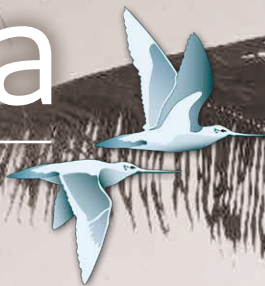


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“TIKI TALK”: VOICES AND MEANINGS OF THE ‘I‘IPONA STATUES, HIVA‘OA (MARQUESAS ISLANDS)

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to show how current knowledge concerning the tiki (sculptures) of the ‘I‘ipona me‘ae (temple site), in Hiva‘oa (Marquesas Islands), has been constructed on the basis of a constant flow of information and “talk” circulated over time. Encounters between locals and non-Marquesan specialists, sometimes resulting in differing stories or misunderstandings, have led to the affirmation of some cultural versions of history over others and have allowed certain individuals to legitimise themselves as “cultural bridge-makers” (*passseurs culturels*). Hidden for decades in vegetation and the subject of cultural loss and demonisation, the ‘I‘ipona me‘ae was restored in the 1990s and more recently included with other areas in the Marquesas project for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This marks a new attitude towards heritage that must be seen in connection with the process of Marquesan “cultural awakening” (since the 1980s) and the important role of archaeology in recovering ancient traditional places, but also within a broader tourist gaze and Western pop trends of commercialised “tiki images”. This article focuses on the cultural contexts and protagonists that have influenced the production of local legends (*ha‘akakai*) or stories as well as artistic and devotional attitudes towards the statues that have evolved. By exploring the liminal zones of encounter between native and foreign witnesses in both oral and written sources, we attempt to examine “tiki talk” and thus several negotiated, hybrid and often creative interpretations of the traditional past.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, myth-making, *passseurs culturels*, anthropology of memory

“But what about the South Seas paradise”, I said, “What do you think about that?” He cracked a big smile and answered, “If you know what kind of soup the customers like, then of course you serve that soup.” (Heyerdahl 1938, quoted in Melander 2020: 167)

The ‘I‘ipona me‘ae (temple site), in the Puamau valley (Hiva‘oa) (Fig. 1), was among those sites recently included in the Marquesas proposal deposited to UNESCO in January 2023 by the Comité national des Biens français du Patrimoine mondial (National Commission for French World Heritage

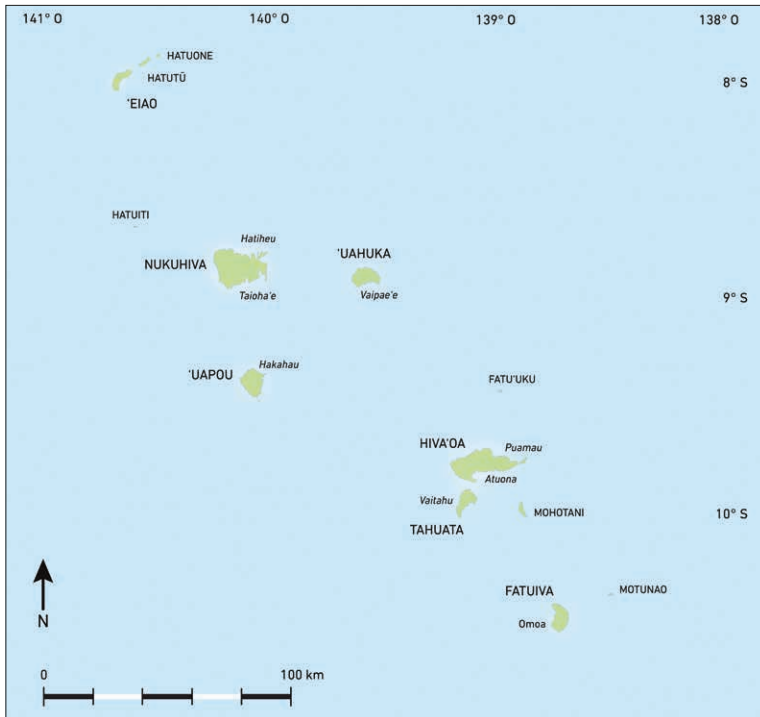


Figure 1. Te Henua ‘Enana (or Te Fenua ‘Enata)—the Marquesas. ©Taku‘ua Services.

Assets) that is part of the French permanent delegation to UNESCO.¹ This attention to heritage within the UNESCO framework is merely the most recent chapter in a movement to promote Marquesan culture that began to flourish in the 1980s and 1990s as part of a cultural revival thanks to Matava’a o Te Fenua ‘Enata (the Marquesan Arts Festival). In 1991, for the third edition of the festival, at Hiva’oa, the ‘I’ipona site was chosen for some of the events, and the site became the target of a restoration campaign promoted by the cultural association Motu Haka and financed by the French Polynesian government as well as the French state, the project serving as “affirmation of [Marquesans’] cultural identity through recognition of their archaeological heritage” (Ottino-Garanger 1996: 346). In this process of “cultural awakening”, a renewed attention to the past has taken the form of an

institutional policy of heritage conservation as well as practices, discourses and interpretations of history interweaving oral versions with written ones produced over time by non-Marquesan observers and specialists. In other words, our aim is to historicise the circulation of content and information about the 'I'ipona tiki (statues), which has often influenced in one way or another the constructed repertoires of both academics and local actors. In examining these aspects, we will also try to underline how these processes have been the basis of and continue to feed local legends (ha'akakai) as well as "talk", i.e., "discursive practices" (Obeyesekere 2005: 1), that reveal fanciful or imagined stories about tiki and their presumed historical and semantic origin. These discourses not only problematise the classic dialectic between written and oral traditions but also invite us to explore the grey zones—the borrowings, backgrounds and sometimes misunderstandings—on which local perceptions of heritage are created and then circulated. These repertoires suggest ways to reflect on how, faced with a context strongly marked by loss and oblivion, disciplines such as history, archaeology and ethnology become firmer anchors, forms of "scientific truths" to be adhered to in order to navigate through the vagueness of interpretations of the past. In considering such cross-references, we will try to underline how personal relations with scholars allowed some local informants to enrich their cultural knowledge and to earn recognition within the community as authoritative tradition-bearers. In addition to showing the research done by the various scholars who have been interested in the 'I'ipona site, we will provide space for more organic versions of local history, questioning the context of their production. Contemporary attempts to make sense of the past cannot be addressed as the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) or as "self-conscious ideology" (Sahlins 1993: 4) but rather as deeply rooted and meaningful perceptions of the hybrid or impure relationship (Clifford 1988) that binds Indigenous people to foreigners.² In the folds of this connection, one can grasp and problematise the dynamics of forgetting and breaking with the past as well as the premises of and ways in which recovery of the past has taken place. Finally, by reflecting on the conservation, preservation and valorisation of the 'I'ipona tiki, we will consider how these anthropomorphic images have spread into mass culture and pop fashion, a development that stands in stark contrast to attitudes of respect and sentimental and artistic connections to the history the tiki continue to embody. We will conclude by discussing how this case study is an attempt to show how the process of constructing knowledge is the outcome of a historical stratification of understandings, interpretations and actions that influence and sometimes conflict with each other while contributing to the complexity of historical meaning-making.

TIKI IN THE “FOREST” OF INTERPRETATIONS: HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS
OF TRAVELLERS, ETHNOLOGISTS AND LOCALS

The ‘I‘ipona me‘ae (Fig. 2) is located at the foot of To‘ea peak in the Puamau valley in the western part of a great caldera, on a piece of land known to the locals as ‘O Toahonu. The structure consists of two large main terraces and two adjacent areas to the south and north (Chavaillon and Olivier 2007: 117–18; Ottino-Garanger 1996: 349). The me‘ae owes its fame to the monumental tiki and other archaeological findings mentioned in written accounts and brought to light during the restoration in 1991. “Eight sculptures were initially known, with work carried out increasing this figure to eighteen, including five statues, ten heads and three fragments of sculptures, as well as a few petroglyphs” (Ottino-Garanger 1996: 358).

