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Ideology, leadership and fertility; Evaluating a model of Polynesian chiefship


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A lucid general model of the ideological background of Polynesian chiefship was presented recently by Nicholas Thomas in the introduction to his monograph on the Marquesas Islands (Thomas 1990:28-33). It is true, this model is neither the first nor the only one, but it certainly is the clearest and most general description of its kind. Other models of Polynesian chiefship include the lengthy discussion of chiefship by Goldman (1970), Sahlins' brilliantly written, though too wide-ranging, essay on the 'stranger-king' (1985; see Oosten 1988 for critical comments), and the rather different approach to the chiefly system by Marcus (1989; for a discussion of his model see Claessen 1996:343).

I will restrict myself here to a discussion of Thomas' model, summarizing its main points below (leaving out a number of nuances):

A key element of Polynesian chieftainship in general is a genealogical and mythological construction of rank on the basis of successive primogeniture: an elder brother is the ancestor of a metaphorically 'senior' lineage while the 'junior' lines trace descent from the younger brother. These notional connections are traced all the way back to the first quasi-human deities, such that principal ancestors are linked in a direct way with the first-born chiefly line and in an indirect way with the rest of society: the access of ordinary people to the main deities is mediated by the chiefs [...] In most contexts there is thus likely to be one chief who has a unique status to (say) a village or clan [...] Dependence arises because the hierarchy is linked to an iconography of food production (agriculture and fishing) whereby such activities do not simply happen but are conditional upon certain kinds of ritual work associated with specific ancestor-gods. The ancestor gods are thus causes of the life of plants and other elements in the natural world and also of course of the humans who depend upon those plants, fish and so on. The ritual knowledge upon which this work is based, and the ritual practices themselves, were generally monopolized by either single chiefs or groups of chiefs. The

1 It would be apter, perhaps, to call Thomas' model an ideal type in the sense of Weber (1964), except that the term 'model' is more common in anthropological discourse and, moreover, Thomas uses this term himself.

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basis of this monopolization is of course the special genealogical link between the chief and the deity [...] The difference between chiefs and others of high status (such as members of relatively recent branches from the chiefly line) should, according to the model, have always been a qualitative one, involving more than merely a greater degree of sanctity, because of the crucial place of ritual action and life-giving agency in the overall field of relations. With respect to any particular object, such as a tract of land, there was a combination of two sets of rights: an abstract or titular ownership on the part of the chief, and contingent but immediate tenure on the part of the users. This general, abstract ownership was associated with a flow of goods towards the chief: some were ritual first-fruits in direct acknowledgement of 'the work of the gods'; others were related to his status in a more general way. Prestations within a chiefly system (of the Tikopian type) entailing hierarchical encompassment are entirely different from those which take place in reciprocal relations, simply because of the titular ownership of all land and the primary if abstract right to all that is produced. Since the survival and regeneration of the group as a whole was dependent upon the work of the chief there was a sense in which everyone was indebted to him. The well-being and productiveness of the land were seen to flow from a generalized condition of chiefly well-being and chiefly ritual in particular. The ritual work was, at one level, the cause of production. Because the chief had a kind of overarching if partial ownership of everything, and because of the condition of the open-ended indebtedness to the chief as the giver of life, or at least the living mediator of divine life-giving forces, the system entailed asymmetrical rather than mutual reciprocal dependence, and prestations to the chief had the character of offerings rather than of the stereotypic debt-creating gift. (Thomas 1990:28-33).

Thomas ends his discussion of chiefship with the statement that 'something like chiefdoms of this kind must have existed in the ancestral society', thus placing his model in a historical perspective. It is not his intention, however, to restrict his model only to the distant past, for he stresses that Polynesian societies 'were all hierarchical to a greater or lesser degree, and all possessed some institution of chieftainship or a chiefly class' (Thomas 1990:26; my emphasis). Moreover, he states that he wants to 'provide an image which can plausibly be equated with the ancestral form of chieftainship in Polynesian societies' (Thomas 1990:27). He adds that the forms of hierarchy and chiefship have been 'modified and transformed in particular histories and local evolutionary processes' (Thomas 1990:27).

