, and Nukumanu, all atolls, are in the Northern Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea. Nukumanu is geographically, culturally, and linguistically close to the large atoll of Luangiua, though the latter falls under the political jurisdiction of the Solomon Islands. Also in the Solomons are the atoll Sikaiana, the larger islands of Rennell and Bellona, Pileni in the Reef Islands and the culturally related Taumako in the Duff Islands, and Tikopia and Anuta, whose populations have long maintained close ties with one another.

Outliers politically integrated into the Republic of Vanuatu include two villages at the eastern end of Emae (Mae); Fila (Ifira), a small island in the middle of the harbor of Vila, and the village Mele, nearby; and Futuna and Aniwa, small islands near Tanna. Finally, Heo and Muli villages at the opposite ends of 'Uvea, an atoll in the Loyalty Islands (under the administration of New Caledonia), are inhabited by speakers of a Polynesian outlier language. To distinguish Futuna and 'Uvea from the islands of the same name farther east, linguists customarily call them West Futuna and West 'Uvea, respectively.

People from several outliers have set up migrant communities on larger Pacific islands. For example, a Kapingamarangi community lives on Pohnpei, and Tikopia settlements are in Honiara and the Russell Islands.

Polynesian  
Outliers**Language**

Language is the one undisputed criterion justifying the identification of Polynesian outlier islands and villages with the rest of Polynesia, rather than with their Melanesian and Micronesian neighbors. Though the structure and vocabulary of many Polynesian outlier languages (especially Mele-Fila, West Futunan, and West 'Uvean) have received strong influence from nearby non-Polynesian Oceanic languages, all outlier languages have features that identify them uncontroversially as Polynesian. Most outlier languages are poorly documented: lexicons and dictionaries have been published only for Anuta, Kapingamarangi, Nukuoro, Rennell-Bellona, Tikopia, West Futuna, and West 'Uvea; grammatical descriptions—none detailed—are available only for Luangiua, Nukuoro, Rennell-Bellona, and West Futuna.

These languages form two distinct subgroups, neither of which is made up exclusively of outlier languages: Ellicean (after the Ellice Islands, the former name of Tuvalu), which comprises languages spoken on all outliers north of Sikaiana, plus Tuvaluan; and Futunic, which includes all other outlier languages, plus East Futunan. The evidence for the unity of the former subgroup is stronger than for the latter. Because languages and their speakers do not always have the same history, archaeologists beware of drawing from the linguistic evidence inferences about prehistoric settlement and cultural development.

**Archaeology**

Little archaeological research has been conducted on Polynesian outliers because

many are small and hard to reach, and many are geologically unstable atolls—which means that finding and interpreting archaeological records are exceptionally difficult tasks. However, since Janet Davidson (1971) demonstrated that archaeology on atolls was possible, archaeological data from about half of the outlier communities have become available. They show that the prehistories of outlier Polynesian societies broadly shared some traits, but diverged significantly in others. As summarized by Patrick V. Kirch (1984), the settlement of several outliers, including Tikopia, Anuta, and Taumako, dates to about 1,000 B.C., roughly the same time as the settlement of West Polynesia. Some outliers appear to have been inhabited discontinuously over time, as the population may have been wiped out, perhaps repeatedly, by natural disasters, like hurricanes, tsunamis, and famines.

The settlement of the outliers was not a unique event, but the product of successive voyages, originating from different points. On most or all outliers, the Polynesian influence, which in all cases brought language and in some cases brought culture and a consequential population, was a later phenomenon. The linguistic evidence, and in some cases the cultural evidence, indicate that this influence originated in West Polynesia, though it is unknown whether the Polynesian settlers traveled directly from there or via other outliers or non-Polynesian islands. On several outliers, archaeologists have found evidence of sustained contacts with neighboring non-Polynesian societies. In every instance, the history of settlement exhibits great complexity.

### **Society and culture**

The society and culture of one outlier community, Tikopia, is the subject of a large corpus of writings by Raymond Firth, who conducted initial work on the island in the 1920s, when Tikopians still practiced indigenous religious rituals. The documentation of life on Tikopia presented in these writings (notably in Firth 1936) remains matchless for its scope, detail, and theoretical sophistication, and has made Tikopia one of the best-documented societies in the world. In contrast, little ethnographic information is available on other outlier communities. Exceptions are Luangiua (Hogbin 1934); Rennell and Bellona, investigated by a team of Danish ethnographers over several decades; and Anuta (Feinberg 1981). Other outliers are known through a handful of scholarly articles each, while virtually nothing has been published about some outlier communities, like West 'Uvea.

The extent to which the structure of outlier societies resembles typically Polynesian configurations depends largely on the extent to which the Polynesian settlers remained distinct from any non-Polynesian populations already established at the time of the Polynesians' arrival. At one extreme, the political and kinship systems of the Polynesian-speaking villages on West 'Uvea are indistinguishable from the social arrangements of the non-Polynesian-speaking inhabitants of the atoll, which follow patterns attested throughout the Loyalty Islands. At the other extreme, Tikopia closely resembles the high islands of West Polynesia in its chiefly system, kinship structure, economic life, and cultural underpinnings, including the elaboration of such concepts as *mana* and *tabu*.

The sociopolitical organization of outlier societies exhibits the same variation in the relative elaboration of hierarchy as occurs elsewhere in Polynesia—variation that according to Marshall Sahlins (1958) relates to such factors as the amount of resources to be managed and distributed, the size of the population, the amount and quality of cultivable land, the importance and complexity of religious rituals, and the importance and nature of emigration. At one extreme are outliers like Luangiua, where hierarchy was minimal and chiefly authority diluted, as is typical of small atolls

elsewhere in Polynesia, including Tuvalu and the Tuamotus. At the other extreme is Tikopia, where chiefly authority is considerable, society is hierarchically ordered, and ascription is more important for chiefly rank than achievement, as is typical of Tonga.

Because contemporary outlier societies fall under the political jurisdiction of various nation-states (with different colonial histories), they vary in their access to economic resources and tokens of modernity, the mobility of their populations, and their relations to the polities of which they are part. Tikopians perceive themselves as significantly distinct from their Solomon Island compatriots, and despite the presence of Tikopian enclaves elsewhere in the country, they insistently maintain their cultural autonomy. In contrast, Polynesian-speaking West Uveans do not see themselves as significantly distinct from other groups in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands; in fact, they are at the forefront of a movement for Kanak independence.

—NIKO BESNIER