

NOTES ON THE POTTERY SEQUENCE OBTAINED FROM SOUTHERN NEW CALEDONIA

Colin D. Smart

A.N.U. Janvier 1969

Excavated sites

The following PROVISIONAL pottery sequence for southern New Caledonia is compiled using evidence obtained from four excavated sites, all of which are beach middens :

TON-6: An exposed, narrow, sandy strip of beach located along the western end of Naia Bay. A sequence of ten layers were excavated in a depth of about 1m.

TON-7 : A sandy flat area in the central part of western Naia Bay. The site is situated inland from a dune and stream running parallel to the beach. For much of the site only two layers are present but a third occurs in two places and descends to over 1m. Most of the site has been destroyed by sand quarries.

NOU-1 : This site is a part of the same midden as site TON-7, but lies to the east. Only a single layer was salvaged from the edge of the extensive sand quarry which has claimed nearly all of the site.

PIN-1 : The site at St. Maurice, Ile des Pins, was excavated under the direction of Jack Golson in 1959-60. It is a strip of sandy beach-flat along the edge of the raised coral platform surrounding the island. Only three layers with a depth of about 0.5m from three squares are used in the sequence from this site.

Pottery sequence

The stratigraphic sequence and available C.14 dates are shown in diagram 1. Three points of uncertainty are present. The first concerns the identical dates from sites PIN-1 and NOU-1 which are associated with very

different pottery in each case. It seems likely that the location of PIN-1 some 135 kilometers distant from Naia Bay is an important factor here and that two different sorts of pottery were in use at about the same time at these two places. A second point of concern is the dated sample from the bottom of layer III in site TON-7. It probably represents an intrusive disturbance in the deposits. Finally there are two dates from samples recovered from within structural disturbance in the surface of layers Va / IV in site TON-6. The difference of over 500 years cannot be satisfactorily explained here.

With the exception of the lowest layers in site TON-6 all sherds are small in size and do not readily permit the reconstruction of vessel shapes. Most of the information concerning vessel form is derived from a general inspection of the sherds and cannot be supported with actual examples. Very few decorated sherds were recovered from layers I-VIII in site TON-6, but otherwise there is sufficient material for a sound description of decoration. Sufficient rims for analysis were recovered from all layers in the sequence.

Most of the information concerning the pottery sequence presented here can be grouped under three headings:

1. Vessel form (diagram 2) : It is possible to distinguish between two sorts of vessel -restricted and unrestricted - from an examination of rim sherds. In the absence of sherds indicating complex or compound vessel forms (except shoulders) they are presumed to have been absent from the deposits. Shoulders are present in the lower part of the sequence but they are small in size and reveal little of the overall vessel form from which they came. Handles are present in the middle part of the sequence only.

2. Rim form (diagram 3) : Variations in rim form are the most useful basis for setting-up the sequence. Four main sorts of rim profiles exist - ledge, direct, everted and raised - though there are some varieties of each of these. The two main sources of variation in rim profiles concern the course or path followed by the profile, and the thickness of the rim in relation to the thickness of the vessel wall to which it is attached.

3. Decoration (diagram 4) : A considerable variety of decoration is present and is sufficient through much of the sequence to enable the reconstruction of the changes it has undergone. Several techniques and several groups of motifs can be recognised.

In very general terms the sequence present in each site is as follows :

Site PIN-1 (St. Haurice)

Only three layers from three (out of seven) squares excavated here can be used in the sequence. There is evidence of change through these three layers. The most prominent feature is the toothed-stamp impressed pottery

which occurs in all layers but in a decreasing proportion towards the top. It occurs on a range of vessel forms including some with acute shoulders and tall, flared necks. The ledge rim is predominant. The same vessel and rim forms occur with an incised decoration with a variety of "hatched" motifs, some of which occur in stamp impressed technique as well. The incised decoration increases in frequency towards the top. Associated with these two sorts of pottery are a very few carved-paddle impressed sherds from restricted vessels with shoulder and everted rims. The paddle impressed pottery occurs only in the upper two layers. The c.14 date of 905 BC (2855 BP) come from the middle of the sequence where all three sorts of pottery are present.

