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TRANSFORMING MORTUARY RITUALS IN "CHRISTIAN" OCEANIA: POST-MISSION CEMETERIES FROM ANIWA, VANUATU

JAMES L. FLEXNER
University of Sydney

BRIANNA MUIR
The Australian National University

STUART BEDFORD
The Australian National University
Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History

FRÉDÉRIQUE VALENTIN
Centre national de la recherche scientifique

DENISE ELENA
Vanuatu Cultural Centre

DAVID SAMORIA
Vanuatu Cultural Centre

ABSTRACT: Extensive cemeteries from Aniwa Island, Vanuatu, provide evidence for historical transformations in ritual practice among Christian islanders that continue through the present day. These cemeteries contain novel grave forms, including many lined with coral and mortar upright slabs that were not present on the island traditionally. The graves largely post-date European missionary presence on the island. They represent an indigenous adaptation of introduced forms and materials that occurred decades after the conversion of Aniwans to Christianity in the 1860s. Local evidence indicates that the graves are primarily a marker of attachment to kinship and place beginning in the period when the population stabilised and began to rebound after the major nineteenth-century population collapse.

Keywords: Christian missions, mortuary ritual, archaeological graves, cemeteries, Aniwa Island, Vanuatu

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As part of an archaeological survey of south Vanuatu's Polynesian Outliers and neighbouring islands (Flexner *et al*. 2018), we documented an extensive series of cemetery features from Aniwa Island. Common grave forms in the cemeteries included burials surrounded by upright coral slabs and more recent cement graves. These graves represent the changing mortuary practices of Pacific Islanders during the last 120 years. They reflect entanglements between

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local social dynamics and global forces including conversion to Christianity and capitalist trade networks (see also Schoeffel and Meleisea 2016).

These features represent local innovations in mortuary practice post-dating the presence of Christian missionaries on the island. However, they are also connected to a longer-term history of changing burial practice in Aniwa that was influenced by the missionaries as well as the demographic upheavals of the colonial period in the New Hebrides (as Vanuatu was called before independence in 1980; see Flexner 2016; McArthur 1981; Spriggs 2007). The ongoing practice of memorialising the spirits (*atua*) of dead ancestors through physical monuments remains an important expression of connections to continuing lineages, religious beliefs and assertions of belonging to place for the Aniwan community today.

Cemeteries dating from the nineteenth century onwards are an important aspect of colonial-period heritage in Oceania and elsewhere. Most commonly archaeological studies of historical cemeteries that focus on material culture, including grave architecture, such as headstones or above-ground mausolea, are based in British or British settler contexts (e.g., Deetz 1996: 89–124; Mytum 2015; Prangnell and McGowan 2013). In contrast, archaeological studies of indigenous cemeteries in the Pacific tend to focus on documenting inhumation practices and skeletal remains dating to precolonial eras (e.g., Clark *et al*. 2016; Leach and Davidson 2008: 133–254; Valentin *et al*. 2011). A recent issue of *Journal of the Polynesian Society* covered the theme of "grave matters in Oceania" from a contemporary perspective, featuring examples from Rotuma (Rensel and Howard 2016), New Guinea highlands (Gibbs 2016; Jacka 2016) and Sāmoa (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2016; Meleisea and Schoeffel 2016). This paper presents findings of indigenous grave markers dating to the last 120 years on Aniwa, Vanuatu, adding a historical and indigenous perspective to these discussions that is couched within a longer-term understanding of changes in mortuary rituals from the island.

Family lineages and ancestral territorial rights were and are an active site of political contestation, disrupted first by demographic upheaval in the 1800s, and currently by increasing mobility within the economic context of post-independence Vanuatu where young people, especially men, increasingly seek opportunities in the capital, Port Vila, or overseas. We of course take a neutral stance on any specific claims (hence we do not specify the claimed familial associations with different cemeteries here), but it is important to note that the political dynamic is and has been an element of the construction of the features we describe below. Ethically, as researchers we distance ourselves, leaving the interpretation and judgment of any actual ancestral claims to Aniwan people and to the atua. Constructed graves do not necessarily reflect ownership or a direct relationship to a particular piece of land. Rather, they can be a broader expression of belonging, to kinship groups and to affiliated territories.

