

**The Changing Anthropological Enterprise:  
A Century of Ethnographic Research in Rotuma**  
*by Jan Rensel and Alan Howard*

From the time that Europeans first began to produce accounts of their visits to Rotuma, beginning with Captain Edward Edwards of the *Pandora* in 1791, multiple categories of visitors, including explorers, whalers, missionaries, scientists of various kinds, and representatives of European government have written about the island, its people, and their customs. Each of their accounts reflect the interests, biases, and often moral persuasions of the writers. For example, the earliest visitors, around the beginning of the nineteenth century, were generally concerned with providing basic information about the island's location and its main physical features, as well as nautical information such as the location of reefs and shoals, and safe anchorages—all of which might be useful to other visitors. To the extent they were concerned with reprovisioning their vessels, they also wrote about their trading experiences with Rotumans, often in evaluative terms (eg, mentioning “thievery”). An associated preoccupation of the early visitors was with authority structure on the island (essentially chieftainship), as this was a significant consideration regarding whom they should deal with in trading and the fulfillment of other wants. The whalers, virtually all of whom were concerned with restocking their supplies, focused on similar aspects of their experiences.

As most of these visits were quite brief, lasting only a few days at most, and were also limited by problems of language intelligibility, the earliest accounts contain little or no information about Rotuman customs and social life. At most they included comments on the people's easily observable features, dress, and ornamentation—often with aesthetic evaluations (that their bodies were well formed, that the people were attractive, etc.). However, beginning in the late 1820s, renegades from British vessels who stayed on the island became a prime source of information about local customs, including aspects of Rotuman culture such as “religious” and medical practices, forms of greeting, various ceremonies (marriage, birth, and death), daily routines, governance and warfare, and sexual mores. Their biases were not always apparent, but their accounts were undoubtedly colored by their personal experiences, as well as by the questions that were asked of them. Later on, Rotumans who had become relatively fluent in English or French while serving aboard European vessels served as interpreters for visitors. Their

accounts were also likely primarily shaped by their experiences and the questions asked of them. To access a selection of early accounts, go to <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Archive.html>.

We have presented this introduction to point out that accounts about any cultural group should always be evaluated with an understanding of the purposes and biases of the presenters, including whether they are pragmatically or scientifically inspired. Here we are particularly interested in *ethnographic* studies, that is, in-depth field research, usually undertaken over a long period of time, with a goal of understanding a people's customs, history, and values. Some ethnography is also ethnological, involving analysis and comparisons among different groups.

In this paper we review the work of eight individuals who have provided what we consider to be ethnographic accounts beginning in the late 1890s through the twentieth century. Our aim is to assess the purposes for their research (whether explicit or implicit), the methods that they used, their intended audiences if relevant, and the resulting products. In chronological order by dates of initial research, the researchers are J. Stanley Gardiner, A. M. Hocart, Gordon Macgregor, Aubrey Parke, Elizabeth K. Inia, ourselves, and Vilsoni Hereniko. The backgrounds of these individuals are considered, including their nationality or ethnicity and their prior education. As two of these researchers are Rotuman, we pay special attention to detectable differences between insider and outsider accounts.

### **J. Stanley Gardiner (1872–1946)**

J. Stanley Gardner, an Englishman by birth, studied zoology at Cambridge University and graduated with a degree in natural sciences in 1894. In 1896, he joined a research expedition to study corals at Funafuti, in what is now Tuvalu. The research encompassed the identification and taxonomy of corals as well as their growth rates and feeding biology. Afterward, he went to Rotuma aboard the HMS *Penguin*, intending to spend three and a half months studying the fauna of the island and its adjacent waters. While there, however, he became ill and, while recovering over the course of several weeks, he collected information about the people and their customs, which he published in 1898 as a two-part article, "Natives of Rotuma," in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

Gardiner's approach to gathering information was in the naturalist tradition that prevailed in zoological sciences. When applied to the social sciences, it involved observing people's behavior in their natural environments. However, Gardiner, like most ethnographers of his

generation, was more interested in “traditional” Rotuman culture, much of which was no longer practiced. This approach generally ignored historical changes that occurred prior to European intrusion; the pre-European culture was basically treated as having been static.