Site NOU-1 (Naia Bay)

Only a single layer is present here and is indeed only a remnant of a layer left after midden material had been stripped by bulldozer to prepare the sand quarries which have now claimed all the site. A single sort of pottery was recovered with carved-paddle impressed decoration, slight shoulder, and everted rim. A few sherds from shallow hand-modelled bowls with direct rims are also present as a minor element. The C.14 date of 905 BC (2855 BP) came from a small oven within the layer excavated.

site TON-7 (Naia Bay)

Most of this site comprises just two layers in a shallow deposit over a wide area of beach flat. The upper layer is severely disturbed by ploughing but analysis of the pottery suggests that it was slightly different from the layer beneath. several sorts of pottery occur within these two layers and are thought to be in proper association. Paddle impressed pottery of the sort recovered from sites NOU-1 and PIN-1 in one recognisable element. A second is that with incised "hatched" and "chevron" motifs rather similar to that recovered from site PIN-1 but here occurring with everted rims some of which are of the thickened variety. A third sort of pottery comprises simple restricted vessels with direct rims on which a thin band of

decoration runs around the mouth just below the lips. This band of decoration may be incised, impressed or applied. Loop handles of round section are also present in the site but cannot be associated with a particular vessel form or decoration.

Two other sources of sherd material are present in site TON-7. Just beneath and sealed by the two layers described above are a number of structural disturbances from which were recovered sherds of much the same sorts as in the two layers above. There is, however, a slightly stronger representation of paddle impressed pottery. A date of 115 BC (2065 BP) was obtained from within a small oven here. In two places beneath these structural disturbances very large ovens were encountered within the fills of which was pottery of the paddle impressed sort. A date of 1215 BC (3165 BP) was obtained from charcoal in the bottom of one of these large ovens and there is reason to expect the fill of the oven to have been in place soon after the oven was last used.

Site TON-6 (Naia Bay)

This site was the deepest excavated in Naia Bay and contained ten layers from which a pottery sequence can be reconstructed. Only two vessel forms are represented in the site a simple restricted form of probably spheroidal shape and an open bowl with high sides. It is possible that some of the restricted vessels from the later part of the sequence here have a rather steeper side. Loop handles of round section occur in the bottom half of the sequence. The direct rim form is predominant throughout the site but in the lower part of the sequence there are numbers of raised rims of the two varieties and in the upper part a variety of direct rim with a bevelled inner surface. Incised decoration is present in all layers. The upper four layers contained expressed "nubbins". Incised "frond" motifs occur throughout but are modified in the later part of the sequence into a more complex range of motifs. Incised "dashes" and other simple motifs occur late in the sequence. Five dates are available for this site. The bottom part of the sequence - thick pottery, handles and simple "frond" motifs - is bracketed by dates of 205 AD (1745 BP) and 315/860 AD (1635/1090 BP). Handles seem to disappear after this time as does the raised rim. A proliferation of simple incised decoration, in association with expressed "nubbins", and the bevelled variety of direct rim, occur in a layer dated at 1025 AD (925 BP) and appear to continue to the top of the deposits where "trade goods" become incorporated into the midden. The "croix enveloppé" motif occurs before 860 AD and as late as 1460 AD (490 BP), but not later. Sherds in the later part of the sequence are blacker, harder and possess a smoother surface.

Structural remains

The postholes of a small round house were observed beside and actually disturbed by one of the large ovens in site TON-7. The charcoal from the bottom of this oven was dated at 1215 BC. Another round house of larger size was observed on the surface of a layer halfway through the sequence at site TON-6. Charcoal samples from two small ovens on this same surface were dated at 315 AD and 806 AD. The same round house plan was recorded throughout New Caledonia by the early European visitors. A complex pattern of palisade holes was recovered beneath the main two layers of site TON-7 and associated charcoal was dated at 115 BC. From the plan exposed in the excavations in site TON-7 and from investigations made elsewhere in the same area, these palisaded structures are interpreted as enclosures of rectangular plan. No information was obtained which could reveal the structures enclosed by the palisades but certainly ovens were present in all examples recorded in the site TON-7 area. Palisaded village units were observed on the île des Pins (particularly at Gadji) by several early visitors.