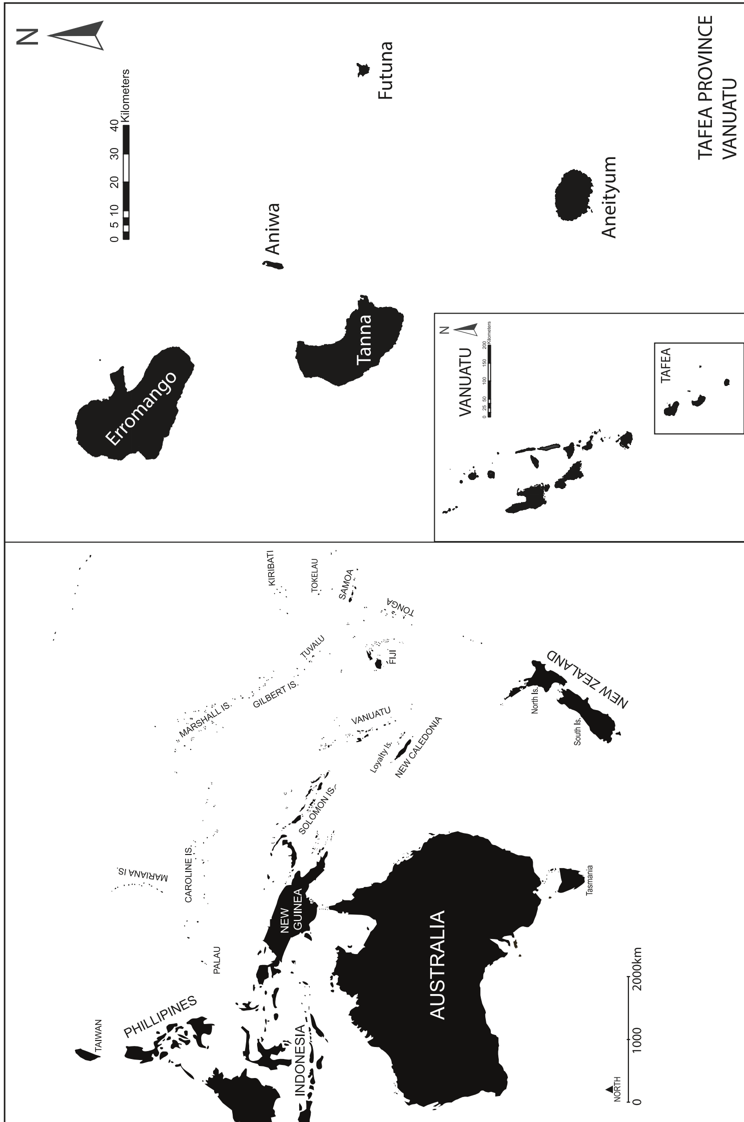

Figure 1. Map of the western Pacific, and the location of Aniwa in southern Vanuatu.

ANIWA: CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Aniwa is a small coral atoll about 8 km in surface area and with a maximum height 42 m above sea level (Fig. 1). The island is classed as a Polynesian Outlier, as it is geographically within the Melanesian region but its people speak a Polynesian language and have some Polynesian cultural traditions as well as commonalities with the neighbouring islands (Capell 1958; Flexner *et al*. 2019). Aniwa is geographically quite close to neighbouring Tanna, and there is archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence for close links between the two islands as well as the neighbouring islands of Aneityum, Erromango and Futuna (Flexner *et al*. 2018).

Formal archaeological research in southern Vanuatu began in the 1960s with the Shutlers (Shutler *et al*. 2002), who had planned to excavate on Aniwa but were prevented from landing on the island by bad weather. There was earlier ethnographic research describing Aniwan culture. The earliest works were either by Christian missionaries (Gray 1894) or heavily coloured by a missionary lens (Humphreys 1926: 120–22). These resources nonetheless offer a useful account of traditional Aniwan society when used critically (see Douglas 2001). Subsequent work expanded ethnographic and linguistic knowledge about Aniwa (Capell 1958; Guiart 1961), but there has been little recent anthropological or archaeological work on the island.

A collaborative archaeological project involving overseas researchers and Aniwan *filwokas* 'fieldworkers' from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre between 2016 and 2019 resulted in the first excavations to recover stratified archaeological evidence as well as additional information about the cultural landscape of the island. While not the focus of this paper, a few details about Aniwa's longer-term history should be noted. Aniwa was initially settled during the Lapita colonisation phase at least 2,800 years ago. Roughly 1,000 years ago there is evidence for intensification of both terrestrial and marine resource use and settlement. We estimate that the incursion of Polynesians into what is now southern Vanuatu began within a few centuries of this time. Significantly for this paper, we have uncovered several inhumations in an ancient beach sand dating to this era, including two in an area also occupied by one of the historical cemeteries we documented.

When the first European observers began recording information about Aniwa as well as the neighbouring Polynesian Outlier of Futuna, the primary means of disposing of the dead was via burial at sea, where the deceased individual was wrapped in a mat or basket and deposited on the reef (Humphreys 1926: 118; Steel 1880: 379). The practice may have marked a transition from the world of the living to *i 'o atua* 'the land of the spirits' (Capell 1958: 9–10). There is ethnohistoric evidence for sea burial at the neighbouring island of Tanna, and on Erromango, where a tradition of disposing "ghosts" of the dead at sea might have been an echo of earlier

practices involving actually disposing of bodies in such a way (Humphreys 1926: 89–90, 163–64). Burial of the dead via terrestrial inhumation and in caves and rockshelters was also practised over the last 1,000 years or so throughout southern Vanuatu. Individuals were usually buried in an extended position, though flexed burial was also common (Flexner and Willie 2015; Humphreys 1926: 89–92, 182–83; Valentin *et al*. 2011: 57–60). It is interesting to note that terrestrial inhumation on the larger islands was thought to be more common, while on the small Polynesian Outliers, with limited landmass and possibly a more maritime-oriented identity (see Keller and Kuautonga 2007), the tendency was to bury the dead at sea.