Before relating the model to the ethnographic data of one of the Polynesian islands in order to test its applicability, two preliminary remarks

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2 This is not the place to go into the interesting parallels and differences between the Polynesian and African sacred chiefs. Suffice it to say here that aspects such as long genealogies and influence on fertility, as well as the legitimizing force of these notions in Polynesia, are quite similar to traditional concepts in Africa south of the Sahara (see Claessen and Oosten 1996). Moreover, African chiefs and kings conform to 'a single ideological model' (Muller 1981) – as was also the case in Polynesia.
should be made. The first is that Thomas' model is an abstract one. Thomas does not refer to specific cases, and though there are a few occasional references to Firth's work on Tikopia, no other data are given. Moreover, the model is presented without a preliminary analysis of ethnographic cases. This is not, of course, to suggest that the model is an arbitrary construct by a twentieth-century scholar: Thomas' familiarity with the Polynesian ethnographic literature is beyond dispute (see, for example, the bibliographies in Thomas 1989, 1990). In preparing his model, he abstracted from specific data—the usual procedure when constructing a general model (see Kloos 1984; De Ruijter 1995). The second remark that I should make here is that I am not so sure that the relations between the chief and the people—as Thomas suggests—were wholly free of reciprocal expectations. The chiefs guaranteed (or created, or promised) fertility and well-being (though one wonders to what extent the heavily taxed peasants in Tonga and Hawaii ever experienced a feeling of well-being, see Gifford 1929:104, 124, 127; Handy 1965:38), and the people worked for the chiefs and handed over their products and daughters to them. The system worked satisfactorily—as long as the chiefs fulfilled their part of the 'deal' by procuring fertility and well-being. Where this was not (or no longer) the case, a chief could be rejected. There are known cases in Polynesia of the ecological situation deteriorating so gravely in the course of time that hunger and poverty became a regular part of life. Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon (1998:77 ff., 101, 114) asserts that no such idea of reciprocity was found in the Tonga Islands, but that on nearby Futuna and Wallis a chief could be removed if he did not (could not) meet his obligations. In the Marquesas and on Easter Island a famine put an end to the rule of the arī‘i, with a kind of shamans taking over their religious responsibilities, while other (lower-ranking) subjects grabbed the political power and—as a kind of 'big men'—led local groups against each other in endless warfare (on the Marquesas, see Kirch 1991, Van Bakel 1989, Thomas 1990; on Easter Island, see McCoy 1979, McCall 1994, Van Tilburg 1994).

The general presentation of Thomas' model justifies an investigation of the ethnographic literature to see to what extent it is applicable to specific historical situations. It is my intention, therefore, to search the ethnographic literature on one particular, well-described Polynesian society in order to find out how the ethnographic data confirm the model. In the process, I will investigate to what extent the terms of the model are found, or foresha-
dowed, in the older literature, conveniently referred to as 'sources' (on the concept of 'sources', see Claessen and Oosten 1988; Van Bakel 1988, 1989, 1996). For this test I have selected the island of Tahiti, on which there is a copious literature.

**Tahiti**

I will not endeavour to present a 'complete' ethnography of Tahiti here, as this has already been done (Oliver 1974). I will concentrate on those aspects of Tahitian chiefship that are of special interest for the model, such as the sacred character of the *ari'i*, the connection between the *ari'i* and fertility, the role of the god Oro, the feather girdles (*maro ura* and *maro tea*), the Arioi society (especially in connection with the inauguration of the *ari'i rahi* and fertility), human sacrifices, offerings of the first fruits, and titular ownership. All these phenomena – not strongly determined by geographic or economic factors – may easily have developed into forms possessing characteristics diverging from the properties of Thomas' model. For convenience sake I will divide the ethnographic literature on Tahiti roughly into the following categories: eighteenth-century sources, missionary literature, miscellaneous nineteenth-century monographs, and one, more recent, publication that is usually regarded as a source. Works and comments by anthropologists are listed in the footnotes.