Gardiner relied on information obtained from elders via some key informants. In the introduction to “Natives of Rotuma,” he expressed his appreciation to those who helped him, especially two of the district chiefs:

I am under especial obligations to my friend Marafu, the chief of Noatau, who was undoubtedly the most influential native on the island. At all times I found that he took a great and most intelligent interest in my progress, and was only too ready to give me all the help in his power. Marafu’s knowledge of English, too, was greater than that of the interpreter, or any other native I met on the island, although he was extremely diffident of speaking it before a third party. To many of my questions he would defer an answer, until he had consulted the old men about them. Marafu had himself been the sou [ritual island head, sometimes glossed as “king”] and alone seemed to know anything about the higher meanings of the old religious rites. . . . I was also greatly assisted by Albert, who was for over twenty years the chief of Itoteu [Itu‘ti‘u]. (Gardiner 1898: 396)

Gardiner also credited his interpreter, Titopu, “who took the greatest trouble in investigating various points for me and in his translations of the different legends,” as well as Resident Commissioner H. S. Leefe, who recommended him to the chiefs in the first place. Further, Gardiner acknowledged “considerable assistance” from Father Chevreul (at the Roman Catholic mission) and “several other white residents” on the island.

Although naturalists and others on previous voyages had published accounts about Rotuma based on their observations during shorter visits, Gardiner’s 106-page publication remains the most complete account of nineteenth-century Rotuma, including descriptions of material culture (from mats, baskets, thatch, sinnet, to stone and shell axes, fishing equipment, and houses) and social and political practices (religion, warfare, marriage, sports, singing and dancing, and medical practices). He also speculated on causes for an apparent “decrease in the Native population.”

Gardiner did not shy away from making generalized statements regarding Rotuman character, such as:

In character they are gentle and kind to one another as well as to strangers. Their kindness and attention to all children is extraordinary. Nothing is too good for them or too much trouble to do. Castigation is unknown; their sole method of correction is by laughing and making fun of them. The old, as long as they don't get ill, are well taken care of, but if they were ill, were formerly much neglected and even allowed to die without any notice being taken of them. They are keenly sensitive to ridicule and sneering. The greatest punishment that can be inflicted is ridicule; I have seen natives slink into the bush to avoid such, when people were about to pass them. If they are telling a story or legend, the least sneer will stop them at once, or make them bring it to an abrupt close, and they cannot, as a rule, be induced to continue in the sneerer's presence. There is no mean within them; they like well and hate well. If a chief is liked, they will do whatever he wants without treating him with too much respect; if he is not, he will be treated with every mark of respect to his face, but as soon as he is gone will be laughed at, and nothing will be done. Fairness and justice in all dealings will be respected. Such a man they will not try to cheat; but if they are once cheated, they think themselves dishonoured until they have cheated their cheater still more in return. (1898: 408)

Nevertheless, in keeping with his naturalistic “objective” perspective, Gardiner reminded his readers that “morality cannot be judged by our laws” (Gardiner 1898: 409).

Although he never returned to Rotuma, he did get news from the island and expressed deep regret on hearing of the death of his friend Marafu in 1897. Gardiner continued doing field work in coral research until 1909, when he became Professor of Zoology at Cambridge.

#### **A. M. Hocart (1884–1939)**

Arthur Maurice Hocart was born in Belgium into a British family from the island of Guernsey (one of the Channel Islands between France and England). In 1906 he graduated with honors from Exeter College, Oxford, with an undergraduate degree in “Greats,” which combined Latin,

Greek, ancient history, and philosophy; after that, he spent two years studying psychology and phenomenology at the University of Berlin.

In 1908, Hocart was picked by W. H. R. Rivers to accompany him on the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to the Solomon Islands. Immediately after that ethnographic fieldwork, Hocart journeyed further east to Fiji, where he became the headmaster of Lau Provincial School on the island of Lakeba in the Lau archipelago. At the same time, he had a graduate research scholarship from Oxford University, which involved his traveling widely through western Polynesia, including Fiji, Rotuma, Wallis Island, Samoa, and Tonga. The result was roughly six years of ethnographic fieldwork, which formed the basis for Hocart's reputation today as one of the most important early ethnographers of Oceania.