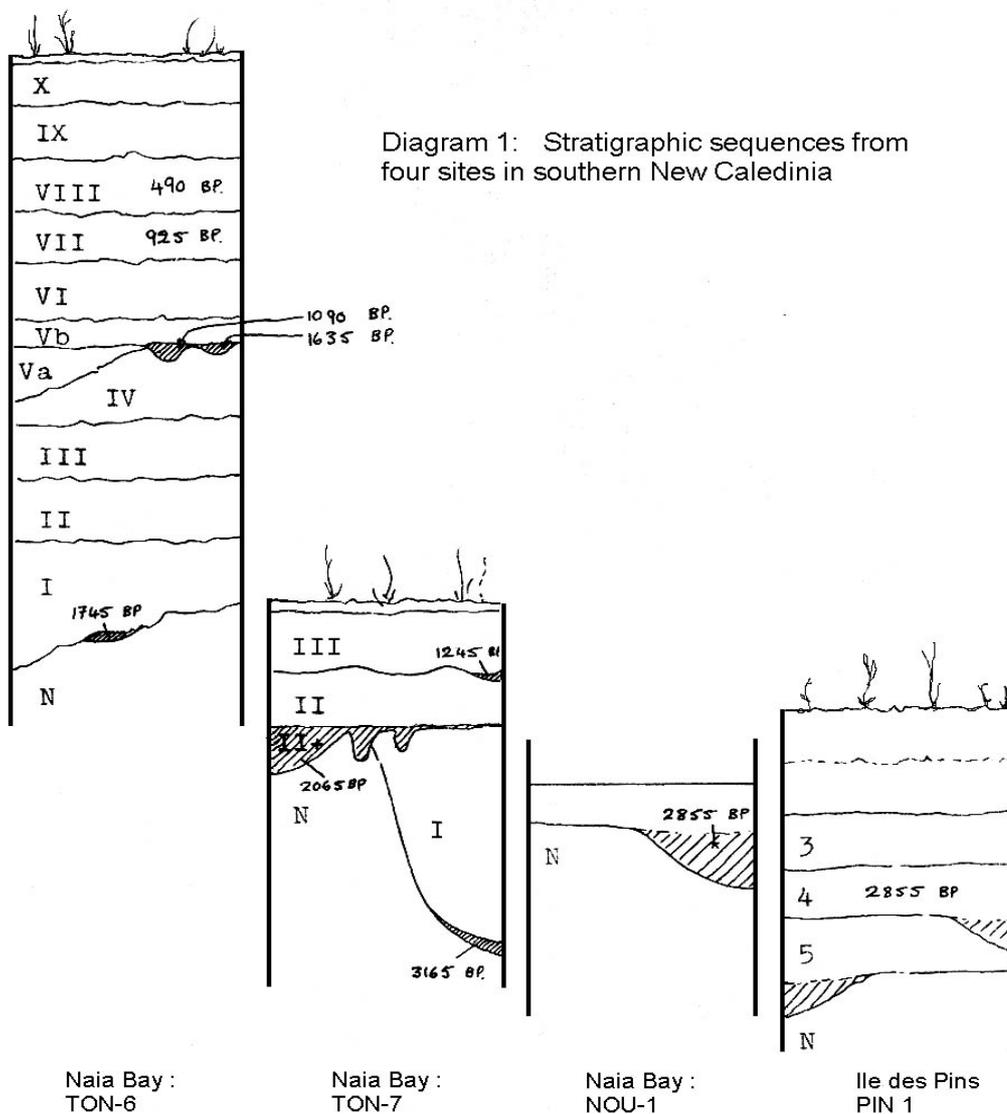
Other evidence

Very few artifacts in stone and shell were recovered from the four excavated sites. Shell armllets in both *Trochus* sp (cf. *T. niloticus*) and large *Conus* spp (inc. *C. Milliponctatus*) shells were recorded. Evidence for the manufacture of each, and possibly some of the abrasive tools employed, were recovered throughout the sequence.