Among the earliest documents mentioning the land on which ‘I‘ipona is located are letters written by the first Indigenous Hawaiian Christian minister and a pioneering missionary to the Marquesas, James Kekela or Kekelaokalani, who became the owner of the site and spent 46 years in the Puamau valley before returning to Hawai‘i.³

The first description of the Puamau tiki appeared in 1895 in an article by English adventurer Frederick W. Christian, a field correspondent of the

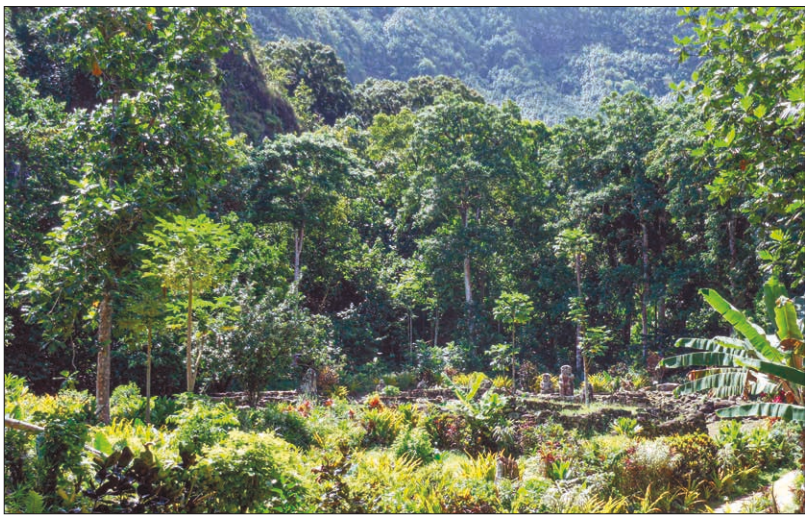


Figure 2. ‘I‘ipona. Photograph by Michael J. Koch, 2011.

Polynesian Society of New Zealand. After collecting notes on the dialects of the western Pacific, he travelled to Tahiti and the Marquesas to do similar work (Christian 1910: 17–18). Christian had visited the valley three times and, in his book *Eastern Pacific Lands: Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands*, he described ‘I’ipona:

Far up the valley, near the residence of the local queen, is an old sacred enclosure ... a most interesting relic of a grey antiquity, within which, surrounded by a dense copse of coffee shrubs, planted of late years by Kekela, stand two giant stone figures, the statues of *Taka-Ii* and his wife *Fau-Poe*, a monarch of might, a grim warrior in days of yore, when the *Pahatai*, “People of the Beach”, were a powerful clan, about the time of the great migration from Hiva-Oa to Tahuata Island by the sons of *Nuku*, some forty generations ago. To this very day natives secretly visit the spot to pay their respects to the departed hero, who still holds sway as a formidable local genius. (Christian 1910: 123)

Christian is therefore the first to mention the names of two tiki, pointing out that the representations of Taka‘i‘i (Taka-Ii),⁴ a chief (hakā‘iki) or local warrior (toa), and his companion Faupoe (Fau-Poe) had been erected in a period when the clan he encountered, Pa‘ahatai (Pahatai), was powerful. This period was forty generations earlier and contemporary with the great migration to Tahuata of the sons of Nuku, one of the mythical characters of oral stories concerning the island of Hiva‘oa. Taka‘i‘i and Faupoe appear in the *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* by Edward Tregear (1891), a member of the Polynesian Society of New Zealand, which had commissioned and reviewed Christian’s fieldwork. Tregear submitted notes and queries, as was customary in Victorian anthropology (Urry 1972, 1984), to Christian.⁵ In a section of the appendix devoted to “Marquesan Genealogy”, Tregear mentions 145 pairs of names of mythical descendants provided by Tahia-toho-tie, a chiefess of Hiva‘oa, collected by the surveyor-general in Hawai‘i, William D. Alexander (Tregear 1891: 671–72).⁶ This long sequence of 290 names was ordered in a binary manner according to sex beginning with Pupu (m) and Hoho (f). Among various cosmogonic figures that appear are “Tiki” (number 100), “Nuku” (134) and the pair “Ta-ka-ii” and “Fau-poe” (143). As Chave-Dartoen and Saura (2019: 95) remark, “[n]ot all Marquesan cosmic genealogies are so poetic or clearly elaborate. Some simply have a binary aspect, stringing together the names of cosmic entities, islands, gods and humans.” However, Polynesian genealogical accounts, including simpler or more narrative Marquesan ones, such as Christian’s (1895), “share a common structure in which the origins of the land, the deities and humankind are embedded in the wider story of how the world came to be” (Chave-Dartoen and Saura 2019: 92).

Christian himself mentions an ordered list obtained from Pahai and his

daughter Tia-Fai-Pue from the Hapatoni valley, which dates the settlement of the island of Tahuata back to the descendants of Nuku and Uia-ei. Confirming, like Tregear, that the name of the ancestral patriarch Nuku only comes 134th in the genealogical records of Hiva'oa, Christian thus stated that "one of the descendants (the ninth) from Nuku is Taka-Ii, the great demi-god and hero of Puamau Valley ... from Tia-Fai-Pue's family record, and allowing ... an antiquity of some 1,600 years, we pretty exactly fix the date of an important period in the history of the Southern Marquesas" (Christian 1895: 194-95). Moreover, beyond this attempt to date 'I'ipona he took the first photograph of Taka'i'i, which was published in the *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies' Journal* in 1895 and which probably inspired Paul Gauguin during a stopover in Auckland on his way to Tahiti. Indeed, the French painter visited the Auckland Museum and Art Gallery, where he drew some sketches of Māori art, among which one strongly resembles Taka'i'i (Nicholson 1995).

In 1896 Taka'i'i and another sculpture, Maki'itauapepe, were photographed (Fig. 3) and measured by German explorer, anthropologist and art collector Arthur Baessler. In his initial account of Maki'itauapepe he assumes that it is a stone representation of a woman giving birth:

She is 1.75 m long, lies outstretched, holding her head bent back with her hands, and carries the child on her body as a 0.48 m high block, 2.20 m in circumference, who is already so disfigured that a Christian cross has been made out of its nose! Under the feet of the statues the block usually continues unhewn in order to be able to set this part of the statue into the ground; under



Figure 3. "Tiki Makii Taua Pepe, Hivaoa, Marquesas Inseln" (Baessler 1900: plate XX).

the woman this part is missing, a sign that she has always lain down and has not fallen over by decrepitude. (Baessler 1900: 236)

The following year another German scholar paid a visit to the place and tried to gather information and insights about the various tiki in a more systematic way. During his six-month fieldwork in the Marquesas financed by the Royal Museum for Ethnology of Berlin (Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde), German psychiatrist and ethnologist Karl von den Steinen spent three weeks in Puamau, where he took an interest in the abandoned me‘ae and questioned the inhabitants about the history of the site and the names and meanings of the sculptures. In his quest for a more systematic assessment of local memory he was directed towards “the old leper Pihua, who lived nearby ... [and] was considered the only living authority on the names of the sculptures” (Von den Steinen 1928a: 80). Although Von den Steinen did not provide other information on this influential informant, his notes show an attempt to contextualise the data collected in the field at a time when, as Sir James Frazer said, “descriptive and comparative ethnology had to be kept most rigidly apart” (quoted in Hyman 1962: 229).⁷ As with Antonio from Von den Steinen’s stays in Mato Grosso in Brazil (1884 and 1887) and Tahia‘ote‘ani in the Marquesas, his collaborators are by no means anonymous figures (Trautmann-Waller 2021: 9). Von den Steinen reported the following story about the ‘I‘ipona tiki, told to him by Pihua:

I was told that once three chiefs of the Naiki tribe, Maiauto, Te Eitafafa and Hakienui, had lived here in Iipona; the best known of them was Maiauto, whose wife’s name was Mauionae and whose son was Hahatevai. They got involved in a war with their western neighbours, captured the chief Tiuooh from Etuoho in the district of Hanapaoa (mid-north coast) and consumed him as heana [human sacrifice]! But from Hanaupe and Moea in the SW came the avengers, the brothers Pahivai and Mataeiaha. They drove Maiauto and his Naiki people out of the place, who dispersed to Vaihoi, Atuona and the island of Uahuka. The victors made the place tapu [taboo]; they erected in memory a meae with two houses for the priests who lived there, and decorated the terraces with large stone tiki. (Von den Steinen 1928a: 77)