Although "he had some two hundred publications, including five books published during his life time," according to Rodney Needham (1970: xv), Hocart published only four short pieces specifically about Rotuma (Hocart 1914; 1915a; 1915b; 1919). However, it is his copious field notes, written in longhand, totaling more than 700 pages, that remain his most valuable legacy for other researchers interested in Rotuma.

During his three and a half months on Rotuma in 1913, Hocart took a complete census of the island, recorded extensive genealogies, made numerous illustrative drawings, took physical measurements of a selection of individuals, and photographed a variety of scenes and people (including head shots of several men to illustrate head forms). His notes include both personal observations and information provided to him by a variety of individuals, Rotumans as well as a few Europeans (including the resident commissioner) who were on the island at the time. His notes are wide ranging, covering all aspects of Rotuman culture, but Hocart was especially interested in chieftainship, which is evident in his selection of which genealogies to record and the special attention he gave to the chiefly district of Noa'tau. (Hocart is perhaps most well known for his 1927 book *Kingship*.) Hocart's skill as a linguist is also evident in these notes, which include extensive vocabulary translations; as the weeks progressed his notes were written more and more in Rotuman and less and less in English. By the end of his brief stay, he was recording narratives completely in Rotuman.

Hocart returned to Oxford in 1914 for postgraduate studies in anthropology, spent four years in France in army intelligence during World War I, served as archeological commissioner of Ceylon, and finally moved to Cairo when he was appointed Professor of Sociology in 1934.

### **Gordon Macgregor (1902–1983)**

Gordon Macgregor was an American anthropologist who received a bachelor's degree from Yale in 1925 with a specialization in archaeology. In 1931, as a recipient of a fellowship from Yale, he joined the Bishop Museum, where he engaged in ethnological research, including a number of Pacific Islands. He spent six months (from 11 January to 9 July 1932) on Rotuma. Although he produced an ethnology of Tokelau (published in 1937), Macgregor published nothing about Rotuma, despite having accumulated extensive notes on a wide range of topics. Fortunately, however, on his retirement Macgregor deposited his Rotuma field notes in the Bishop Museum's archives. Under an agreement with the museum, Alan Howard later organized and made those notes available via a Rotuma website that Howard created in 1996 (see <http://www.rotuma.net/os/Macgregor/Macgregor.html>).

At the time of Macgregor's field work, a main concern of the Bishop Museum was with collecting information about Pacific Islands customs and history prior to European intrusion, with an eye to reconstructing "traditional" cultures and historical connections between island groups. In a report to the museum's director, Macgregor described his work as follows:

making a study of the pre-European history, the customs, and the race of the native inhabitants. To cover this work fully, it was necessary to live in each of the seven districts into which the island is divided, for each had its own history and especially its own legends which it regarded as its own particular property and which would only be divulged by the people to whom it belonged. This "living around" the island afforded many obvious opportunities of expanding material and checking information, but only when the work was completed did it appear how very valuable was this constant repetition of investigation in the various localities of the seven districts. For only from all the district histories of migrations, legendary material, and stories of wars can the origins and development of cultural traits and the chronology of events for the island as a whole be fully pieced together. This material recorded by localities will greatly assist in clearing up the puzzling complexity that exists about Rotuma.

(Macgregor 1933: 34)

In addition to collecting information regarding customs, legends, beliefs, and governance, Macgregor also took physical measurements on “some hundred and fifty-odd full-blooded Rotumans.” He speculated that “this data on the physical type will be extremely useful for comparative purposes, for the Rotuman native is today as different in his appearance from the native of the neighboring islands of Tonga and Samoa as he is in language and cultural traits” (Macgregor 1933: 37). However, his attempts to conduct archaeological investigations were thwarted by “native sentiment and superstition” (Macgregor 1933: 37), particularly in relation to digging up cemeteries (Macgregor 1932b). The “complex study” of the language, with its “strange vocabulary,” he deferred to the Rotuman grammar and dictionary work in progress by missionary-linguist Rev. C. Maxwell Churchward (Macgregor 1932c).