Some adze chips from site PIN-1 suggest adzes of angular section, possibly quadrangular. Adzes and chips from all sites in Naia Bay are from examples with rounded or oval sections.

A single flake of obsidian, a material said to be absent from New Caledonia, was recovered from site PIN-1.

Faunal remains were virtually absent. No chicken, pig or dog bones have been identified amongst the excavated material.



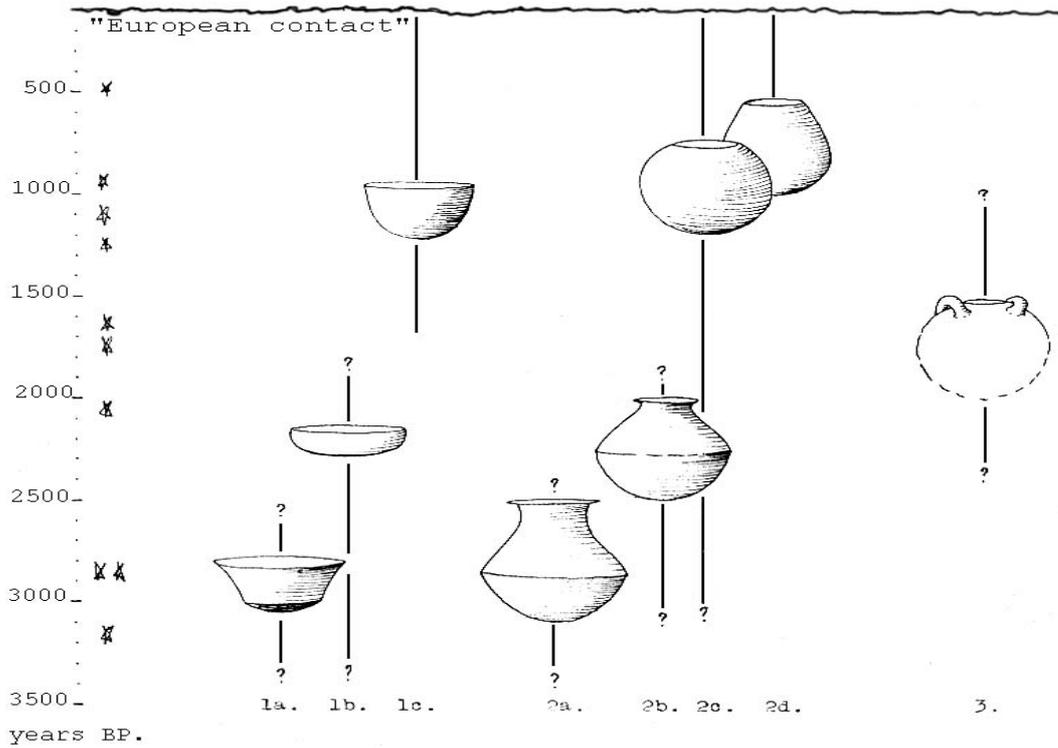
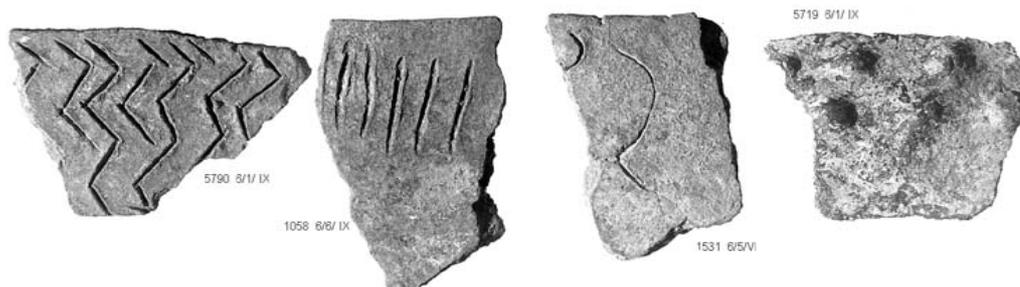