Apart from mentioning the two terraces of the me‘ae dedicated to the victorious tribes,⁸ Von den Steinen counted eight sculptures, including statues and heads, and affirmed that each tiki had its own name, often related to that of the sculptor who made it. Examples are the 190 cm statue lying behind Taka‘i‘i (Christian’s Fau-poe), which he reported to be called Te Ana-chuehu (Te Ana‘ehu‘ehu, dim cavern), and Te Haatoumahi-a-Naiki (Te Ha‘atoumahi a Naiki), also headless, which “would have been that of a tuhuka [master]” (p. 80). Moreover, according to his informant, the term Taka‘i‘i would mean “red with rage” because the population would have taken three full months

to drag the heavy block into place "working with all their strength" (p. 78). Von den Steinen also specifies that the tiki did not represent an *etua* (deified ancestor) or a warrior or demigod, which Christian had claimed evoked the "wars of Taka-Ii in East Hivaoa" (Christian 1895: 194–95). Not certain which tiki Christian was referring to when he spoke of Faupoe, Von den Steinen hypothesised that it was the headless tiki beside the latter, i.e., "Te Tovae-Noho-Ua [Te Tova'enoho'ua] ... tropicbird-dwelling-hole" (p. 79). Furthermore, Pihua explained that the head with the open mouth was that of "Tiwoo [Tiwo'o], the chief of the Etuoho and the son of Etutete". Von den Steinen interprets its facial expression as one of a victim caught and roasted by the Naiki people (Von den Steinen 1928a: 80).

Finally, he attempted to describe Makii-Taui-Pepe (Maki'itauapepe),⁹ "the strangest sculpture in the Marquesas, if not all of Polynesia", which is said to represent a woman dying in giving birth to O Poiti-E-Mai-Haaatua, a deified child. Considering the tiki's block as the child, Von den Steinen interpreted the flat carving on the lateral sides as the child's legs whose "crooked feet are turned inwards and upwards in the direction of the woman's face, indicating the head's position at birth" (p. 82). In addition to this, he assumed that another figure on the underside of the block was "a small tiki with raised arms and curved legs" and admitted that "if it were not for the legs in relief, one would think that the little tiki image was the child depicted in its proper birth position" (p. 82). This is why he challenged Baessler for his interpretation of the child's nose as a Christian cross and not as a part of the above-mentioned little tiki. However, according to Von den Steinen, the statue lying on the ground was not in its original vertical position. Despite Baessler's hypothesis and local talk about the woman in childbirth, through his remarks Von den Steinen contested this representation of Maki'itauapepe and revealed its contradictions. This interpretation shows how, despite the precision of his work, Von den Steinen gave credence to local narratives (probably heard by Pihua himself) and, through his writings, in turn influenced later explanations about the statue.

Von den Steinen's interest in "primitive art" (Boas 1930: 7–8) was combined with a historical approach towards data collected in the field, as it shows his attempt to date 'I'ipona on the basis of genealogies told by some of his collaborators. In counting back the number of generations since the time the brothers Pahivai and Matateiaha founded the *me'ae* he contested Christian's exaggerated claim and concluded "that even the cautious must decide to go back only to 1750, and that the bold must be modest in accepting the beginning of the eighteenth century" (Von den Steinen 1928a: 86).

This dating continues to stand almost unaltered, and Von den Steinen's version of the oral history constituted the most systematic frame of reference for many subsequent expeditions. After Von den Steinen's passage, 'I'ipona

was visited in 1920 by American anthropologist and archaeologist Ralph Linton and his colleague Edward S.C. Handy and his wife Willowdean, who were members of the Bayard Dominick Expedition, sent out by the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu. After surveying the site and drawing a detailed plan of it, Linton stated that the complex may have been a me‘ae dedicated to funerary rituals and that the peak of To‘ea served for the final deposition of the bones, although structures for drying bodies (*taha tupapa‘u*) were never found (Linton 1925: 159). His collaborators also told him that “the mana [power] of this structure was so great that after the expulsion of the Naiki even the *ta‘ua* [tau‘a, ritual specialist] of the Pahatais (the modern inhabitants) never dared to enter it, believing that such trespass would be punished by failure of the breadfruit crop” (p. 159). The state of abandonment in which the ruins were found was therefore linked to the inhabitants’ fear of the me‘ae. In particular, the mana was believed to remain strong in some of the body parts that had been removed from the statues, as Linton himself states in his text:

Several figures in this site have been mutilated, and according to native informants the parts broken off and carried away were those in which the mana of the figures was supposed to reside. Thus, the heads of the figure on the edge of the terrace and the largest fallen figure are missing, while the curious female figure ... and Takaii have each lost the left arm. (p. 163)

Beyond these interesting considerations we cannot further venture into the interpretation of these apparently iconoclastic actions. Furthermore, Linton collected new proper names for the tiki used by locals. The statue that Von den Steinen had transcribed as *Te Tovae-Noho-Ua* was referred to as *Mahiauto*, a Naiki chief, interpreted, according to him, as “the cook of *Taka-Ii*”. Despite this, according to another of his collaborators the latter was instead a pregnant woman, *Petetamuimui* (*Petetamu‘imu‘i*). Linton had also heard of *Maki‘itauapepe* to indicate the head of red tuff—very similar to *Manuiota‘a* transferred to the Berlin Museum—that his predecessor had christened *Tiuoo*. Nevertheless, for Linton, *Tiuoo* referred to the headless statue in basaltic trachyandesite (identical to that used for *Maki‘itauapepe*) that *Pihua* had told Von den Steinen was called *Te-Haatoumahi-A-Naiki*.

This apparent confusion is symptomatic of the loss of cultural knowledge concerning the statues. Due to this uncertainty about the past, there may have already been interpretative conflicts among the actors trying to cope with the oblivion of the local history. Evoking the possible history of the chiefdoms, Handy claims that “the Na-iki or some of them had, at a not very distant date, lived in *Pua Ma‘u*, whence they were driven by the *Pa‘aha-tai*, fleeing to *Atu Ona*” (Handy 1923: 27). Linton agrees with this point and reports that the tiki were not erected to commemorate the victory over the

Naiki because, as he was informed, “the largest *me’ae*, that of Oipona, was made by them” (Linton 1925: 159). Linton and Handy had probably come across informants who were in some way connected to Von den Steinen, as Handy reports, stating that a “text of the chants was copied by me from an original manuscript in the possession of Tahia-ti-’a-ko’e of Pua Ma’u, who had written this original from the dictation of her grandfather, Pihua, the last *tuhuna o’ono* [keeper of oral tradition] of Pua Ma’u” (Handy 1923: 316). Handy added that Pihua, in order to avoid certain loss, did his best to pass on his knowledge to his granddaughter, who learned to write at the Catholic mission school and sang funeral songs using the manuscript left by her grandfather. Another important informant at that time was Henry W. Lie (Fig. 4) (Handy 1923: 34; Linton 1925: 136), a Norwegian settler who a few years later served as an extremely valuable source for his more illustrious fellow countryman, Thor Heyerdahl, during the latter’s visit to the valley with his companion, Liv, in 1937.

Lie had been cultivating copra for many years and, thanks to his passion for archaeology and local ethnology, his extensive book collection and his versatility in Marquesan dialects, by the time of Heyerdahl’s visit he had already been an indispensable reference point for the Bayard Dominick Expedition. Although Heyerdahl in *Fatu Hiva: Back to Nature* (1974) had often depicted Lie as a man immersed in isolation and loneliness, his activity as a copra farmer allowed him to be “in regular contact with ‘white men’ every time the schooner from Tahiti stopped by ... [giving him] the opportunity to meet any foreign visitors to the Marquesas Islands, including the Heyerdahls” (Melander 2020: 166). It can therefore be seen that by disembarking from his ship and settling in the Marquesas as a “beachcomber” he played, within the metaphorical framework of the “beach” (Denning 1980, 2004), a fundamental role in the construction of local discourses. By connecting distant worlds and accrediting his version of history within this “contact zone” (Clifford 1997; Pratt 1991), Lie legitimised himself as an authoritative holder of noteworthy knowledge. He can be thus considered as a *passeur culturel* (cultural bridge-maker) (Bénat Tachot and Gruzinski 2001; see also Aria 2007) for his ability to impart stories and interpretations thanks to his relationships with both the locals and white people.