Macgregor’s tentative outline for an ethnography on Rotuma included human geography, archaeology, material culture, daily activities and customs, social organization, land holding, religion, legends, and physical anthropology (see Macgregor 1932a). Importantly, he concluded that “migrations to Rotuma from all points of the compass imply a cultural and racial mixture whose existence has been recognized for a long time. The complete story of the island’s origin and history will not be easily solved due to this very multiplicity of sources” (Macgregor 1933: 37). Nonetheless, he reluctantly suggested that his data “give some clues to two migrations or two distinct populations,” the last one from Tonga and the earlier one also Polynesian, “perhaps from the earliest drift that penetrated Melanesia to Fiji, and then worked eastward” (Macgregor 1932b).

In some ways, the availability of Macgregor’s notes in their original form enhances their value for contemporary researchers. The diversity of opinion expressed by individual Rotumans on various topics has not been masked by the ethnographer’s summarizing hand. In addition, Macgregor recorded the names of his consultants for much of the information in his notes. Howard has been able to identify many of the consultants according to their parentage and locality, thereby re-grounding their varying perspectives.

Macgregor went on to obtain a PhD from Harvard in 1935 for research with a Native American tribe and spent the major portion of his career devoted to applied anthropology in government service. Although this included two years (1949–1951) as a Pacific specialist with the US Department of Interior Office of Territories, most of his government service was concerned with American Indian tribes.

### **Aubrey Parke (1925–2007)**

Aubrey Parke was born in Moreton, Dorset, England, and displayed an interest in archaeology and folklore from a very young age. He attended Lincoln College, Oxford, where he read Greats: Greek and Latin. On leaving Oxford he spent a year in London at the Institute of Archaeology and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in preparation for service in the British Colonial Service. In 1951 he was posted to Fiji, where he worked for twenty years, serving as district officer in several localities, including Rotuma for six months in 1964. Although Aubrey's main interests remained in archaeology and folklore, he collected a wide range of cultural information while serving in Rotuma. He also had a talent for language acquisition, including a fluency in Fijian and a working knowledge of Rotuman. In his first publication following his stay on Rotuma, entitled "Rotuma: A Brief Anthropological Survey," he described his research in the following way:

Administrative duties took me into many parts of Rotuma, not only in the coastal area where people now live but also in the interior where people are building roads and developing their coconut plantations. During spare time, visits were paid to many historical sites on the island of Rotuma and also on the small islands lying near by. I acquired a working knowledge of the Rotuman language and made the acquaintance of the seven *Gagaj 'es itu'u* (district chiefs), the forty-odd *Fā 'es ho'aga* (chiefs of the sub-districts), and other leading personalities. (Parke 1964: 436)

Parke reported paying particular attention to house mounds, fortified sites, caves, and cemeteries. Perhaps because as district officer he was in a position of authority, he was able to obtain permission to open some graves and reported on burial positions and grave goods. In addition to the objects he found in graves or in house mounds, he made a collection of surface finds and objects. He reported that the district chiefs and their people assisted in collecting a wide array of material objects, including some that were seldom if ever in use at the time and others that were in common use, all of which, along with objects of archaeological interest, he deposited in the Fiji Museum in Suva (Parke 1964: 437).



Parke, in contrast to Gardiner, Hocart, and Macgregor, was interested in culture change, as he explained in his preface to *Rotuma: Custom, Practice and Change*:

In investigating, in 1964, what was then regarded in Rotuma as “custom,” I explored first, the extent to which custom was flexible and liable to be affected by change and conflict; secondly, the extent to which practice was acceptable when it diverged from custom; and thirdly, the stage at which divergent practice came to be accepted as custom. (Parke 2003: ix)

In addition to a 48-page book on Rotuman idioms (1971), Parke went on to publish two major contributions to the Rotuman literature: *Seksek ‘e Hatana—Strolling on Hatana: Traditions of Rotuma and Its Dependencies with Excerpts from an Archaeologist’s Field Notebook* (2001), and *Rotuma: Custom, Practice and Change: An Exploration of Customary Authorities, the Kinship System, Customary Land Tenure and Other Rights* (2003).

