Book and Media Reviews
found in other zones of the site date to approximately 1850, when major European-introduced epidemics had a devastating effect on the Tuamotuan population.

From a theoretical perspective, one of the strengths of the Te Tahata monograph is its integration of archaeological, ethnographic, and ethnohistoric data in a notably critical manner that allows for divergences between the two data sets to be teased out and explained. As Conte and Dennison articulate, the fact that knowledge of the more recent skeletal remains at Te Tahata had been erased from the community’s collective memory must be situated within the local context. The authors suggest that because these deaths resulted from violent encounters, this would have reinforced a voluntary silence, given the tapu (taboo) notions of not speaking of the dead so as to protect the living. In addition, the chaotic nature of the postcontact period broke apart many families and caused relocations, weakening avenues for the transmission of traditional knowledge. In this way, Te Tahata illustrates an important role that archaeology plays in traditional island communities: it allows silences in their long-term histories to be reconstructed using scientific evidence.

**Jennifer G Kahn**

*College of William and Mary*

---


To date, the UNESCO series “Knowledges of Nature” comprises four volumes and is dedicated to documenting and preserving local and indigenous knowledge. Another aim of the series is to “strengthen knowledge transmission across and within generations” (UNESCO Links website). Echoes at Fishermen’s Rock: Traditional Tokelau Fishing is a remarkable work, originally published in 2008 in Tokelauan as Hikuleo i te Papa o Tautai; in making it available in English to a broad audience, UNESCO has evidently succeeded across these laudable goals. Compiled over what must have been a lengthy period of time, this volume results from the initiative of a group of elders originally from the Tokelau atoll Atafu, resident in New Zealand. The group gathered in order to identify, document, and thus secure their collectively vast and highly detailed knowledge about the natural environment of their home atoll. They have expressed a desire to preserve their common stock of experience—from deep-sea fishing to fishing inside the lagoon, as well as techniques for catching various other species found in the reef environment.
including shellfish and seabirds. The volume is a striking tribute to the intimate understanding these elders have of their land and seascape, about the habits of other living beings residing therein, and of seasonal variation and lunar cycles and how these effect the challenging and complex work of marine resource use. This well-realized volume may serve as a guide for local and extra-local researchers seeking to do the same elsewhere in the Pacific and perhaps beyond.

The techniques for the different kinds of fishing, hunting, and gathering practices are many, and they are precisely described in a manner that allows the book to be read as an instruction manual. Be not deceived, however, by the seemingly straightforward simplicity of the elders’ instructions. In many if not all of the practices detailed in the volume, it is striking how dangerous the detailed activities can be if appropriate caution is not exercised. Most of the kinds of “fishing” described here are collective ventures led by expert fishermen, called tautai in Tokelauan. It is essential that the most expert one takes the lead and that the others follow his instructions, both in order to ensure a catch as well as the safety of the fishing crew. In other words, while an instruction manual, however complete, may go some way to ensure that the information contained therein is transmitted to others, the practices described are normally learned by doing and especially by observing skilled experts in the process of carrying out exact procedures. One of the obvious added values of this volume’s approach is its reinforcing message that nothing can substitute for the experience of learning through apprenticeship in the company of one’s peers and elders.

It is also important to note that while reading this volume, the numerous qualities of the atoll landscape come clearly to the fore. Many distinct microenvironments—potentially every nook and cranny in subtly variable land and seascapes—are mentioned as possible hunting grounds for this or that kind of fish, on such and such a named night in the lunar cycle, and so on. One thing that stands out to this reader, a matter of significance that is not mentioned in the book, is the marginality and harshness of the environment. It is clearly an environment that harbors an abundance of fish, crustaceans, clams, octopi, and birds. However, the seasonal winds, rainy periods, and periods of drought must have sometimes posed quite a challenge for continued existence prior to the current situation, in which foodstuffs are imported from overseas and added to the local menu. This volume is a testimony to the survival skills of the generations of Tokelauans who have learned to utilize every resource that their atoll land and seascape provides.

The book is divided into five parts: “Food from the land, the ocean shores and the tree canopy,” “The lagoon,” “The reef,” “The open sea,” and a final chapter about “Omens, stars, singing and other valuable things.” There is also a valuable glossary of Tokelau fish, bird, and plant names, and this is particularly important as no full encyclopedia of local fauna exists as of yet. New Zealand social anthropologist Antony Hooper and physician Iuta Tinielu
from Tokelau also deserve recognition for their efforts in making this volume available. Both have worked with transmitting and translating Tokelau matters to the greater public for many years, and they clearly possess the combined skills needed to see this project through. For new generations of Tokelauans, and in particular for those who do not have the language, it is a great treasure to have this work translated into English.

At the same time, it is a pity that the volume did not come out as a bilingual edition. There are many places where one would want to make reference to a Tokelau version, in order to see what the exact formulations were. This is most striking with regard to the song texts that are found through the volume. The elders state that the songs have been added, as they are important treasures of Tokelau heritage, and that they wish the songs also to be transmitted to new generations. This is understandable, and from the perspective of everyday life in the Tokelau villages, where songs are present as a running commentary on everything that occurs, their inclusion makes sense. However, it is tempting to speculate about whether the precise placement of a particular song under a specific heading in this volume might have some meaning as well, and it is not possible to determine this on the basis of the English text. Thus, a reader who does not have access to the proceedings of the meetings of the elders when compiling the material is left puzzled and wanting to know more about the songs’ contexts, both originally and in this work. In the final section, on “omens, stars, singing and other valuable things” we learn a little about local ideas of performance. We learn how the powers of the natural environment and the control over nature are closely calibrated in local practices and in oral tradition, as exemplified by the spells or fakanau that are uttered as part of fishing practices. The significant description accompanying the spells presented in this volume is one example of contextualization that is lacking elsewhere in the volume when additional oral materials, such as songs, are added.

I mention this last point because as a reader I find that the material presented in this volume makes me wish to learn more. Indeed, volumes in this UNESCO series and other similar works readily distributed by electronic media are tremendously valuable sources of knowledge about the natural environment, but more importantly, of the social and technical skills that people have developed in dealing with the conditions provided by their lifeworld over generations. I am confident that these and other Tokelau elders have more to contribute in order to enlighten new generations and others who take an interest in the local knowledge and treasures from Tokelau.

INGJERD HOËM
University of Oslo

* * *