Lie was described as an important influence for the Kon-Tiki theory because in 1937 he showed Heyerdahl images in one of his books of sculptures from the San Agustín site in Colombia (Heyerdahl 1974: 206–20; Melander 2020: 164) that resembled the tiki of ‘I’ipona. These images inspired Heyerdahl to challenge the theory of East Polynesian settlement from the west and instead propose a possible migration from South America (Heyerdahl 1974: 210–20). This conjecture was the basis of the Kon-Tiki experiment, which consisted of sailing on a balsawood raft over 101 days



Figure 4. Henry Lie and his family with Liv Heyerdahl, Puamau, 1937. Collection of Michael J. Koch.

from the Peruvian coast to East Polynesia to prove that the islands may have been settled from the east instead of entirely from the west of the Pacific. The connections between the Marquesas and South America were investigated in 1956 by a team of archaeologists seeking to date 'I'ipona in Puamau. During a one-week stay in Puamau, two members of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific, Arne Skjølsvold and Gonzalo Figueroa García Huidobro, made a cast of Taka'i'i for the Kon-Tiki Museum in Oslo (Fig. 5) and fixed the left arm that had broken off of Maki'itauapepe (Heyerdahl 1965). They also carried out excavations and, using charcoal samples, managed to date the occupation of the site to between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In addition, they attempted to compare the tiki with ones at the Paeke site in Taipivai valley on Nuku Hiva (Ferdon 1965), pointing out that for Fau-Poe/Tovae-Noho-Ua/ Mahiauto/Petetamuimui the powerful chest muscles resembled those of the statues of Nuku Hiva, which were "certainly female" (Heyerdahl 1965: 128). In Heyerdahl's opinion, "the fact that both sexes and four completely different names were attributed to this still standing image by the informants of three visitors within slightly more than a quarter of a century, clearly shows that little credence is to be attached to the alleged knowledge of the monuments among the present dwellers in the valley" (Heyerdahl 1965: 128). The question of the sex of the tiki is a complex and problematic issue and has been interpreted according to criteria influenced over time by different discourses. It therefore remains

difficult to make gender assessments concerning the statues of ‘I‘ipona, and to do so we must essentially rely on talk.

Another remark made by Heyerdahl was about the interpretation of the tiki according to their found position, as discussed above for the case of Maki‘itauapepe. In addition to underlining the conflicting records of Baessler and Von den Steinen concerning the different statues’ set-up and pose, he also pointed out that “[t]he misleading information invented by the uninformed native population did not lessen the confusion” (p. 129). When Heyerdahl first saw this statue in 1937, he observed that people had forgotten the “woman giving birth” meaning because at that time it was posed on its block in a horizontal position. As a consequence, this representation became meaningless, as did the cultural practice mentioned by Henry Lie of pregnant women bringing offerings while kneeling in front of the statue (p. 132). Moreover, the engravings at its base, which Von den Steinen recognised as the legs of a deified child, were described by Heyerdahl as mammal figures. On account of Heyerdahl’s hypothesis, these mammals were later believed to be llamas or felines (p. 134). Apart from these observations, the Norwegian expedition pointed out that the most artistically similar counterparts to the ‘I‘ipona tiki were those of Nuku Hiva and Ra‘ivavae in French Polynesia. The Marquesan statues were also reminiscent of the monuments of Zacachún and Guayaquil in Ecuador and those of San Agustín in Colombia, thus



Figure 5. Members of the Norwegian expedition making a cast of Taka‘i‘i in 1956. Courtesy of Brigid Mulloy.

underlining a geographical continuity of anthropomorphic statue models between the Andes and Polynesia (p. 150).

For decades, local versions of history were intertwinings between local oral tradition and the interpretations of ethnologists or archaeologists as well as those of settlers, missionaries and other actors. Indeed, as Melander states, “the foundations of the scientific fields of ethnography, anthropology and for that matter archaeology can be said to rest in and originally depended on the writings, recordings and collections of travellers, initially exploration voyagers and later missionaries ... even after the gentleman amateurs were replaced by professionals” (Melander 2020: 33).

Thanks to their “expert” knowledge, amateurs and specialists thus endorsed the voices of certain local people, allowing the latter to gain authority and consolidate their interpretations of the past. As we will now see, the recent restoration of ‘I‘ipona has allowed some individuals close to archaeologists to strengthen their role as cultural references and to be addressed as “keepers of the tradition”. At the same time, we will try to highlight how the loss of historical knowledge about the tiki, already noted in the early sources, has shaped contemporary local talk. These discourses are characterised by a progressive ignorance of the social and symbolic context of their production, forcing the actors to partially reinvent the past to fill the “voids of history”.

REEMERGING FROM OBLIVION: TIKI IN BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGY, ORAL WITNESSES AND CONTEMPORARY BELIEFS

In 1991, for the third Matava‘a o Te Fenua ‘Enata, a project to restore ‘I‘ipona (Fig. 6) was led by French archaeologist Pierre Ottino-Garanger and historian Marie-Noëlle Ottino-Garanger, with the participation of Vohi Heita‘a, at the time assistant mayor of the municipal section of Puamau, and a team of people from Motu‘ua and Nāhoe valleys.¹⁰ As part of the rediscovery of traditions, archaeology thus becomes a way to turn “*mémoires de pierre*” (stone memories) (Julien *et al.* 1996) into heritage through the inhabitants’ involvement. Indeed, as Ottino-Garanger himself argues, “a restored site gives the satisfaction of being immediately ‘readable’, because it allows everyone to see a concrete result, an immediate usefulness of archaeological research, and encourages the population to better know, understand and safeguard their past” (Ottino-Garanger 1996: 347). With the foundation of the cultural association Motu Haka (1978) and the Matava‘a o Te Fenua ‘Enata festival (1987),¹¹ the study of housing structures and the enhancement of archaeological heritage have taken place alongside a rehabilitation of the past and an identity affirmation process (Ottino-Garanger 2014: 84). The restoration of cultural sites became an important opportunity to reconnect people with their past. In this sense, archaeology played a decisive role in

reconstructing, legitimising and shaping the existence of a piece of local heritage (Smith 2006: 41). Despite this renewed interest, for most of the older generation (people over 60 years of age) the past is still a source of pain and stigma that is difficult to face, whereas for others a respectful attitude towards the ancient ruins may support preserving them in a state of “voluntary abandonment” in the forest and experiencing them as social intimacy (Donaldson 2019). In this regard, Ottino-Garanger affirmed:

The old fears, buried deep in our soul, resurfaced; we were warned! Caution, time and respect within our work were needed more than ever, for too radical a removal of Iipona, clumsy handling, and worse, shocks to and breakage of certain sculptures would certainly have had many consequences. If there were no incidents on the site we would then, in a way, be understood by the elders. (1996: 348)



Figure 6. Restoration of ‘I’ipona in 1991. Courtesy of Direction de la culture et du patrimoine, Tahiti, No. 3 8256.

These points are interesting in order to understand the apparent degree of abandonment of the tiki after the Norwegian expedition and the fear that surrounded the statues. This feeling must be seen in connection with today's meaning of *tapu*, which has moved from being a permanent or temporary ban against manipulating a power (*mana*) considered socially dangerous or contaminating (Thomas 1990: 61–73) to indicating a general prohibition against entering into contact with the past and its manifestations. The nefarious consequences linked to the transgression of displacing certain objects or stepping over *tapu* places in the wild is at the core of stories people believe in and which influence their perception of heritage. Moreover, substantial discontinuity in terms of meanings of the past can be observed today in the prevalence of semantic or factual gaps in knowledge and in the many attempts to fill them by local interlocutors. As far as 'I'ipona is concerned, the latter point is an example of “folk etymology—spontaneous inferences that speakers tend to suggest to explain the origin of a word in their own language, and which are often erroneous or unreliable” (Charpentier and François 2015: 84). Local actors use folk etymologies to decipher terms fallen into disuse and of which the content was lost. On the other hand, the presence of *tapu* can be found in anecdotes in which tiki are endowed with supernatural powers or are responsible for unexplained events, such as photographs in which they do not appear or accidents due to some disrespectful behaviour towards them.