Aniwa was traditionally divided into two main districts, Iafatu/Iefotuma to the south and Sura/Surama to the north (see Capell 1958: 1 for alternate names). A primary occupation of Aniwan people was and remains agriculture, with gardens containing the typical Oceanic crops including yams, taro, sugarcane, bananas and breadfruit. Kava would have been grown traditionally but was discouraged by the missionaries and is no longer grown today. Agriculture takes place on a rotational basis, and different families maintain rights to plant across a number of garden plots around the island where they have kinship ties. The main protein sources come from the sea, particularly the extremely rich lagoon in the north of the island, which is used seasonally and intensively during certain times of year and placed under a resource *tabu* 'restriction' during others. Pigs were and are important but primarily for chiefly exchanges and ritual occasions rather than as a staple.

Villages consist of groups of houses primarily of wood, bamboo and thatch, though increasingly also incorporating introduced building materials, including demolition materials from former mission structures (Flexner *et al*. 2019: 411). Houses are arranged around a central open space and traditionally would have represented the dual Sura/Iafatu divisions. Other open spaces, called *marae*, were used for ritual performances and for the convivial daily men's activity of drinking kava, probably similar to the practice on Tanna (Brunton 1979). There are hereditary chiefly titles on Aniwa that traditionally would have included rights to land, resources and supernatural powers, though titles could be challenged and disputed. Competitive feasting is an endemic element of southern Vanuatu's political economy (Spriggs 1986) and would have been practised traditionally on Aniwa as well. The political, exchange and kinship networks of Aniwa were and are closely aligned and entangled with those of neighbouring islands, especially the much larger nearby volcanic island of Tanna (Flexner *et al*. 2018: 249–53).

The first mission representatives on Aniwa were Polynesian teachers landed on the island in April 1840 by the London Missionary Society (LMS). Others were sent to join them soon afterward, and they all laboured for several years with limited success (Miller 1985: 143; Murray 1863:

213–14). The next effort was the arrival of the Aneityumese teachers Navalak and Nemeyan, sent by the Presbyterian Church to Aniwa to evangelise in the 1850s (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 148–50). They came from an island where significant changes in burial ritual were already underway. A formal cemetery had been established by the missionary John Geddie on Aneityum, where converts were strongly discouraged from continuing to bury bodies at sea (Miller 1978). An as-yet-unpublished archaeological survey involving several of the authors of this paper has documented stone-lined graves on Aneityum, similar to one of the main forms in Aniwa.

These types of cemeteries are currently unknown from neighbouring Tanna and Erromango, despite extensive surveys of the mission landscapes of those islands (Flexner 2016), with the exception of a single stone-lined grave lying in the bush at Dillon's Bay, Erromango. It is possible that the customary methods of burial in those islands persisted through the missionary period, even as people's religious beliefs changed. Physical burial markers of imported cement only occur on Tanna and Erromango in the larger villages close to major mission stations beginning in the twentieth century, remaining rare in more remote areas.

It seems likely that even before the arrival of European missionaries in the New Hebrides stone-lined graves may have been introduced by Polynesian teachers associated with the work of the LMS in the 1840s (Liuaʻana 1996). Ethnoarchaeological research in East Futuna (namesake to the previously mentioned Outlier in Vanuatu) as well as neighbouring Alofi identified five coral slab-lined graves, while cobble-outlined graves were considered "abundant" for Futuna (Kirch and Dickinson 1976: 37; see also Sand *et al*. 2020: 92–94). In Sāmoa, Meleisea and Schoeffel (2016: 150) note that "the graves of those of lesser status were marked with a low rectangle of stones". Communal burial grounds in Tonga often use stone cobbles, as well as bottles and cans in more recent examples, to retain the white sand fill of the graves (see Burley 1995: 77–78). Considering how common lined graves were in pre- and post-missionary Polynesia and the lack of similar practices in pre-mission southern Vanuatu, it is reasonable to infer that the form was introduced by islander catechists from east to west.

The Aniwan graves we recorded generally post-date Pacific Islander evangelists by several decades (see below). We would suggest the Aniwan grave form was most likely adapted from practices introduced by the later Aneityumese teachers. One possibility is that an example of a stone-lined grave was provided for Nemeyan after he was killed on Aniwa (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 149), and the form was subsequently copied and expanded upon. Later Aniwan converts visiting Aneityum would certainly have seen this grave form in the cemetery established under Geddie. Regardless of the original source, the Aniwan cemeteries described below can be attributed to a large degree to indigenous exchanges of material form rather than European missionary introduction.

The first European missionary settled on Aniwa was John G. Paton, who followed in the footsteps of the Aneityumese teachers. Paton, having fled a previous failed mission in Tanna (see Adams 1984), arrived in Aniwa along with his wife, Margaret Whitecross Paton, in November 1866 with a significant contingent of Aneityumese teachers (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 126). They set about creating a mission station consisting of a massive lime mortar house, a mission church, a printing house and an orphanage to house children, who increasingly were left without parents or even close relatives because of outbreaks of introduced diseases (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 130–34). General demographic statistics for Aniwa do exist, and they parallel the drastic depopulation as recorded for neighbouring islands, notably Aneityum (Spriggs 2007). The periodic records indicate an overall pattern of decline, from a population of roughly 600 in the 1840s to 250 people in 1871 when infant mortality is noted to be particularly high, 222 in 1873, 167 in 1884 and down to a low of 150 in the 1890s (Miller 1981: 46, 49; 1986: 186–211). Considering the high mortality rates, it is probable that burial at sea continued from the 1860s to the 1880s or that "cemeteries" dating to the mission period of Aniwa are in fact mass graves whose locations have long been forgotten.

