# Conservation of Archaeological Sites in the Pacific

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL sites are an irreplaceable natural resource, as are forests, water, and minerals. Once these resources are destroyed they cannot be replaced. Once an archaeological site is excavated it is gone forever, and unless it has been properly excavated, the material from it is useless for scientific purposes.

There are many kinds of archaeological sites: campsites, caves, rock shelters, burial places, village sites, petroglyphs and pictographs, megalithic monuments, and sacred areas of various kinds with or without wood and/or stone carvings, etc.

Due to a number of causes, the conservation of archaeological sites in the Pacific is becoming of paramount importance. Ever-increasing construction projects of all kinds, mining activities, agricultural and plantation work and the actions of pothunters all contribute to the destruction of archaeological sites. The expansion of fieldwork by professional archaeologists in the Pacific is also a matter of some concern. Until quite recently local governments in the Pacific have shown little interest in these conservation problems. Within the operating territory of the South Pacific Commission, I know of only one locally born person who has done archaeology: Luc Chevalier of the Musée Néo-Calédonien. The South Pacific Commission is in a position to play a major role in the conservation field, not only within its own territory, but as a leader in this critical problem area in the Pacific.

There are two major aspects to consider: (1) what we call salvage archaeology and (2) the normal research activities of archaeologists in the Pacific. Applicable to both of these is the necessity to preserve and rescue the material legacy of the Pacific, so that its cultural history may be reconstructed. For it is from the material culture of archaeological sites that such a culture history is interpreted. As a beginning, regulations are needed for the preservation of archaeological sites endangered by

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public and private works and for the control of problem-oriented fieldwork by archaeologists; the former to prevent the destruction of irreplaceable archaeological sites, the latter to better coordinate long-range archaeological research and to prevent duplication of effort and unnecessary competition among archaeologists.

A greater development of the local museums and scientific societies, such as the Société d'Études Mélanésiennes in New Caledonia, which has long sponsored scientific projects in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands, is absolutely necessary to educate and inform the local people, and to get them involved in the problems of conservation and the proper way to solve them. The logical agencies for this function are local museums and societies. The intelligent cooperation of the amateur archaeologist is the best hope, really, for the conservation of archaeological sites. Some local agency or institution should be responsible for maintaining a repository of archaeological site records, operating a library, and overseeing the granting of permits for survey and excavation of archaeological sites, as well as coordinating long-range research aims. A local museum, working with an antiquities board, would be one solution to this problem.

A government archaeologist attached to the local museum, or to a regional or territory museum if one or more are present, would be ideal. He could coordinate archaeological conservation and salvage work, carry on his own archaeological program (as do Chevalier in New Caledonia and Palmer in Fiji), and work with archaeologists coming from outside, again as Chevalier and Palmer now do. In lieu of this possibility, outside archaeologists working in a country or territory should be consulted on these problems, and should be willing to be consulted.

Most countries, states, and provinces now have some sort of antiquity laws, which show varying degrees of effectiveness.

To return to salvage archaeology: with the ever-increasing public and private construction activities in the Pacific, mining operations, and the depredations of pothunters, the destruction of valuable archaeological sites is increasing at an alarming rate.

Salvage archaeology is difficult because of the need for speed in excavation, which often calls for the sacrifice of good excavation techniques. Excavation work under salvage conditions is often actually only one step in front of the bulldozer. The lack of locally trained personnel and long-range planning compounds the problems.

There should be laws so that private companies doing construction work or carrying on mining operations provide funds for an archaeological survey of the area concerned and for the excavation of any key sites that will be destroyed by these projects. In Hawaii, as an example, when the State Government is doing work on public property it must set aside one percent of the total budget for archaeological salvage work. The major problem, of course, is to sell the government on this policy in the first place. Added to this is the need for adequate notice of construction work so that the salvage archaeology work can be done. Provision must be made to halt work for a reasonable time should the need be to excavate, at least partially, a previously unknown site. The only answer to pot-hunting is education.

The detailed policies of any conservation or salvage archaeology program should be worked out with land management departments and local authorities.