One of the most authoritative voices to whom one can turn to learn about what the locals call *tekao kakiu* (talk about local history) is the aforementioned former assistant mayor of Puamau village, Vohi Heita'a, born in 1928. Vohi had said on several occasions¹² that “I didn't want to identify myself with the Pa'ahatai because ‘coffin of the sea’ refers to something negative. Instead I wanted to link the valley to the Hakatao-o-te-Atea, the ‘people who celebrated until dawn’, who came after the Naiki” (Vohi Heita'a, pers. comm., 10 Nov. 2021). As evidence of the degree of cultural loss, it is difficult to verify, on the basis of Vohi's testimony and interpretation, whether Hakatao-o-te-Atea was really a tribe or rather a place name. Despite this confusion, it is due to him that the term is currently in circulation among the inhabitants of Puamau and is frequently used as the ancient name of the valley (Hakatao o Atea). Similarly, Vohi's assertion that the name Pa'ahatai means coffin of the sea probably corresponds to an erroneous understanding that was later interpreted by joining the terms *pa'aha* (coffin) and *tai* (sea) to give sense to an expression of which the knowledge of its original and cultural background was unknown to him. Based on accounts Vohi heard in childhood of Timaukei, an elderly man from the nearby village of Pehina who died in 1945, Vohi then explained that Taka'i'i was cut out of a huge block of *ke'etū* (red tuff) from the Motonui valley and was “so heavy that

20,000 people carried it to where it is now”. Although this disproportionate number of people is perhaps meant to evoke the weight of the effort, Vohi claims that Taka‘i‘i was the name of a toa (warrior) “companion of Makii-Taau-te-Pepe and father of PePETamuimui and was so called because taka means bond while ‘i‘i means strength, so he represented the strength of the bond between the members of the tribe who sculpted him”. Beyond this interesting attempt to explain the kinship of the tiki and the very meaning of the name Taka‘i‘i, Vohi recounted an episode during the Matava‘a in 1991 when he was preparing two large Marquesan umu (earth ovens) to prove that the statue still retained a supernatural force or mana:

That day it rained a lot, and every time the food was served on the tables, a tapatapa [proclamation] was made in honour to Taka‘i‘i ... with his blessing the first two tables were served without any problems, but forgetting to thank him before the third, the tray spilled on the ground on the way and the rain stopped suddenly, as if the tiki had become angry. (Vohi Heita‘a, pers. comm., 10 Nov. 2021)

The association of Taka‘i‘i’s power with this exceptional event should not here be divorced from the simultaneous presence of the Christian faith, which, in the accounts of many local actors, coexists with a whole range of experiences related to the land, heritage sites and the world of spirits or ancestors (Donaldson 2019).

In this regard, Vohi admitted that “as a Christian believer I never thought I would witness and be convinced of Taka‘i‘i’s power ... because when I was a child, I was afraid of the invisible, and I did not visit the site because the tiki were on the ground”. The man had in fact only heard stories about the me‘ae in the 1930s and 1940s, and his fear of the statues overgrown by vegetation reflected the demonising connotations with which the Church, both Protestant and Catholic, had surrounded the traditional past. Vohi, like other inhabitants of the valley, claimed to have heard the place name ‘I‘ipona for the first time only with Ottino-Garanger’s project to restore the site.¹³ With his help, the head of the tiki Te Ha‘atoumahi a Naiki/Manuiota‘a was found in the nearby scree and, with Ottino-Garanger’s approval, mounted on the statue. Nevertheless, in contrast to the desires of Vohi and others, Ottino-Garanger opposed unearthing the upper part of a broken red tuff statue set upside down in a pebble pavement (Fig. 7), saying that the arrangement is a sign of the major upheavals described in Von den Steinen’s history of ‘I‘ipona. Vohi said, “Pierre Ottino told us that digging here would not be respectful of the history because the tiki is a warrior of the tribe to which the site of ‘I‘ipona belonged ... a tribe mentioned by Steinen” (pers. comm., 10 Nov. 2021). On this point, Ottino-Garanger remarks that

one of the names of this tiki is Maiauto, the name of one of the Naiki chiefs who started a war in which they were defeated. It is striking that out of five tiki, only the one that is broken bears the name of a defeated chief. This would explain both the fact that this tiki was older and broken voluntarily by the Marquesans themselves, the victors, and that it was left visible, exposed broken at the feet of Takaia, one of the prestigious ancestors of the new occupants of this land. (1996: 364)

This interpretation, which certainly influenced Vohi and others, was never confirmed by Von den Steinen or in later sources. This suggests that it was probably the archaeologist's conjecture inspired by Von den Steinen's version, which in circulating among locals had, through its scientific authority, provided local "heritage makers" (Lowenthal 1996) with elements to enrich their talk on their cultural history. This dynamic would thus underline Ottino-Garanger's role as a "passeur" who shared the contents of written records within the village community, allowing some individuals to acquire a certain authority in using these sources for constructing their own oral versions. In the hermeneutic circle of stories and meanings surrounding 'I'ipona, there has indeed been a constant exchange and flow of information over time between the so-called "written" and "oral" sources. Coping with gaps in knowledge involves an effort to salvage the "surviving religious remnants and shreds of mores set adrift" (Segalen [1975] 2001: 115) and to transform them into anchors linking the present to the past and thus filling the gaps left by cultural loss.



Figure 7. Maiauto, the tiki mentioned by Ottino-Garanger and that is part of ongoing "tiki talk". Photograph by Giacomo Nericì, 2021.

On the plurality of accounts concerning the tiki, Rémi Santos, a retired teacher and *tumu pure* (deacon) in the Puamau Catholic parish (Fig. 8), pointed out that “although people say that Taka‘i‘i is a god, a warrior or an ancestor, it is hard to know because there are versions that you hear or you read in Steinen’s book, so that you find yourself surrounded by a general jumble of stories” (Rémi Santos, pers. comm., 22 Nov. 2021). Nevertheless, Rémi reported a very detailed and complex version of the history of ‘T‘ipona (similar to that given by Vohi, with a few differences), which he had received entirely from his stepfather, Tea‘iki Tohetiaatua, another of the elders who had worked with Ottino-Garanger and who later became an indispensable source for both the local community and scholars thanks to his knowledge. Tea‘iki had meticulously transcribed many *ha‘akakai* ‘*enana* (Marquesan legends) he obtained from various informants throughout the archipelago and from texts he consulted at the diocese of Taiohae in Nuku Hiva. The following version of the local story must therefore be seen in the context of this *mélange* of sources, references and interpretations, which the storyteller reformulated to create a coherent and meaningful whole:

Tea‘iki told me that this area today called ‘T‘ipona was once inhabited by the Naiki tribe, while in the nearby valley of Motu Nui lived another tribe whose king was called Tehaumatua and whose queen was Avareipua. During a period of scarcity, the latter tribe asked the Naiki if they could settle in the Puamau valley, and they accepted. *Tumu mei* [breadfruit trees] were abundant in the area, so when harvest season arrived the two rulers asked the Naiki if they could help them. The Naiki allowed them to take the seeds and replant them where they had settled. At the end of the *mei* season, some hungry men decided to steal the Naiki’s *mā* [fermented breadfruit paste], but when they reached the pits [‘*ua mā*] they were taken as prisoners. As a consequence, Tehaumatua and Avareipua decided to leave and resettle their tribe in Vai‘oa, in a place called Matau. Unfortunately, the place had no water source, so the tribe was forced to negotiate a terrible deal with the local chief: they would have to exchange a child for a jug of water. The victims were then sacrificed and eaten by the Vai‘oa tribe. Once the situation became unbearable they were forced to build rafts and leave, and then made it to Tuamotu, Hawai‘i and Rapa Nui. Tehaumatua and Avareipua left for Easter Island, and that’s why even today there are still place names that recall the Vai‘oa land and tribe, as the Rapa Nui dancers at the Matava‘a at Hiva‘oa told us ... At the time they were hosted in Puamau, which was called Hakatao o Atea, “where the king Atea rested”, they built Taka‘i‘i as a gift to thank the queen of the Naiki, Maki‘iveuhina, for the hospitality granted to them. To cut the large block of red *ke‘etū*, a powerful *tau‘a* called Meihano made an *anaunau* [invocation] to support the people as they rolled it on logs to the place where it stands now. Later the Naiki went to war with the Etuoho tribe of Hanapa‘a‘oa and took their chief, Tiuo‘o, as prisoner. Seeking help from Tehaumatua and Avareipua, they discovered that they had left already the valley to settle in Vai‘oa. The