Diagram 2 : Probable vessel forms in pottery sequence.
 Suggested duration of each form show by vertical lines.
 " Stars" indicate C.14 dates.
 Vessel forms : 1. Unrestricted, 2. Restricted (a, b with shoulders),
 3. Loop handles



Echantillonnage des décors incisés et à pustules de TON 6

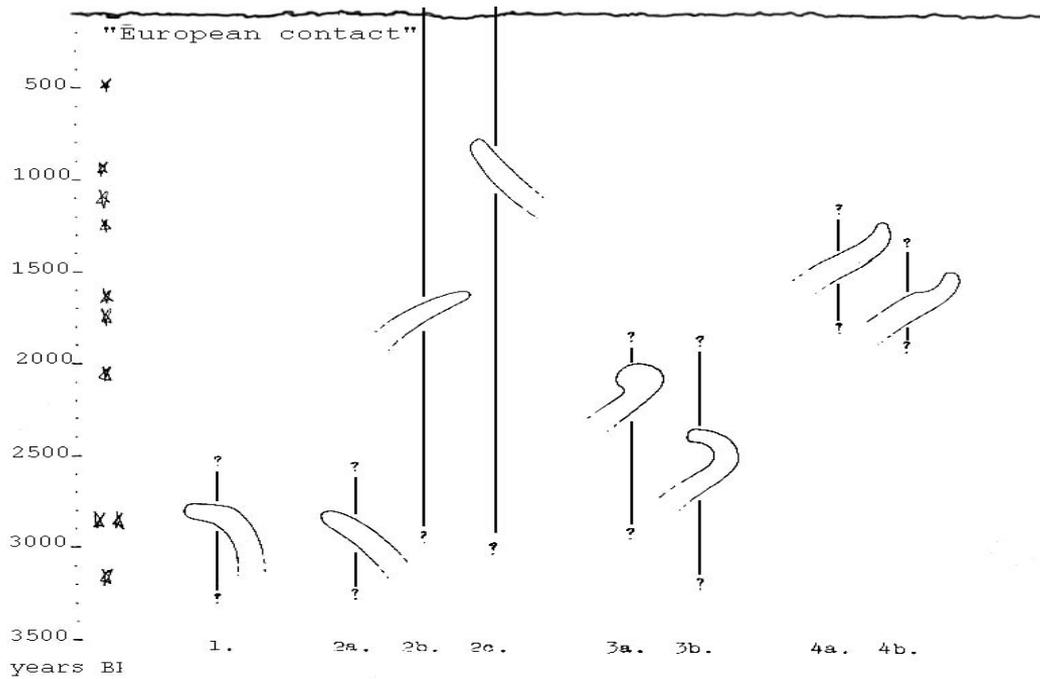


Diagram 3 : Main rim forms in pottery sequence. Possible duration of use shown by vertical lines.
 "Stars" on left indicate C.14 dates
 Rim forms : 1. Ledge, 2. Direct, 3. Everted, 4. Raised.