*Seksek ‘e Hatana* is an edited collection of myths, legends and stories as well as some ceremonial speeches and songs that Parke gathered from several named Rotumans during his time on the island in 1964. Many of the tales refer to specific places in Rotuma and its offshore islets (called “dependencies” in the Rotuma Deed of Cession of 1881), including Hatana, which is central to some origin myths of Rotuma. The volume also includes excerpts from Parke’s archaeological field notebook. His approach sets the traditions of Rotuma in an archaeological and geographical landscape, and in the context of ceremonial and traditional activities, signs, and omens.

As noted on the back cover of *Rotuma: Custom, Practice and Change*, this 2003 book “provides a detailed analysis of the traditional social organisation and land tenure systems on Rotuma and how these have been affected by external influences and the transition from traditional to colonial to post-colonial government.” It includes an analysis of practices that “diverge from traditional customs and accepted norms in the allocation of land, fishing and farming rights, access to water, other resources and communal facilities” and the impact of these changes on the island’s complex kinship system.

After Fiji became independent on 10 October 1970, Parke settled in Canberra, taking the post of administrative officer for the recently established Canberra College of Advanced

Education (now the University of Canberra). He obtained an MA at Australian National University in 1981 for a thesis on clause structure in the Fijian language (Parke 1981). After retiring in 1990, he went on for a PhD, which, despite deteriorating health, he was awarded in 2006 at the age of 81. He died a few months later.

### **Elizabeth (Elisapeti) Kafonika Makarita Inia (1925–2009)**

Elizabeth Inia was the first Rotuman woman to be professionally trained as a teacher, and she continued to teach till the end of her life. She was also a lifelong student of Rotuman language and culture. She contributed to innumerable sessions to share her knowledge, and learn from others, in variety of contexts both on the island and among Rotumans in Fiji. Many of her students were, or went on to become, successful professionals and community leaders.

Born and raised on Rotuma, Elizabeth left at age fifteen to attend Ballantine Memorial School in Suva, then the Teacher Training Institute in Davuilevu, and finally the secondary school now called Lelean Memorial, also in Davuilevu, just outside Suva. After passing her Senior Cambridge Examination and obtaining her Grade IV Teachers Certificate in 1945, she taught at Annesley Girls' School in 1946 before returning to Rotuma to prepare for her marriage to Wilson Inia. In 1947 Wilson was appointed headmaster at Richmond Methodist School in Kadavu; Elizabeth accompanied him and taught there as well, but without receiving a salary.

In 1953, the Inias returned to Rotuma, and Elizabeth taught at a series of district schools on the island over the next twenty-four years: Motusa (1953-1954), Malhaha (1955-1969), and Paptea (1970-1977). Starting in 1977, Elizabeth worked for the Fiji Ministry of Education Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) to prepare Rotuman language materials with a view toward perpetuating the language among the children of Rotuman migrants to Fiji. She retired from the CDU in 1985 but was then called back to continue her work with them; she finally retired again in 1988.

Even after retirement, Elizabeth unfailingly accommodated individuals of all kinds who showed up at her doorstep—priests, anthropologists, linguists, ethnomusicologists, government officials, and the tiny tots who attended her own little “kindy” (kindergarten/preschool)—instructing them in whatever they needed to know about Rotuman language and culture. A gifted writer, she published two books as sole author, *Fāeag 'Es Fūaga: Rotuman Proverbs* (Inia 1998)

and *Kato‘aga: Rotuman Ceremonies* (Inia 2001). She was also lead author of the multiauthored *A New Rotuman Dictionary* (Inia and others 1998).

*Fäeag ‘Es Fūaga* consists of 473 sayings collected by Inia over a period of years. Each saying is presented in the Rotuman language with an accompanying English translation. The saying is then explained in Rotuman with English translation. In addition, a description of relevant contexts in which each saying is used is presented (in English).

*Kato‘aga* is composed of two sections. Part one contains descriptions of the main components of ceremonies, including material goods such as fine mats, food cooked in an earth oven, chiefly tables, garlands, anointing oil, and turmeric; key roles played by knowledgeable elders and chiefs; and the fundamentals of ritual etiquette. Part two consists of descriptions of particular ceremonies, including those associated with life events (birth, marriage, death, etc.) and rituals pertinent to the installation of and ritual homage to chiefs. To provide a deeper understanding for her descriptions, Inia added as an appendix an essay on Rotuman spirituality that elaborates on the cosmological assumptions underlying the ceremonies. A second appendix includes a number of traditional chants. In her foreword to this volume, Inia acknowledged not only the multiple oral and written sources she drew on but also the fact that other Rotumans could well have different experiences and perspectives: “In this book, I have tried my best to synthesize the knowledge conveyed to me by my parents, relatives, and fellow Rotumans with archival sources. The result may be unique, but I hope it will stimulate other Rotumans to discuss issues of importance to preserving traditional knowledge, and perhaps to produce their own accounts and interpretations.”