There are certain basic requirements for any conservation program, whether it be of a salvage- or a problem-oriented nature. The first step is an archaeological

survey, so that at least an overall impression of the archaeological potential of an area can be gained. Without such knowledge any sort of planning is impossible.

Assuming some idea of the archaeological potential of an area, a system of classifying sites depending upon their archaeological importance is desirable. Admittedly, such a system is not easily developed. This would permit the establishment of a system of priorities and the setting aside of some archaeological sites as national historical monuments, etc. Control of archaeological sites differs greatly from area to area, in accordance with varying laws. In some countries and territories, all archaeological sites belong to the government. In others, the government controls only those sites on public land.

Regardless of the amount of archaeological activity in a given area, some sites should be preserved because archaeological techniques are continually developing. In the future we may be able to solve problems that are mysteries to us now, the solutions to which may throw a different light on our current thinking. If there are no sites to excavate, this cannot be done.

As mentioned earlier, one way to insure the conservation of archaeological sites and antiquities would be to have a governmental antiquities board, working in conjunction with the local museum, to conduct all archaeological business; to approve projects; and to approve material leaving the country, either permanently or for study. Further, the local museum should have a type collection and the unique pieces from any excavation. All archaeologists applying for permission to excavate should have an affiliation with a recognized research institution (e.g., a university, museum, etc.). Any permit issued for fieldwork should require a preliminary report within six months of the completion of the fieldwork and a full report within three years. Local governments should consider the enactment of laws providing for the prosecution of a person or persons who cause the willful destruction of any archaeological site or artifact. A suggested wording for such a provision is as follows:

> No person shall knowingly destroy, desecrate, deface, move, excavate, or alter in any way an archaeological site of any kind, including human burial places, petroglyphs or pictographs, or remove or cause to be removed therefrom any archaeological object, except to the extent he is authorized to do so by a valid and subsisting permit issued by the appropriate government agency, and with particular attention given to any local native tradition or taboo that might prevail.

As a bare minimum, I would recommend the following five points as the basis of any archaeological conservation program:

1. A continuing survey for archaeological sites.
2. The formulation of policies to conserve sites, keeping in mind research needs of the future.
3. Correlation of policies with all relevant government agencies.
4. Making particular note of sites with special scenic, educational, or monumental value.
5. Coordination by a local agency of all archaeological activities.

Of special relevance to the foregoing discussion on conservation and related

problems is Resolution No. 1, passed by the participants in the Wenner-Gren Symposium on Oceanic Culture History, held in Sigatoka, Fiji, August 18–29, 1969. This resolution is published in *Studies in Oceanic Culture History,* vol. 1, Pacific Anthropological Records, no. 11 (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1970, p. 183).

### RESEARCH ETHICS IN OCEANIC RESEARCH

Given the rapid political, economic and educational development of Oceania, the participants in this Symposium recommend that all future culture history research projects within the Oceanic area should exhibit a deep concern with local institutions and researchers. Thus, projects should not only bring together local and outside personnel in *all* aspects of research and publication, but also be directed toward the early dissemination of research results and, when appropriate, the training of local researchers.

Specifically we would recommend that:

a) project personnel should spend 5 to 10% of their field time teaching and working in local universities, museums, teachers' colleges, high schools and other institutions.

b) local personnel, where available, should be incorporated in the project as researchers and/or trainees. The cost should be financed by project funds (as for example the University of Hawaii's Laura project and the New Guinea Research Unit's vacation-scholars program).

c) research reports in adequate number (greater than a few courtesy copies) should be widely distributed to libraries, schools, administrators, missions and local officers in the research country and especially in the research area.

d) simple and brief summary reports should be submitted to local journals, newspapers, radio stations and schools.

The discussion of the problems of the conservation of archaeological sites and materials in the Pacific is based on the author's experience with archaeological research in the Pacific, which began in New Caledonia in 1952. The concern for these problems has been growing through the years.

The establishment of a South Pacific Commission Advisory Committee for the purpose of formalizing a plan for a conservation program for archaeology in the Pacific, followed by strong support for such a program by the South Pacific Commission, would be a major step in the right direction not only for South Pacific Commission member countries, but for all Pacific countries, territories, etc.