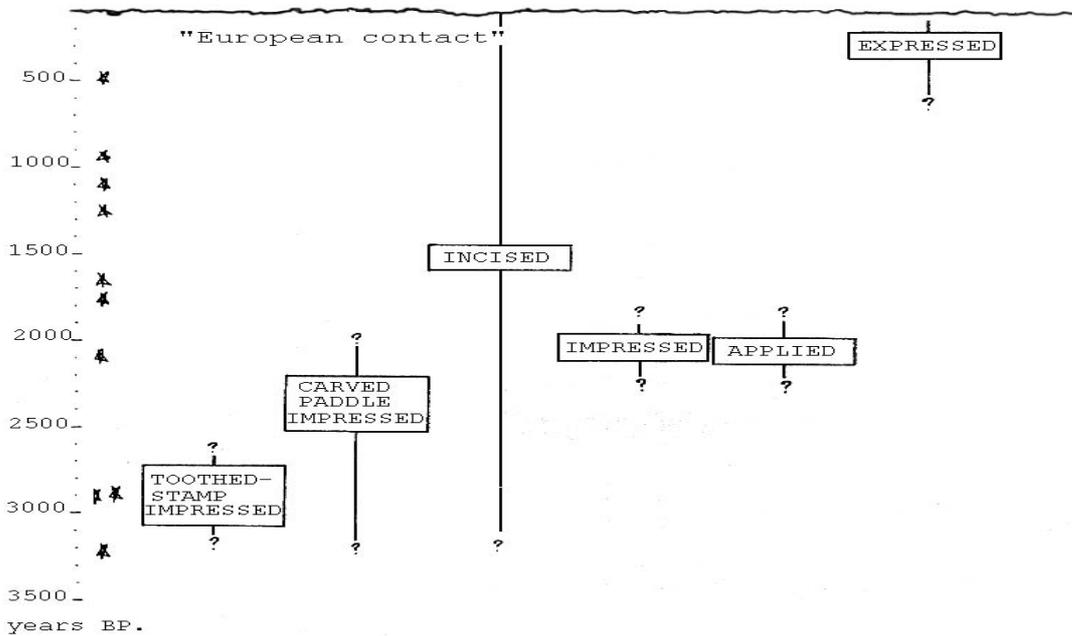


Diagram 4 : Major decorative techniques in pottery sequence. Probable duration shown by vertical lines
 "Stars" indicate C.14 dates.