Paton's mission was located on spiritually charged ground at a place called Imarae ("marae" locations having the same connotation of sacred space in Aniwan as elsewhere in Polynesia, though it can also be used more generically to refer to open space in villages; Capell 1958: 2–3). Paton (1907, vol. 2: 130–31) even recognised that he was intentionally given land that was thought to be dangerous, housing the bones of dead people whose atua could cause harm (Capell 1958: 19, 35–37). The belief that men with spiritual power both cured and caused sickness was present on Aniwa as it had been on Tanna, something Paton (1907, vol. 2: 135) notes with frustration. Missionaries were often called upon to treat the sick, but to do so ran the risk of also being blamed for the death of the patient. Despite this and many other pitfalls and barriers based on mutual misunderstanding, Paton was eventually able to convert the entire population of Aniwa to Christianity. One key event was the digging of a freshwater well on the tabu ground of Imarae, which produced fresh, potable water despite local belief that this was not possible in the area. The chief, Namakei, when confronted with the apparently miraculous well, decided that he would convince his people to convert to Christianity (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 153–93).

As the population declined and with missionary encouragement, the Aniwans abandoned most coastal settlements within a few decades of Paton's arrival, aggregating into a smaller number of villages in the "healthier" uppermost terrace of the raised coral island. At the same time, apparently concerned about the negative effects of European traders and plantations on neighbouring islands, the population of Aniwa "sold" first a portion in 1866, and then the entire island in 1871, to the mission to be kept as a "native reserve" (NHBS 13/III/18, Western Pacific Archives, Auckland).

After 1881 Aniwa was largely administered by the missionaries Watt and Gray, stationed on nearby Tanna (Miller 1986: 187–90), with local elders actually running the church on the island.

The Patons continued mission work on Aniwa for several decades, punctuated with speaking and fundraising tours to Australia, North America and Europe. They left the island for Melbourne in 1881 but retained a continuing capacity as missionaries of the island, continuing to travel to Aniwa on a regular basis until a final visit in 1903 (Paton 1907, vol. 3: 104–5). While the overall island was "owned" by the Presbyterian Church, the notion of ownership was often interpreted differently by indigenous people in Vanuatu (Flexner 2019; Van Trease 1987). Practical rights to use the land, clear and plant garden plots, harvest fruit from the forest or build houses, among other activities, would have been managed by the Aniwan chiefs and were likely more important for Aniwans than legal title.

THE CEMETERIES OF ANIWA

Archaeological surveys documented a series of cemeteries on Aniwa Island adjacent to the founding mission station and a former settlement nearby. Collaborative survey with local researchers revealed that most of the graves we recorded on Aniwa date to the decades after Presbyterian missionaries were no longer permanently living on the island. The cemeteries represent complex transformations in mortuary behaviour during the last two centuries in south Vanuatu, which we argue are tied to changing relationships between people, land and ancestors. We interpret the visible grave markers constructed around Aniwa since the early 1900s as physical manifestations of continuing assertions of kinship and connection to territory. The graves located closest to Paton's mission also represent close ties to the Presbyterian Church. In other cases, more or less explicit ties to ancestral places are being expressed by the families who maintain connections to the cemeteries and the marae on and around which they are located.

The cemeteries we recorded largely cluster around the mission sites at Imarae, Aniwa (Fig. 2). We describe the four main cemeteries, from south to north: Irangai, which consists of four discrete clusters of graves; the graves surrounding the remains of Paton's mission house and subsequent churches; Nakmaroro, which was one of the largest and most variable; and Ikeri further north (not pictured in Fig. 2). A total of 92 graves are located in the four cemeteries, with a variety of forms (Fig. 3; Table 1). The two most common forms are (i) rectangular with upright slabs of coral, sometimes replaced with or including lime mortar from one of the now-demolished missionary buildings with a layer of coral gravel sealing the interior surface, and (ii) cement graves made from imported construction materials. There were also two unique occurrences, one of piled coral slabs and a "bottle grave",