*A New Rotuman Dictionary* (Inia and others 1998) is a revision and update of the vocabulary portion of *Rotuman Grammar and Dictionary* by C. Maxwell Churchward, which was published in 1940. Although the original version only contained a Rotuman-to-English dictionary, the reissue includes an English-to-Rotuman word list as well.

### **Alan Howard (1934– ) and Jan Rensel (1951– )**

*Alan Howard:* An American by birth, I obtained an MA in anthropology from Stanford University in 1958 and chose to do my doctoral dissertation research in Rotuma. I arrived in Rotuma in December 1959 after spending four months in Suva, Fiji, awaiting transportation, stayed for one year on the island, then conducted an additional eight months doing fieldwork

among Rotuman emigrants to Fiji. In graduate school at Stanford I had developed a strong interest in psychological anthropology. Having received support for my doctoral fieldwork from the National Institute for Mental Health in Washington, DC, I intended to focus on cultural practices associated with death and mourning. However, a recently failed colonial government land commission had Rotumans up in arms and eager to express their views on the subject of land tenure, so I ended up writing my PhD dissertation on that topic. In addition, like the researchers before me, I took comprehensive notes on all aspects of Rotuman life, organizing them according to the *Outline of Cultural Materials* prepared by George Peter Murdock and his colleagues (1945) to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons. While in Fiji, I also reviewed published and archival sources for a historical perspective, but, unlike many of my predecessors, my primary research focus was contemporary social life.

I also differed from earlier researchers in terms of those with whom I interacted on a regular basis. Gardiner and Hocart, especially, had consulted primarily with chiefs; I, on the other hand, resided with a family headed by an untitled man in Itu'muta district on the western end of the island. In Rotuma, the west is associated with common people in contrast to the eastern, chiefly districts. Because of the suspicion of the people toward the colonial government in the wake of the land commission fiasco, I also distanced myself from sponsorship by the colonial government. I participated as much as possible in the normal activities of Rotuman daily life.

After two years of research, I left Fiji, eventually finding academic positions in Hawai'i at the Bishop Museum, the East-West Center, and ultimately the University of Hawai'i. Over the next twenty-six years I published twelve articles and a book based on what I had learned during my original fieldwork. I used a variety of approaches depending on the topics addressed, for instance, a cognitive analysis of the decision-making process when land rights were at issue (Howard 1963) or in adoptions (Howard 1970a); a historical analysis of changes in the Rotuman system of land tenure (Howard 1964); and behavioral learning theory in my first book, *Learning to Be Rotuman* (Howard 1970b). Two of my papers concerning Rotuman myth and chieftainship reflect the influence of Marshall Sahlins and French structuralism (Howard 1985, 1986).

In 1987 I returned to Rotuma for the first time for a two-week visit, accompanied by my wife, Jan Rensel, an American scholar who had recently completed her master's degree in anthropology at the University of Hawai'i.

*Jan Rensel*: Enchanted with the island and the people I met during that visit in 1987, I decided to also pursue PhD research on Rotuma, focusing on social relationships. Between 1988 and 1991, I conducted research on the impact of increasing access to cash on reciprocal exchange between households (Rensel 1994). This required compiling the island's economic history from archival sources as well as surveys, a household census, interviews, and observations of contemporary exchange practices. In addition, because Rotuman society today is multi-local (with approximately four times as many Rotumans living outside Rotuma as on the island), exchange relationships with emigrant Rotumans formed a key part of my study.

We have returned to Rotuma many times now, for periods ranging from a week or so to six months. Besides Itu'muta, we have stayed for extended periods in two other districts: Oinafa (at the northeastern end of the island) and Hapmafau, Itu'ti'u (on the southern shore), and visited in all other districts. We have continued to do collaborative research in Rotuma and among Rotumans abroad, which has resulted in numerous co-authored publications, including the book *Island Legacy: A History of the Rotuman People* (Howard and Rensel 2007).