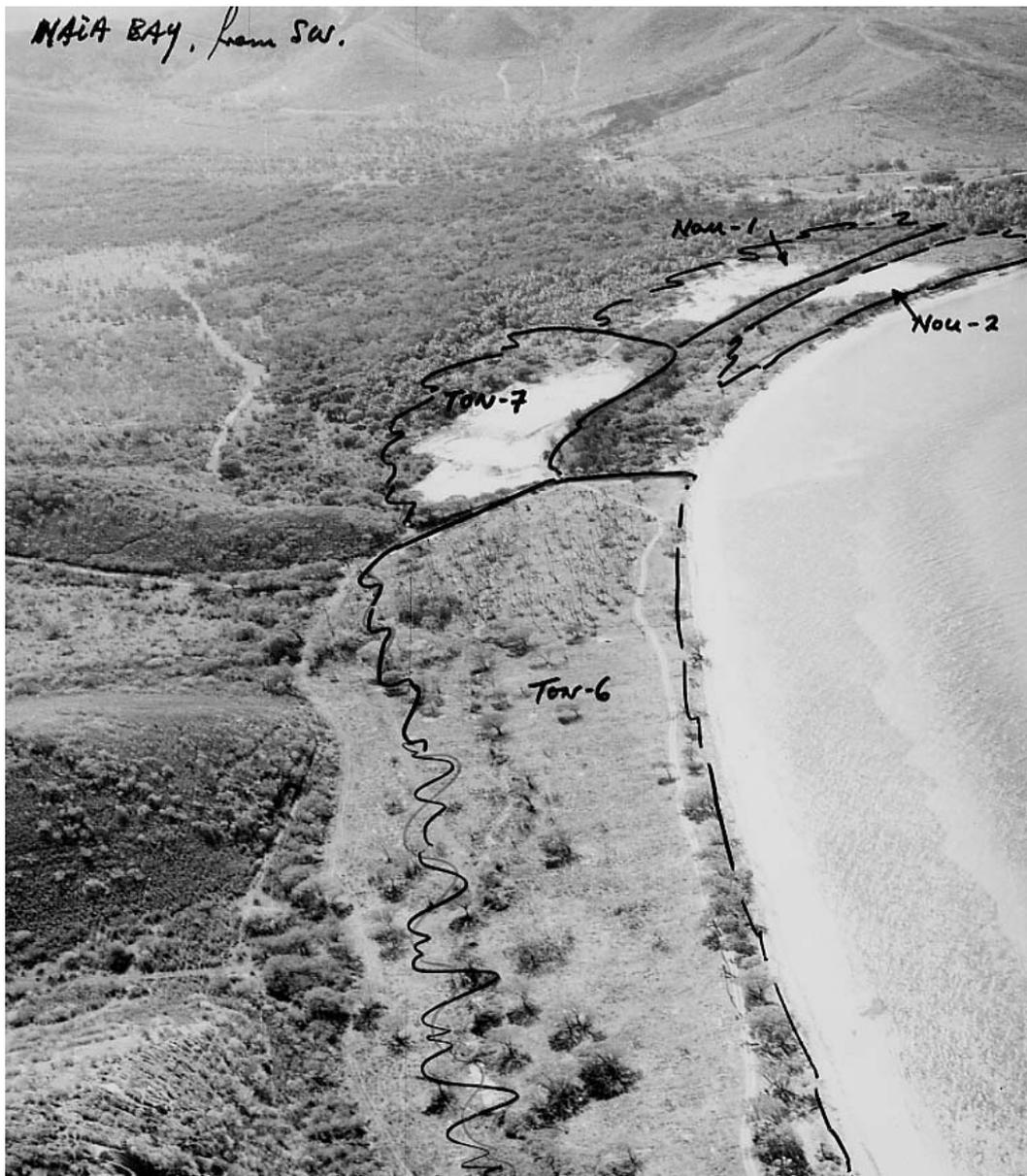
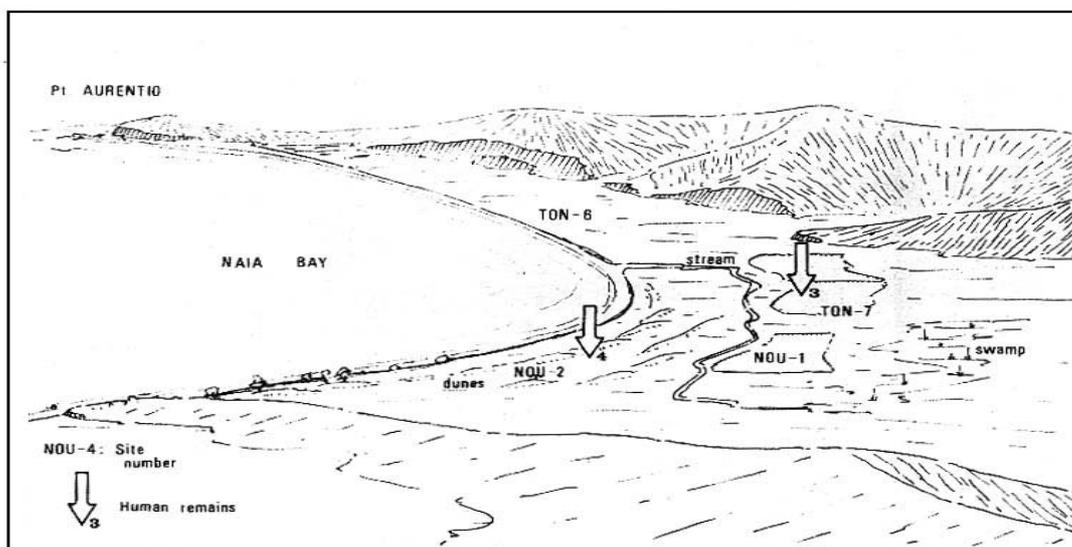


Photo et plan des différents sites de la baie de Naia





TON 6 en cours de fouilles



Différents niveaux d'occupation ancienne sur TON 6