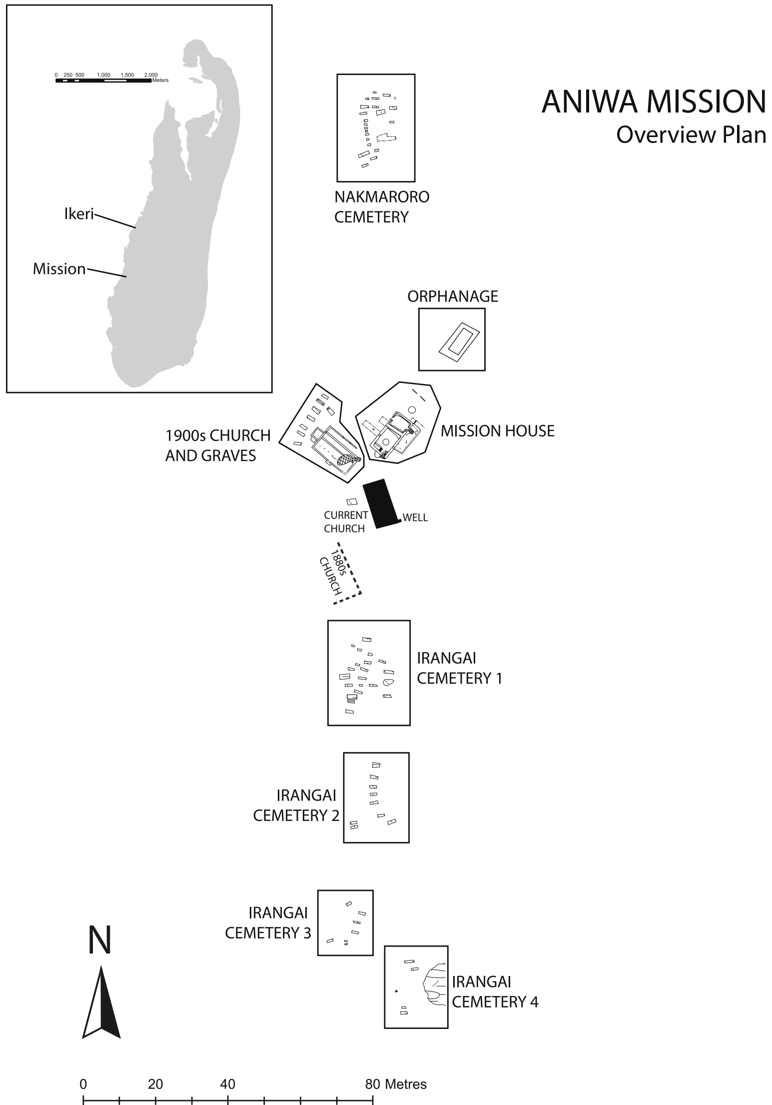

Figure 2. Plan of the main Aniwa mission features and surrounding cemeteries. The small rectangular features represent graves documented during surveys of this area.

Figure 3. Examples of the variants in grave form from Aniwa: (a) coral slab-lined; (b) cement; (c) bottle grave; (d) heaped coral.

Table 1. Distribution of grave forms in the main cemetery areas.

Area/cluster	Slab-lined (adult)	Slab-lined (child)	Bottle grave	Heaped coral	Unknown (damaged by cyclone)	Cement	Total
Nakmaroro	8	10	1	1	0	0	20
Irangai 1	11	5	0	0	0	5	21
Irangai 2	10	4	0	0	0	2	16
Irangai 3	5	2	0	0	0	0	7
Irangai 4	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
1900s church	6	0	0	0	0	2	8
Current church	0	1	0	0	0	4	5
Ikeri	6	1	0	0	4	0	11
Total	49	24	1	1	4	13	92

both at Nakmaroro. While the cement graves represent cash expenditure, the kinds of elaborate imported headstones Lilomaiava-Doktor (2016: 175, 177) documents for contemporary Sāmoans are not present in Aniwa. However, the presence of grave goods on many of the most recent cement graves (see below) may represent an impulse to materialise the wealth of the family in a similar way.

Irangai

The cemeteries in Irangai, to the south of Paton's mission, cover an area of roughly 2,500 m^2 that groups into four clusters with conspicuous gaps in between. The largest cluster of graves is the one closest to the mission in the north, with smaller clusters to the south. The burials in Irangai 1 include prominent church elders and their family members. The 21 graves in Irangai 1 are primarily of the slab-lined form (16/21), but there are also five recent cement graves that date to the second half of the twentieth century. All of these graves are associated with people who had strong ties to the Church. In contrast, moving south through Irangai 2, 3 and 4, the smaller clusters appear to be divided into family groups. The size of the clusters gets smaller going south through these cemeteries (Irangai 2 = 13; Irangai 3 = 7; Irangai 4 = 5). There are no mortar graves in Irangai 3 or 4, and notably the two mortar graves in Irangai 2 are the northernmost ones in that cluster. Oral traditions indicate that Irangai 1 and Irangai 4 have been used from the 1940s through the present. While not remembered as well, local histories indicate that the other clusters at least date to after the 1890s, when there was no longer a permanent European missionary presence on Aniwa.

Also notable for Irangai 4 is the presence of a large banyan tree (Bislama: *nabanga*) that formed a boundary for the kava drinking and dancing ground (Bislama: *nakamal*; Aniwan: marae) named Ramangasa. The graves of Irangai 4 date to no earlier than the 1940s, and in one case much more recently, again reflecting the relatively current nature of these features. It is somewhat ironic that even though the "traditional" use of marae for dancing or drinking kava has subsided, they nonetheless remain important places on the landscape through their renewed use as burial grounds (as is also the case for Ikeri; see below). Between our 2017 and 2018 field seasons, a local community member was buried at the southernmost cluster of graves at Irangai 4. This burial was surrounded by a wooden fence draped with cloth. Inside of the enclosure was a grave in the "traditional" coral slab form. In addition, there was a small (50–100 cm diameter and height) mound of ash from a fire that had been kept lit to mark the 30-day mourning period from the date of burial.