As a useful guide in the development of any archaeological program, conservation and otherwise, the generally accepted code of ethics recognized and accepted by the Society for American Archaeology for archaeologists is presented below. (Reprinted from *American Antiquity,* vol. 27, no. 2 [October, 1961].)

### FOUR STATEMENTS FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

#### *1. The Field of Archaeology*

Archaeology, a branch of the science of anthropology, is that area of scholarship concerned with the reconstruction of past human life and culture. Its primary

data lie in material objects and their relationships; of equal importance may be ancillary data from other fields, including geology, biology, and history.

### 2. *Methods in Archaeology*

Archaeological research depends on systematic collection of material objects together with adequate records of the circumstances of the finds and relationships among objects and their surroundings. Value attaches to objects so collected because of their status as documents, and is not intrinsic. Therefore, collecting practices which destroy data and thus prevent the scholarly goal of archaeology are censured.

Explicit permission of the property owner must be secured before excavation is undertaken. State and federal statutes regarding preservation of antiquities and permits for excavation must be scrupulously observed.

Field techniques aim at preserving all recoverable information by means of adequate descriptive records and diagrams. Although archaeologists may take only a limited sample from a site, the collection should include all classes of artifacts encountered, not excluding any category; all pertinent data, including relationships and associations; samples of faunal remains; and other data to be interpreted by scientists in other fields. The archaeologist does not discard classes of information in favor of a special interest.

Certain basic field records must be kept, including the following: (1) A map of the site showing the surface features of the site and environs as well as the location and extent of the digging. (2) Detailed written records and maps of burials, houses, and other structural or natural features, known or assumed to have significance in the cultural history of the site. (3) Stratigraphic relationships of data must be noted and preserved, either through separation in natural soil layers or by arbitrary levels established during digging. (4) A catalogue of all the specimens found indicating their location, stratum of origin, and cultural association. Specimens should be labeled, numbered, and catalogued to preserve their identity as scientific data. (5) Photographs, drawings, and other documentation necessary to clarify the technique of the work and the context and associations of the finds.

Disregard of proper archaeological methods provides grounds for expulsion from the Society for American Archaeology, at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

### 3. *Ethics for Archaeology*

Collections made by competent archaeologists must be available for examination by qualified scholars; relevant supporting data must also be accessible for study whether the collection is in a museum or other institution or in private hands.

It is the scholarly obligation of the archaeologist to report his findings in a recognized scientific medium. In the event that significance of the collection does not warrant publication, a manuscript report should be prepared and be available.

Inasmuch as the buying and selling of artifacts usually results in the loss of context and cultural associations, the practice is censured.

An archaeological site presents problems which must be handled by the excavator according to a plan. Therefore, members of the Society for American Archaeology do not undertake excavations on any site being studied by someone without the prior knowledge and consent of that person.

Willful destruction, distortion, or concealment of the data of archaeology is censured, and provides grounds for expulsion from the Society for American Archaeology, at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

### *4. Recommendations for Training in Archaeology*

Archaeology is a scholarly discipline requiring knowledge of field techniques, competence in laboratory analysis of specimens, and the ability to prepare a detailed report of the investigations and their implications in archaeology. In times past, a number of leading archaeologists have acquired the necessary skills without formal training, but they, as well as archaeologists trained in scholarly techniques, have spent years in the study of archaeology as a science. The Society for American Archaeology condemns uncontrolled excavation by persons who have not been trained in the basic techniques of field archaeology and scholarship.

The Society for American Archaeology recommends the following formal training as a minimum qualification for persons planning to enter archaeology as a career. Individuals engaging in archaeology as a profession should acquire the B.A. or B.Sc. degree from an accredited college or university, followed by two years of graduate study with concentration in anthropology and specialization in archaeology during one of these programs. This formal training should be supplemented by at least two summer field schools or their equivalent under the supervision of archaeologists of recognized competence. A Master's thesis or equivalent in published reports is highly recommended. The Ph.D. in anthropology is recommended but not required.