Naiki found themselves alone to face the Etuoho and their allies from the Mo'ea and Hana'upe valleys, together with the terrible warriors from the beach, the Pahatai. The Naiki were defeated in that war and forced to migrate first to Atu'ona and then to Nuku Hiva, 'Uapou and 'Uahuka. The episode of war described by Steinen is more recent than the story about hunger and the theft of the mā. Here in 'I'ipona there were many breadfruit trees, but Pierre Ottino wanted to cut some of them down because he said that the roots would ruin the me'ae. (Rémi Santos, pers. comm., 22 Nov. 2021)

According to Vohi the name of the tribe driven out by the Naiki was either Puapu'u or Meaite, and, contrary to the story told by Rémi and Tea'iki, this tribe settled in Vaihoi, where water and breadfruit were abundant. Moreover, Vohi affirms that after the tribal war, the Naiki moved away from Puamau to seek hospitality in Vaihoi, where the Puapu'u/Meaite demanded they "exchange a child for a certain amount of water. Unable to survive for long, the Naiki were forced to build rafts and migrate to Rangiroa, Tautira or Rapa Nui" (Vohi Heita'a, pers. comm., 10 Nov. 2021). Rémi and Tea'iki's version has the merit of linking this story of the Puapu'u/Meaite tribe to that of the construction of Taka'i'i. If the reference to human effort recalls Vohi's version (as well as Von den Steinen's), the transportation of the red tuff block instead closely resembles the theories on the building of the moai (Rapa Nui's monolithic human statues), perhaps suggesting an influence



Figure 8. Rémi Santos during a visit to 'I'ipona. Photograph by Giacomo Nericì, 2021.

from the Rapanui dancers who participated in the Matava’a in Puamau, as does the name Avareipua, an important ancestor in Rapanui genealogies. However, the legend reflects and gives insight into how the Marquesans dealt with periods of abundance and of famine that led to alliances, conflicts and even displacement of tribes both towards other valleys of the island and elsewhere. To give an account of this and to explain a link between the valleys of Puamau and Ta’a’oa, Tea’iki and Rémi recount a mythical version concerning the etymology of their most important sites:

When the first Polynesian settlers arrived on the shores of Hiva’oa from the west, the first two sites they built were Upeke and ‘I’ipona. At that time there were two queens, Upu of Momo’ei [an ancient name for Ta’a’oa] and Maki’iveuhina of Hakatao-o-Atea. Once Maki’iveuhina finished building the ‘I’ipona me’ae and Upu the Upeke tohua [public feasting centre], a big meeting between the tribes was made to decide which of the two would be the “head”, i.e., the man, and which would be the “feet”, the woman. In order to establish this three challenges were organised on the me’ae of the Naiki. The first one was a hand-to-hand fight between the two best toa, the second was a magical duel between the most fearsome tau’a, and the third a shooting contest with the sling. The final victory of the Naiki allowed them to proclaim themselves as “the head”, and therefore the male side, while Upeke represented the female side, that is, the “feet” of the island. Thanks to the new alliance between the two tribes, the site where the competitions took place was named ‘I’ipona, meaning strength in unity. ‘I’ipona, the man, ruled from then on over the woman, Upeke. From that day on ‘I’ipona, from ‘i’i, strength, and pona, union [strength of the union], is considered the father and Upeke, from ū, milk, and peke, maternal [mother’s milk], the mother of all the paepae [stone house foundations] of Hiva’oa, who are their children. (Rémi Santos, pers. comm., 23 Nov. 2021)

In telling this ha’akakai Rémi is nevertheless aware of the borrowings and influences of the Christian religious framework, which have probably added layers of new meanings and changed its original plot. Indeed, according to his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures as deacon, “the legend resembles the passage of Ephesians 5:23 in the Bible, when Jesus admitted that ‘the man shall be the head of the woman’ ” (pers. comm., 22 Nov. 2021). These telling remarks clearly show the strong impact of the Christian religion on local accounts and the way new elements have been embedded in the latter over the years. Despite this, this legend, amongst other mythological references, is at the heart of the decision to nominate the Ta’a’oa valley, with its vast complex of Upeke, as one of the archipelago’s seven proposed cultural and natural areas for UNESCO World Heritage status. As we next show, this ongoing inscription process is part of a heritage-making strategy and a cultivation of tourism that is sometimes in contrast with artistic and sentimental ways of experiencing the statues.

THE ANCESTORS AND UNESCO: CONSERVING, REPRODUCING AND
REINVENTING THE IMAGE OF TIKI TODAY

After the restoration in 1991, various surveys on the condition of the statues took place under the direction of the Tahiti-based SCP (*Service de la culture et du patrimoine*). In 2006 experts at the *Laboratoire de Recherche des Monuments Historiques de France* noted the critical state of conservation of the tiki and recommended building shelters over them in order to limit further damage (Sigaud-Fourny and SCP 2006). Ten years later, two archaeologists (Tamara Maric and Belona Mou), with the agreement of the owners of the site, the Tissot family, erected the shelters “to limit erosion of the stone caused by exposure to the weather and the sun, stabilise the degree of humidity and thus stop the growth of lichens and mosses over their whole surface” (Sigaud-Fourny and SCP 2016: 18). In 2018 new analyses of the sculptures were carried out by SMBR (*Société méditerranéenne de bâtiment et de rénovation*) and the company *Aslé Conseil*. These led to conservation work with a biocide treatment to strengthen the most fragile areas of each tiki (Fig. 9). These measures are all part of a campaign to enhance the archaeological heritage “with the aim of inscribing ‘I’ipona and other selected sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List” (Tamara Maric, pers. comm., 12 May 2021). Among them, the ‘I’ipona me‘ae is included according to criteria iii, iv and vi of the World Heritage Convention (1972) and above all for the monumentality of its tiki, the largest in French Polynesia. The inscription project includes the nomination of seven terrestrial and marine areas on the islands as mixed sites for their outstanding universal natural and cultural value.¹⁴

The UNESCO valorisation process represents the latest chapter in the interest taken in the conservation of this site since it was inscribed in 1952 on the list of the cultural heritage of the *Établissements français de l’Océanie* (renamed *Polynésie française* (French Polynesia) in 1957).¹⁵ In the Marquesas Islands, among the various disciplines it was archaeology that played the greatest part in shaping the conception of heritage based on physical conservation, and this conviction became so locally embedded that sometimes “the remains of the past seem to exist only to be preserved” (DeSilvey 2017: 4). With the restoration of the complex in the 1990s and the various Matava’a festivals, its visibility has increased in terms of tourism, enabling the island municipality to attract an increasing number of visitors.¹⁶ On the tourist market, ‘I’ipona became known for the monumentality of its statues and the various stories told on site by local guides.

Beyond the uniqueness of the sculptures in Puamau, the presence of tiki in pop culture and tourism remains anchored in stereotypical figures of ancestors, heroes and divine beings belonging to a vague traditional past that has fascinated explorers, artists and writers in the West over centuries.



Figure 9. Maki'itauapepe after treatment for conservation, 2021. Courtesy of Direction de la culture et du patrimoine, Tahiti.