Local colleagues explained that this apparently continuous practice related to the family group making an explicit historical link to their ancestral lands. Another instance of constructing a new coral slab-lined grave in May 2018

Figure 4. Contemporary burial from 2018, featuring the ash mound and wooden surrounding structure over the upright coral slabs.

confirmed that this form of mortuary ritual was an important contemporary as well as historical practice (Fig. 4). Significantly for archaeological research, within a few years the wood and cloth will have rotted away and the ash mound dispersed, leaving only the coral slabs, which is what we have documented elsewhere in the island. The recent nature of these mortuary monuments has provided an important challenge to assumptions about demographic decline and missionary influence in the formation of historical cemeteries. The graves of Aniwa appear to post-date the period of major colonial epidemics, and indeed new graves of this form continue to be constructed in the present.

Third Church and Current Church

Two clusters of graves surround the third and fourth churches constructed around the mission area. There are six coral slab-lined graves and two cement graves to the north of the footings of the third church in Imarae, which was built in 1894 and blown down by a cyclone in the 1950s. The other group consists of four cement graves to the east of the current standing church on

the site as well as a stone-lined marker outlining the graves of three children (two of the Patons' children and one of their grandchildren) to the west of this building. The most recent of the graves around the third and current churches dates to 2016. We were told by local informants that these graves were associated with people who were senior in the church (deacons or elders) but also associated with the traditional land area of Imarae.

Nakmaroro

Nakmaroro is another cemetery located in the vicinity of a previous marae of the same name. Nakmaroro's graves date primarily to the second half of the twentieth century, based on the artefacts present and local memories. The cemetery consists of a cluster of 20 graves, half of which were a smaller size, suggesting child burials. There is historical evidence for high child mortality (Miller 1981: 49), though considering the more recent date of most of these graves it is unclear whether such a pattern continued in the decades after missionaries departed from Aniwa. Most of the graves at Nakmaroro (18/20) are of the slab-lined form. Four of these integrate fragments of lime mortar, some of which have the impressions of wooden lathes. This material would most likely have been robbed from collapsed mission buildings, many of which were destroyed in a major cyclone in the 1950s. Integration of the fabric of missionary constructions in grave lining is an example of the ways that mission heritage has been localised in terms of indigenous tradition or *kastom* in southern Vanuatu (Flexner and Spriggs 2015; Flexner *et al*. 2019: 411–13).

Nakmaroro included single examples of two forms of burial that are unique amongst the graves recorded. One is a slab-lined grave that has been surrounded by beer bottles. Local memory indicates a woman being buried in this grave. The bottles are an amber, machine-made form with embossed labels indicating the 1960s, with a *terminus post quem* of 1965. Burley (1995) has documented the use of beer bottles and cans as grave construction material on Tonga. He warns against the simple equation of bottles with drinking, and suggests it is also their aesthetic value and physical properties as construction material that are prominent in the minds of those who use these items in constructing graves. The other unique grave form at Nakmaroro is a mound of heaped coral and lime mortar building material. There were no memories of who is buried in this grave, but the form and size suggests it may contain a person who was of some importance in the community.

Ikeri

Ikeri, a former village area located approximately 1 km north of Paton's mission, contained two clearly visible clusters of slab-lined graves, though it should be noted that their apparent spatial discreteness may be slightly

Figure 5. Cluster of slab-lined graves from Ikeri. The far-right grave, said to be a child burial, was reset at a larger size decades after the initial interment.

misleading. The area in between also had graves which were heavily disturbed by a tidal wave that inundated the area during Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, leaving behind a jumbled area of surface stones, some of which were grave stones. The southern "cluster" consists of three graves located on the historic marae, which is bounded by two large banyan trees, as at Irangai 4. The northern cluster (Fig. 5) includes a child's grave whose stones have been reset further apart to make the grave appear larger, another reminder of the ongoing transformation of these features by living people connected to particular places on Aniwa.

Grave Goods

Grave goods were common throughout the Aniwa cemeteries, placed as offerings or integrated into the grave architecture in some cases (Table 2). In the Irangai cemeteries, two slab-lined child graves documented in 2018 at Irangai 2 included a metal jaw harp, buttons, and fragments of a slate pencil and writing slate. The slate pencil and writing slate may represent a nineteenth- or twentieth-century date (our older colleagues in Vanuatu remember using slate pencils in school through the 1950s). At Irangai 4, the presence of a very large iron cauldron on the surface may have been

Table 2. Types of grave offerings from Aniwa cemeteries ("X" indicates presence).

Grave good type	Nakmaroro	Irangai 2	Irangai 4	Contemp. church	Mission church
Ceramic bowl		X			
Ceramic mug		X			
Clothing			X		
Flashlight		X			
Glass bottle (brown)	X				X
Glass bottle (green)		X			
Glass bottle (clear)		X			X
Glass bottle (blue)		X			
Glass bottle (other)	X	X			
Glass cup				X	
Glass plate				X	X
Metal bowl	X	X			X
Metal cooking pot			X		X
Metal lap-lap grate					X
Metal mug	X	X			X
Metal plate	X	X		X	
Metal spoon	X				X
Metal teapot		X			X
Metal machete			X		
Plastic bottle	X	X			
Plastic container			X		
Plastic flowers			X	X	
Ribbon			X		
Shoes			X	X	X
Tinsel				X	
Asthma inhaler		X			
Aerosol container		X			

an offering, or perhaps was used to cook meals during the 30-day vigil for one of the earlier burials in the area. Other common offerings among the Irangai graves include bottles that would have contained alcohol, perfume or other liquids, enamelled metal plates, bowls and pots, and on one of the more recent examples, a cathode-ray tube television and a DVD player. At Nakmaroro, in addition to bottles, there were enamelled metal cups and bowls left as offerings, which may have contained food or drink when initially placed on the graves. These offerings likely related to the personality of the individual and the family and community's wishes to both remember and perhaps propitiate and continue to care for the atua of the deceased. They may also be a representation of family wealth and wellbeing, though this was not particularly remarked upon by our Aniwan collaborators. These graves remain very much in the community's consciousness and, as indicated by the more recently deposited grave goods, continue to be visited on a semi-regular basis.

