

How did the original settlers distribute land rights among themselves? To what extent was this done as a conscious project of allocation, and to what extent did ad hoc measures taken to meet particular problems lay the foundation for future custom? To what extent did custom in the land whence they came set the framework for the new tenure system, and to what extent did environmental and demographic factors modify this basic pattern?

No detailed record exists of the land systems of any of the islands in the precontact era. However, some general deductions can be made. Any land custom which is found to be distributed throughout Polynesia (but not elsewhere) can be assumed to have existed from the time of initial dispersal from the homeland (Samoa?). Customs widespread throughout Western or Eastern Polynesia (but not both) may be assumed to have arisen either in the West after the group left for Tahiti (or before if the group which left thenceforth rejected that aspect of custom for some reason); or in the East after arrival in Tahiti. Customs found only on atolls may be assumed to have arisen in response to the atoll environment.

Interisland contact (particularly conquest) after the initial dispersal, could possibly have enabled aspects of land tenure to be diffused. However, after initial settlement, there is no evidence of contact between Western and Eastern Polynesia. Considerable inter-island and inter-group contact was maintained between the high islands of Western Polynesia, and some contact

*style mounted  
on exhibits as  
it stands?*



*what about knowledge  
of other on Tahiti & of  
the Cooks on Raiatea?*

existed between the islands of the Tahiti group and the neighbouring Tuamotu. Contact also existed between the islands of the Southern Cook group.

Where any aspect of local custom deviates from that brought from the homeland, the reason must be sought in local environmental and demographic circumstances.

Presumably one major factor determining the initial land systems of new colonies was the demographic composition of the settling party. Whether the voyage was accidental or planned would constitute another and related determinant.

In illustration of demographic composition it may be noted that the 80 warriors who came to Rarotonga with Tangiia in the 13th century divided the island into 80 districts of which one was allocated to each. Evidence of these divisions remains clearly to-day. As most settling parties appear to have been much smaller than this, individual personalities must also have had greater scope for development of their own ideas and ambitions than they would have had in their home islands.

A planned voyage presumably constituted a group of people with a given authority structure. It is conceivable that the individuals comprising such a party could take their own plants (and animals), and that these being established in the new homeland gave the owner rights to the land on which they were planted. Accidental voyagers on the other hand, being ill-supplied with plants or animals, presumably had to rely more



heavily on fishing and foodgathering. With no proprietary rights established through ownership of the initial plants, or through expenditure of labour on their growth, there would not be as much reason, in the initial stages at least, for defining of individual rights to land. Moreover while fishing and foodgathering lends itself to individual effort, it does not normally necessitate the definition of boundaries of exploitation.

*But as soon as the security factor enters the scene there is a call for definition of rights.*