In addition to the accounts of Bougainville and Cook and the works of Melville, Stevenson and Gauguin, the image of the vahine (Polynesian woman) and the beachcomber as well as of tiki and moai became popular in the 1950s in the United States thanks to soldiers coming back from the Pacific at the end of World War II. Mythologised icons of idyllic beaches and the exoticism of native custom came to occupy a range of contexts and objects in a new “tiki style” (Kirsten 2014). From hotel décor to the invention of tiki-themed cocktails, clothing and musical repertoires in the 1950s, this highly commercialised trend was abandoned in the 1960s by the postwar baby boomer generation, and then resurrected in a mixture of nostalgia and pop interest in the 1990s. Beyond its affirmation in the West, in most Polynesian archipelagos in recent decades the tiki has become a symbol used in multiple artistic and touristic contexts, where the need to refer to a real or presumed tradition is entwined with commercial aspects. Thus in French Polynesia, and especially the Marquesas, since the 1980s, the

image of the tiki has (re)emerged on different supports, regaining impetus in sculpture (wood, stone and bone), appearing on tapa (barkcloth) and finally resurfacing in patu tiki (tattooing). “From a domain linked to the sacred in Polynesian cultures, the tiki is now part of a globalised system, mixing art, commerce, show, heritage ... and new generations are taking possession of it and turning it into a dynamic icon of Pacific cultures” (Guiot and Ottino-Garanger 2016: 31–32). Free of the restrictions or constraints associated with its representation in ancient social structure and the demonic connotations assigned to it by the Christian religion, this symbol is nowadays perceived, experienced and reinterpreted in the Marquesas, as elsewhere in the Pacific, according to the cultural and historical specificities of each context in which it appears. In other words, rather than being conceived as a “distinctive style” of pop fashion, as it is in North America and Europe, the tiki must in the Pacific be understood today as a “signifier” through which people can frame ideas and ties, claim attachments and express a personal view of the world. If in the West the tiki style merely reproduced an exotism and a latent sexual desire (White 2015: 565), the tiki was at the same time reborn in Oceania not only as a tourist or media icon but also as a source of inspiration for artists and craftspeople, as well as a symbolic connection to the ancestors.

An example of this artistic and sentimental approach to the ‘I’ipona tiki is the artist’s biography for Maheatete Huhina, a sculptor from Puamau living in the nearby Nāhoe valley. In 2020 Maheatete created a wooden tiki post (Fig. 10) which was later installed in an open columned hall surrounded by 120 other columnal artworks from all over the world as part of STOA169,¹⁷ a contemporary art project in Bavaria initiated by German painter Bernd Zimmer. Since his childhood, Maheatete wanted to become a sculptor like his grandfather and follow the footprints of his legendary ancestors from Puamau to establish a connection to their representations.

By emphasising respect for and an emotional attachment to the past, Maheatete’s discourses and practices concerning tiki are different from those of mass culture and tourism as well as those of heritage conservation. Against such stereotyped representations from the consumer world the artist sets an intimate approach based on a “felt” bond with Taka‘i‘i: “I come here to ground myself, especially before making an important tiki ... what I do is lay my hands on the back of Taka‘i‘i to seek his support and experience his powerful mana which is still in him” (Maheatete Huhina, pers. comm., 22 Oct., 2021). Such a devotional attitude, which underlies informal heritage-building practices, does not aim to attain a philological reproposal of the past. Rather, it refers to vernacular and creative forms of commemoration, use and rediscovery of the past on the basis of values and needs that are “felt” and developed in the present (Lowenthal 1996). In this case, Maheatete’s concept of mana maintains a sentimental tie to the past, and as a term, instead



Figure 10. Maheatete Huhina sculpting Motuhaiki for STOA169, 2020. Courtesy of Warren Huhina.

of being detached from Oceania in deterritorialised global culture mana “demands close attention to the chains of transmission and transformation that have shaped and reshaped what mana signifies and the values it both absorbs and manifests, including silence as well as speech, loss as well as gain, novelty as well as tradition” (Tomlinson and Tengan 2016: 16). The meanings of the concept of mana for Maheatete and his art could not be understood without the bond to heritage and the cultural intimacy with the tiki of ‘I’ipona, which constitute a material and symbolic reference for his wooden or stone statues. Like other bearers of tradition and their versions of local history, Maheatete can be considered as a *passreur culturel* and a heritage maker. Indeed, by seeking inspiration in ancient statues he tries not only to connect himself with a symbolic and cultural past but also to create and perpetuate a living tradition. This living tradition is intertwined with the knowledge and expertise of historians, ethnologists and archaeologists, as it shows Maheatete’s appreciation of Karl von den Steinen, “whose work that he bequeathed to us is priceless” (Maheatete Huhina, pers. comm., 22 Oct. 2021). For this reason, he decided to call his tiki in Bavaria Motuhaiki, a name inspired by a sculpture from Nāhoe collected by Von den Steinen (Von den Steinen 1928b: β C). Maheatete’s Motuhaiki portrays the legendary builder

of the vaka hiva (oceangoing canoe) in a contemporary style, and represents a mélange of artistic abilities, scientific knowledge and Indigenous mythology.

Although Lowenthal (1996) proposed an irreconcilable divergence between the historian and heritage maker in the elaboration of knowledge, we have tried rather to suggest a constant overlapping of attitudes, postures and ways of examining and reappropriating the past between these two figures. Furthermore, in giving an account of the oral and written stories concerning the tiki of 'I'ipona we have sought to show a continuous interweaving of history/archaeology and heritage. It is not merely a case of historians and archaeologists being dragged into the public sphere "as interpreters of a technical (i.e., non-political) and objective (i.e., non-rhetorical) view of the past only to find themselves 'competing' with other, vernacular arguments that claim devotional and subjective connections with [the tiki]" (Dei 2012: 183). Indeed, voyagers' and specialists' versions indicated the presence of "a few aspects of mythification, imprecision and heritage; and heritage, for its part, would have no value if it could not in some way link itself to a legitimate academic discourse" (Dei 2019: 28). Moreover, this overlapping or interweaving of registers and interpretations is reflected in a series of types of "tiki talk", i.e., discourses, fantasies and reinventions capable of articulating in new forms the remnants of local history and blurring the distinction between written and oral repertoires. In addition, they invite us to take into account misunderstandings, grey zones and dialogical planes (Obeyesekere 2005: 263–64) to understand the meanings of the local stories. Through these discursive levels, we have tried to underline that the construction of knowledge regarding the microhistory of 'I'ipona is a slippery and controversial ground which nevertheless shows how the rediscovery of tradition should be understood as a hybrid product, conceived by both 'enata/'enana (Indigenous people) and hao'e (foreigners). The definitions and descriptions created by Western disciplines have participated in the realisation of this recovery through the restoration of the me'ae and the raising of its tiki and, at the same time, through the production of texts that have saved, selected and transmitted certain accounts collected over time by amateurs and scholars. The circulation of these accounts and the archaeological works have enabled some individuals to access content through which to give meaning to their versions and legitimise their role as passeurs culturels (Aria 2007; Bénat Tachot and Gruzinski 2001). By positioning themselves on the cultural crossroads, which we have here referred to as beaches (Denning 1980, 2004) or contact zones (Clifford 1997; Pratt 1991), local actors such as Pihua, Henry Lie and, more recently, Vohi Heita'a, Rémi Santos and Tea'iki Tohetiaatua have demonstrated their ability to skilfully use multiple languages and symbolic universes, and to stitch the past to the present through a relationship established with discourses and practices of specialists. The perspectives and

contents coming from outside are thus "indigenised" by these protagonists of the "liminal areas", i.e., of that "complicated intercultural zone ... where 'native' and 'stranger' play out their working misunderstandings in creolized languages" (Sahlins 1993: 13). If on the one hand the West has stimulated oblivion, demonising traditions and condemning them to irreversible loss, it has, on the other hand, nevertheless triggered the subsequent rehabilitation of the local past by providing the means, approaches and often knowledge to (re)establish relationships with the ancestors. Nevertheless, such recovery of the past inevitably involves challenging trends, stereotypical views and interpretive frameworks created by the hao'e who have participated together with the locals in producing over time new and different layers of "tiki talk".