Artefacts had been placed by local people in the roots of a large java plum tree during cleaning of the Ikeri site in 2018. The artefacts included a case gin bottle which likely dates to the missionary period, a cordial or sauce bottle and two patent medicine bottles (Fig. 6). One is "WESTON'S WIZARD OIL//THE UNIVERSAL AMERICAN MEDICINE", and the other less complete example reads "…O'S…[EFFER]VESCING//[LIGH]T SALT". Frank Weston, of the aforementioned "wizard oil", was an American

Figure 6. Patent medicine bottles and shellfish remains from Ikeri.

performer and patent medicine salesman who notably toured Australia in the 1870s and 1880s (Miller 2007). The sale of the whole island of Aniwa to the Presbyterian Church precluded the establishment of any traders on the island, but Aniwans were in regular contact with traders based on Tanna, and so the presence of these items is no surprise. The area disturbed by Cyclone Pam included shellfish remains, pig tusks and bones and metal artefacts including sewing pins. It is unclear whether these objects consist of offerings or derive from the period when the area was actively inhabited in the 1800s. Probably it is a combination of these things.

CEMETERIES, ANCESTORS AND SPIRITS IN A CHANGING PACIFIC

Colonialism wrought major changes in the Pacific region, affecting political economies, island ecosystems, religious belief and practice and demographics (here we focus on the latter two phenomena; for overviews see Flexner 2014, 2020). Evidence for large-scale population collapse following the introduction of Old World infectious diseases is common throughout the Pacific (Kirch and Rallu 2007). The New Hebrides islands were no exception. General population decline in the New Hebrides was noted by contemporary observers including Christian missionaries during the 1800s and 1900s (e.g., Gunn 1914: 113–22; Speiser 1922). Historical analysis has also sought to reconstruct the structure of population collapse in the archipelago (e.g., McArthur 1981). The most thoroughly documented population decline in the southern New Hebrides is that of Aneityum, where Spriggs (2007) has traced a series of major epidemics from the 1850s until the early 1900s. An initial population of over 3,500 plummeted to a low of around 300 within that period, and the island remains largely depopulated relative to its contact-era density. Major epidemics were also recorded on Tanna during the 1850s and 1860s (Adams 1984: 116–33) and on Aniwa from the 1840s to the 1890s (see above; Miller 1981: 46, 49; 1985).

At the same time that Pacific Island populations were collapsing, European missionaries entered the region with the goal of converting the survivors to Christianity. Conversion to Christianity was not a simple, straightforward process in the New Hebrides, despite the way it was often depicted in missionary accounts. Islanders didn't simply become Christian subjects, leaving behind all traces of their previous "heathenism" (see Keane 2007 for a similar discussion of the Dutch Calvinist missions in Indonesia). Rather, islanders incorporated Christianity into a broader universe of beliefs and customary practices, referred to as kastom in Bislama, Vanuatu's pidgin (Flexner 2016). One of the practices in Aniwan kastom that changed was mortuary ritual. Burial at sea was actively discouraged by missionaries in the New Hebrides, but much of the change may also have been driven by local people and their adaptation to changed settlement patterns and connections

to customary land via ancestors. The traditional practice of burial at sea (Capell 1958: 18–19; Steel 1880: 379) was replaced with burial in formal cemeteries featuring graves lined with coral slabs or mounded coral or marked with bottles, and eventually raised cement graves.

Recent studies of grave form and location in Rotuma (Rensel and Howard 2016), New Guinea highlands (Gibbs 2016; Jacka 2016) and Sāmoa (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2016; Meleisea and Schoeffel 2016) have uncovered some common threads within ongoing changes to Pacific Islander relationships to death and burial. Specifically, these studies have revealed the ways that contemporary grave markers are used by Pacific Islanders to assert ownership over land, reflect the prestige and wealth of particular family groups and mediate disputes. Contemporary grave-marking also reflects ongoing concerns about relationships to the spirits of deceased ancestors.

Spirits were and are a worry for Pacific Islanders, as they could cause injury, misfortune or death, especially where the deceased individual was killed by warfare or sorcery. Often relationships with spirits had to be controlled by ritual specialists to minimise the risk of such harm (for an example from southern Vanuatu see Bonnemaison 1994: 178–80). Proper mortuary ritual was another way of controlling these spirits. On Aniwa and neighbouring Futuna, atua were seen as universally dangerous, though traditionally only certain atua were believed to persist in the mortal realm beyond the period of mourning (Capell 1958: 36–37). After conversion to Christianity, it is possible that a more immortal form was granted to all atua in line with Christian cosmology, though this is not clearly remarked upon by the missionaries or subsequent ethnographers.