Our research since 1987 has focused on the changes that occurred on the island since Howard's initial fieldwork as well as the ongoing changes taking place from 1987 to the present. Our interests continue to include Rotuman migrant communities in New Zealand, Australia, Hawai'i, Canada, the US mainland, and Europe. Since 1987, in addition to *Island Legacy*, we have published thirty-five articles or book chapters about Rotumans.

Increasingly, though, our efforts have turned from writing *about* Rotumans to writing (and otherwise working) *for* Rotumans. For example, Howard wrote a biography of an inspirational Rotuman leader, Wilson Inia (Howard 1994), especially for a Rotuman audience. We also worked closely with Elizabeth Inia to edit and produce camera-ready copy of her works on Rotuman culture for publication—works for which she is the sole author (Inia 1998, 2001). Also, in 1996 Howard created a website as a service to members of the transnational Rotuman community (for details, see Howard 1999, 2002). Besides a news page, bulletin board, photo albums, sound files, maps, background essays, and information about recent publications about Rotuma, he has made available a searchable online version of the English-Rotuman wordlist from Churchward (1940), Macgregor's 1932 field notes, and the most important (and otherwise hard-to-find) nineteenth-century publications about Rotuma. In addition, all of our published

articles about Rotuma are available. We conceive of this as part of a repatriation project aimed at making as much information about Rotuma available to the now-global Rotuman community. As part of this overall project, in the UHM Hamilton Library Pacific Collection we are creating a physical and online Rotuma Archive that includes our field notes as well as documents, photos, and other materials we have collected regarding Rotuma over the years; the online version of the archive will be accessible to Rotumans wherever they may be.

As our primary stance has shifted from one of objective research to one of service to the Rotuman community, of which we now feel a part, the question arises: Are we outsiders because of our origins and our blood—or are we insiders (as many Rotumans consider us to be) because of our long-term engagement, our informally adopted children and grandchildren, accumulated knowledge, shared histories, and personal, lasting commitment to the Rotuman people?

### **Vilsoni Hereniko (1954– )**

Born and raised on Rotuma for the first sixteen years of his life, Vilsoni Hereniko developed a lifelong fascination with story telling. He attended Malhaha High School, where Elizabeth Inia was an influential teacher, before being awarded a scholarship by the Rotuma Council to study at Queen Victoria School in Fiji. After earning a bachelor's degree and a graduate certificate in education from the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji, Hereniko taught English and history at Queen Victoria School. He was awarded a Commonwealth scholarship to pursue a master's degree in drama-in-education at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in England. When Hereniko returned to Fiji, he worked for the Ministry of Education before joining the USP faculty, teaching literature, drama-in-education, and theatre arts. At the same time, Hereniko began writing and directing several plays, reflecting on life in multicultural Fiji from a variety of local perspectives.

While working toward his PhD in literature and language, Hereniko read a great many cultural anthropological accounts of other Pacific Islands, with a particular focus on the forms of indigenous theater in Polynesia, leading to his 1990 doctoral dissertation, titled "Polynesian Clowns and Satirical Comedies." Hereniko's 1995 book *Woven Gods: Female Clowns and Power in Rotuma* focuses on the role of the *han mane 'ak sū* (female clown) who traditionally performs at weddings in Rotuma and her power in that context to temporarily subvert the usual power relations between chiefs and commoners, men and women. He also tied his analysis to the

special status accorded to women weaving *apei*, the fine pandanus mats that are essential for Rotuman ceremonial exchanges. Ever the storyteller, Hereniko acknowledged that *Woven Gods* is a “playful, subversive ethnography” (1995: 141), in which he drew on both his own experience of being Rotuman and his extensive research to weave together ethnographic description, fiction, myth, interviews, and analysis to express both “objective” and “subjective” truths about clowning in Rotuma as well as Rotuman ways of being and knowing.