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NOTES

1. This article's opening section and more generally the entire article are the result of joint work. Paragraph 2 in particular is attributed to Michael J. Koch and paragraphs 3 and 4 to Giacomo Nericì. All translations in the article are ours.
2. Although our article calls into question some aspects of the Pacific debate on tradition (see Babadzan 1983, 1999; Hanson 1989; Jolly 1992; Jolly and Thomas 1992; Keesing 1989, 1993, 1996; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Lindstrom and White 1994; Linnekin 1983, 1985; Tabani 2002; Thomas 1992; Van der Grijp and Van Meijl 1993), it more specifically seeks to show how tradition is the result of discourses, practices and interpretations "constructed by many hands" (Aria 2007: 34) between foreigners and natives who recover, redefine and readapt each other's accounts. The encounter between scholars and certain collaborators, the interweaving of scientific knowledge and oral narratives, has generated both the forgetting and the recovery of the past, always reconceptualising tradition in relation to 'I'ipona according to the present.
3. His great-granddaughter Sarah Aeata married the Swiss Frédéric Numa Tissot in Atu'ona. They are ancestors of the site's present owners.
4. In this article, we preserve the spelling and transcription choices for the various tiki according to each author we cite. The different spellings of the names of tiki appearing below and sometimes next to each other is meant to be a way of giving an account of how the written sources have recorded, interpreted and transmitted them.

5. Edward Tregear was in fact a member of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain, and in that dictionary he had produced a monumental work on Polynesian dialects. By his own admission, however, that work “does not pretend to be a dictionary of Polynesian, but to present to the reader those Polynesian words which are related to the Maori dialect” (Tregear 1891: ix–x).
6. William DeWitt Alexander was an educator, author and linguist in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i who probably received this list of names from his father, William Patterson Alexander, who had been a missionary in the Marquesas, or from Thomas Lawson, an English sailor who had deserted a whaling ship and settled among the natives in the Marquesas in 1842.
7. Karl von den Steinen developed an interest in ethnology during a voyage around the world (1879–1881) after meeting Adolf Bastian in Honolulu and then contributed, along with others, to the professionalisation of the discipline by attributing importance to the length of time spent in the field, learning languages and using cartography, drawing and photography (Trautmann-Waller 2021: 1). His extensive research in the Xingú region of Brazil (1884 and 1887) and his books (see Von den Steinen 1886, 1894) became classics of Americanist anthropology, and his assertion that the “Bororo were araras”, i.e., tropical parrots, went on to influence Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s studies on the mental functions of traditional societies and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s later studies on myths and on totemism.
8. Von den Steinen refers to the German words “tribe” (Stamm) and “clan” (Clan) synonymously (Von den Steinen 1925: 15). Here we use these expressions instead of the word “chiefdom”, in accordance with the interpretations of his collaborators, who mainly translated ‘ati as “people, tribe or group”.
9. “Taua means priest or priestess; pepe means butterfly. For ‘maki’, it is perhaps compared to the Tahitian mairi, ‘to fall or drop down from a high place’; it should also be mentioned that, according to popular belief, the souls of dead priests are embodied in large butterflies” (Von den Steinen 1928a: 81). A sculpture of the same design, smaller and broken, was found below Meiaute me‘ae in Hane on the island of ‘Ua Huka.
10. Representatives of the cultural association Motu Haka and the municipality of Hiva‘oa also asked the archaeology department at the Centre polynésien des sciences humaines to undertake the restoration of the important tohua Upeke in the Ta‘aoa valley (in the southeast of the island). This was carried out by French archaeologist Éric Conte.
11. It was with the Nuku Hiva edition of the festival (1999–2000) in particular that municipalities, associations and prominent intellectuals began to call for archaeological studies and interventions. Visible remains thus became the supports of memory and local identities, but also a means for teaching the younger generations to reclaim, rediscover and enhance their heritage, as was the case with those of Hatiheu Valley in Nuku Hiva (Ottino-Garanger 2006).
12. The interviews mentioned in this article were carried out by Giacomo Nericì during his fieldwork in the Marquesas Islands (May 2021–July 2022) as part of his PhD project in cultural and social anthropology at the University of Milano-Bicocca.

13. The site is referred to as “Jipona” by Baessler (1900: 235), while the spelling “Oipona” was adopted by Linton (1925: 159–63) and later by Heyerdahl. “Iipona” was used for the first time in written sources by Von den Steinen (1928a: 77) and, according to Heyerdahl (1965: 123), was also used by “the present population of the valley ... and this may very likely be the original version”. This passage shows that the name was already circulating and that its transmission has probably followed a discontinuous and nonlinear path up until today.
14. Unlike the concept of “cultural landscape” adopted for inscription of the Taputapuātea site in Ra’iātea (Society Islands) on the World Heritage List in 2017, the Marquesas rather sought to highlight an oceanic vision based on the holistic relationship between culture and nature. Consequently, the UNESCO-Marquesas file identifies seven clusters: Eiao and Hatutū; Nuku Hiva (Ha’atuatua Anaho Hatiheu, Tekao, Nuku Ataha Hakau’i); ‘Ua Pou (Haka’ohoka, Hoho’i, Motu ‘Oa, Mokohe, Takae); ‘Ua Huka (the coastal marine area only); Hiva ‘Oa (Puama’u, Ta’a’oa, Mount Temetiu); Tahuata (Mount Ha’aioputeomo, Motopū); Fatu ‘Uku; and Fatu Hiva (Hanavave, Tou’aouoho and Mo’unanui, Omoa), including a zone of three nautical miles around each of the islands.
15. By decree no. 865 a.p.a. 23 June 1952, site no. 135. Full text: “Arrêté no 865 a.p.a., portant classement, en sue de leur protection, de monuments et sites des Etablissements français de l’Océanie”, *Journal Officiel*, 15 July 1952, no. 14, p. 287, under “Actes des institutions de la Polynésie française”.
<https://lexpol.cloud.pf/LexpolAfficheTexte.php?texte=270638&idr=0&np=6>
16. ‘I’ipona has, since the 1990s, been one of the major tourist attractions not only for Hiva’oa but more generally for the archipelago. As evidence of the notoriety acquired by the site since its restoration, the cargo-passenger ship *Aranui 5*, the preferred means for touring the islands, makes a stop in the Puamau Valley. The *Aranui 5* currently runs 17 tours per year and generally carries 150 to 200 passengers, with a capacity for up to 230. Inaugurated in 1984, this ship brought the Marquesans face to face with the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990), playing a decisive role in the overall process of artistic and cultural revival (Ivory 1999). Apart from the *Aranui 5*, smaller flows of tourists also reach Hiva’oa by plane, staying on average a few days in one of Atuona guesthouses. Usually one day is devoted to visiting ‘I’ipona, which the island authorities promote as the most important tourist destination along with the monuments to Paul Gauguin and Jacques Brel.
17. Maheate Huhina’s artist biography for STOA169:
<https://stoa169.com/en/stoa/maheate-huhina/>

GLOSSARY

The terms included in this glossary are Marquesan unless otherwise stated.

anaunau	invocation
‘ati	people, tribe, group
‘enata/‘enana	human being, man, mankind, Indigenous

etua	deified ancestor, god
ha'akakai	myth, legend (see tekao kakiu)
ha'akakai 'enana	Marquesan myths, legends
hakā'iki	chief
hao'e	foreigner
heana	human sacrifice
'i'i	strength
ke'etū	red tuff
mā	fermented breadfruit paste
mana	power, supernatural force
me'ae	temple site
moai	monolithic human statues (Rapanui)
pa'aha	bier, coffin
passeur (culturel)	(cultural) bridge-maker (French)
paepae	stone house foundation
patu tiki	tattoo, tattooing
peke	maternal (according to local versions)
pona	knot, union
taha tupapa'u	place for drying bodies
tai	sea, saltwater
taka	connection, bond
tapa	barkcloth
tapatapa	public declamation, proclamation
tapu	taboo
tau'a	ritual specialist
tekao kakiu	stories referring to ancient times
tiki	image, statue, first man, lit. phallus
toa	warrior
tohua	public feasting centre
tuhuka	master, expert
tuhuna 'o'ono	keeper of oral tradition
tumu mei	breadfruit tree (<i>Artocarpus altilis</i>)
tumu pure	deacon
ū	female breast (milk, according to local versions)
'ua mā	storage pit for fermented breadfruit paste
umu	earth oven
vahine	Polynesian woman
vaka hiva	oceangoing canoe

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