After the main period of missionary influence on Aniwa, people widely adapted new forms and practices of leaving consumer goods as grave offerings. These practices materialised ancestral relationships. Assertions of kinship relate to ongoing connections to land (*fanua*), and often more specifically to particular marae, a term that referred both to a sacred space for dancing and drinking kava and to the traditional hamlets consisting of groups of houses surrounding an open space (Capell 1958: 2–3, 9–10). Relationships to land and to atua were also shaped by processes of Christian conversion, and thus these stories are inherently intertwined.

Demographic decline in some cases caused claims about ancestry and territory to become ambiguous or contested because of discontinuities in ancestral lines. Other factors, such as economic development, are also relevant to transformations in Oceanic mortuary rituals. The ability to offer a “modern” grave to one’s ancestors could be linked to personal or familial prestige. Where graves are located likewise remains significant and in many cases is tied to expressions of ancestral connection. This is clearly the case for burials on now-abandoned marae of Aniwa. These are not either/or

factors. Burial practices relate simultaneously to the pragmatic concerns of the living and their spiritual concerns for the dead. Relationships to spirits, contemporary political and economic competition, and assertions of land rights are all connected ongoing processes derived from colonial and post-colonial history in Vanuatu.

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A variety of ritual dynamics are at play in the cemeteries of Aniwa. The mission-era cemeteries do not reflect in a simple way the demographic collapse and religious conversion of populations in these islands over the course of the 1800s. It is quite likely that sea burial, practised on Aniwa (Capell 1958: 18–19; Steel 1880: 379) as well as neighbouring islands (Humphreys 1926: 89–90, 118), continued to be used for some time in the mission period. There is also the possibility of people being buried in unmarked graves, particularly during the severe outbreaks of epidemic disease commonly documented by the missionaries.

The graves themselves are not directly related to outbreaks and related demographic decline. They are instead a reflection of cultural choices made by Aniwans, largely independently of missionary influence and largely after the period of population collapse had ended. The slab-lined grave is likely an introduced form adapted to the local context. It seems likely that this form came initially to Aneityum with the Sāmoan and Rarotongan teachers who came to the southern New Hebrides ahead of European missionaries beginning in the 1840s (Liuaʻana 1996) and was later introduced to Aniwa, possibly via Aneityumese teachers. Regardless of from where it was introduced, this form of grave became widespread after the missionary period in Aniwa and continues to be used through the present. It was common for people to use not only coral limestone but also fragments of lime mortar to line the graves. This reflects an integration of missionary materials into local interpretations of Christian belief, alongside changing ideas about kastom or tradition. Likewise, the widespread presence of grave offerings might indicate a continuing sense of obligation to spirits or ancestors. If atua are still potentially dangerous, or at least beings who require ongoing relationships with the living, then these are material markers of propitiation.

These cemeteries were not constructed in empty landscapes. The terrace on which Paton built the Aniwa mission has been occupied for at least 2,600 years, and there is abundant archaeological evidence on and below the surface. Paton (1907, vol. 2: 130–31) notes clearing mounds of bone from the mission grounds, which he assumed to be evidence of cannibalism, though the bones are much more likely to have been evidence of earlier burials. It was common for local people in the southern New Hebrides to settle missionaries on spiritually dangerous ground, including former burial

grounds (Flexner and Willie 2015). Encounters with the restless atua of the deceased were considered particularly hazardous. As cosmological and spiritual beliefs shifted with the adoption of Christianity, the relationships with atua may also have changed, though they were and are still periodically propitiated with offerings. Simultaneously, being able to point to ancestors buried in particular places—and indeed, continuing to assert the right to bury people in specific places—reinforces a sense of belonging and ownership over parts of the island, linked through extensive kin networks.

People throughout Vanuatu have historically used foreign people, goods and concepts to mark evolving connections to land while leveraging such relationships for political purposes (Flexner 2019). The Aniwa cemeteries represent a variety of processes, including assertions of territorial connection but also connection to ancestors, kinship and atua. More broadly, what these changing burial practices reflect is a pattern of Aniwan people adopting introduced beliefs and materials, then adapting them creatively within an evolving sense of kastom as people in the New Hebrides continue to negotiate their relationships with the colonial world. This pattern of behaviour is not restricted to the colonial period (Flexner *et al*. 2019). Rather it reflects a long history of innovation and resilience as local people from Aniwa negotiated relationships with each other, with regional neighbours with whom they had kinship and exchange relationships, and with interlopers from the outside world.

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Corresponding Author: James L. Flexner, Department of Archaeology, Quadrangle Building (A14), University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.
Email: james.flexner@sydney.edu.au. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2577-5991

Brianna Muir: School of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. Email: Brianna.Muir@anu.edu.au.
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0320-4415

Stuart Bedford: Department of Archaeology and Natural History, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia; Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Jena, Germany. Email: stuart.bedford@anu.edu.au.
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6476-5617

Frederique Valentin: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris, France; MSH Mondes à Nanterre, Nanterre, France. Email: frederique.valentin@cnrs.fr.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0575-7681

Denise Elena: Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Aniwa, Vanuatu.

David Samoria: Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Aniwa, Vanuatu.