Building on his experiences as a playwright and scholar, Hereniko also turned to filmmaking. He wrote, directed, and coproduced Fiji’s first-ever (and so far, only) feature film, the award-winning *Pear ta ma ‘on Maf (The Land Has Eyes)* (Hereniko 2004). Filmed entirely on Rotuma, with a mostly Rotuman cast and crew, the movie gives viewers a closeup perspective of life on the island in the 1960s. The events and experiences of the protagonist in the film were informed by Hereniko’s life growing up on the island. Through the course of the story of a young woman determined to right a wrong done to her father and find her own path in life, Rotuman values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices are acted out. The film also revises and updates some of Hereniko’s earlier observations and interpretations of Rotuman culture and history, most notably the founding oral tale that opens the film.

Hereniko joined the faculty of the University of Hawai‘i–Mānoa (UHM) in 1991, teaching for nineteen years in the Center for Pacific Islands Studies including two years as its director. He then served as director of the USP Oceania Center for Arts, Culture, and Pacific Studies in Fiji before returning to the UHM to take up a position as professor in the Academy for Creative Media. He has authored or edited numerous academic books and articles on Oceanic literature, film, art, culture, and the politics of representation.

## **Conclusion**

To the extent that we can recognize a trend in the approaches of the sequence of “ethnographers” discussed above, it would be a shift from reconstructing the “traditional” culture (inclusive of institutions, customs, and practices), based mainly on the knowledge and memories of elderly Rotumans, to a concern for the contemporary culture. Gardiner, Hocart, and Macgregor, for example, all were engaged in trying to comprehend a wide range of “traditional” customs, beliefs, and practices as they existed prior to European intrusion and the changes that contact brought about—but for different reasons. Gardiner, as a naturalist, apparently was concerned

with providing an accurate description of life on Rotuma for its own sake, as a contribution to general knowledge. At any rate, he gave no additional reason and appears to have approached his project without any particular theoretical preconceptions. Hocart, although primarily interested in chieftainship and the legends, genealogies, and customs that supported that institution, recorded information about a wide array of Rotuman beliefs and behaviors. Macgregor did likewise, but within a framework of historical connectivity to other island groups.

Parke, as district officer, was engaged in research from a rather different vantage point—a position of authority not enjoyed by any of the others discussed in this paper. He shifted the focus of research from a rather static view of the culture to one engaged in continual change in response to both externally introduced and internal contingencies. We have continued and expanded this concern for change by placing most of our writings in historical perspective and extending our research to Rotumans' adaptations to Fiji and overseas contexts. Furthermore, by returning to the island repeatedly since 1987, we have seen changes not only since Howard's 1960 experiences but in a shorter, year-to-year, time frame. The result is a view of Rotuman culture that is much more dynamic than the views of Gardiner, Hocart, and Macgregor.

A second development is the degree of researcher involvement in the Rotuman community, from that of detached observers, to that of someone occupying a formal position on Rotuma like Parke, to our emotionally grounded long-term engagement within what is now a global Rotuman community supported by widespread involvement in social media such as Facebook (see Howard 1999, 2017, 2019). Rotuman researchers Inia and Hereniko drew on their own life experiences but also incorporated the fruits of research by others to provide expanded perspectives.

Although in this paper we single out Inia and Hereniko as Rotuman “ethnographers” of note, it is important to point out that quite a few other Rotumans have written accounts of Rotuman customs, though on a more limited scale and focus. For example, the anthology titled *Rotuma: Hanua Pumue (Precious Land)*, published in 1991, includes articles by ten Rotuman authors; besides Vilsoni Hereniko, these were Anselmo Fatiaki, Ieli Irava, John Tanu, Tiu Malo, Mamatuki Itautoka, Daniel Fatiaki, Mosese Kaurasi, Lavenia Kaurasi, and Maniue Vilsoni. (An earlier edition of this anthology, published in 1977, was titled *Rotuma: Split Island* and included most of the items in the later edition.) The number of Rotuman scholars who are currently doing research on various aspects of their culture continues to increase, including Makareta Mua



(2007) and Jason Titifanue (2017), both of whom have completed master's theses based on research into Rotuman culture. Their work and that of other researchers focusing on Rotuma serve both to contribute to knowledge and to support the formulation of strategies to preserve the physical and cultural environments that have served Rotumans so well over the years.

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