*The early visitors*

Some of the early eighteenth-century reports on Tahiti can be dismissed immediately, as they contain no relevant data on any of the aspects indicated above. This holds for the journals of Wallis, Robertson, and De Bougainville and his companions, as well as for most of the reports of the Spanish visitors.4

The Spanish captain Andia y Varella mentions special stones in the *marae* (temples) for the *ari'i* (Andia in Corney 1915:260) and points out that the *ari'i* are 'absolute lords over life and property' and 'are fed by the hand of another person' (Corney 1915:264). The fathers Clota and Gonzalez several times mention human sacrifices, which were offered on the occasion of the illness and death of Vehiatua, the lord of Taiarapu (Clota and Gonzalez 1915:337,

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4 Tahiti was discovered by Wallis in 1767 (Wallis 1789). Wallis' master, Robertson, has given a detailed account of the encounters with the Tahitians (Robertson 1948). De Bougainville (1966) and several of his officers (Fesche, Caro, De Commerson, Vivès) also wrote about their experiences. On these voyages, see Claessen 1994. The Spanish missionaries and the captains of the ships taking them to and from Tahiti wrote diaries and journals mainly about their stay at Taiarapu in the years 1772 to 1774 (Corney 1913, 1915, 1919; Rodriguez 1995).
The journal of the interpreter, Maximo Rodriguez, also contains some interesting details, such as that a Tahitian fisherman did not dare use a fishing net that belonged to Vehiatua (Rodriguez 1995:131). It also mentions human sacrifices (Rodriguez 1995:172, 175), saying that the corpses were afterwards taken to the marae Taputapuatea at Atehuru 'pour que le sacrifice fût complet' (Rodriguez 1995:176). Rodriguez further observed that on a special occasion women were allowed to enter a marae at Tautira. It goes without saying that the Spanish chroniclers had no clear idea of the meaning of these data (Cook, 1968:135, states that women were never allowed to enter a marae).

More important are the observations by James Cook during his four visits to Tahiti (1769, 1773, 1774, 1777). He was accompanied by scholars such as Banks, Solander, and the father and son Forster, who all wrote about their experiences in Tahiti. Artists such as Parkinson, Hodges and Webber made colour paintings of eighteenth-century Tahiti, moreover, and crew members such as the astronomer Wallis, the natural historian / surgeon Anderson, the surgeon Ellis, and the surgeon's mate Samwell wrote reports and kept diaries. Most of their accounts are descriptive, for the visitors knew little about the background of much of what they saw. It is often only in retrospect that we are able to interpret the phenomena described by them. On the other hand, as Cook visited Tahiti four times, his knowledge and understanding increased all the time. One of the main problems for the British visitors was the intricate nature of the political structure of Tahiti, where there existed a number of independent polities and there were close connections between the ruling families. The British invested much time and energy in efforts to understand the political situation. I will restrict myself here to the features indicated above, however, and will refer only to the passages relevant to these in the reports of Cook and his companions.

**Sacred character of the ari'i**

Cook mentions a visit by one Amo (of Papara) and his son Teri'irere, who was carried on the shoulders of a man. In the course of this, everyone was obliged to uncover their shoulders. Amo acted as a kind of 'regent' for his son (Cook 1968:103 ff., 134, 1969:206, 208). Banks (1962, I:384) refers to the high esteem in which the ari'i rahi was held, though pointing out that 'in Power he seemed to us inferior to several of the Principal Earées' (some of the regional lords were very powerful indeed, while Tu, the later Pomare I of Pare Arue, was at that time very young and timid). G. Forster (1983:282) likewise mentions that everyone uncovered their shoulders in the presence of Vehiatua (the ari'i rahi of Tautira), as in that of Tu (G. Forster 1983:300).
Inauguration of the ari'i rahi

'The Eare dehi (ari' i rahi) or King' was crowned by priests, 'in the performing of which we are told much form and ceremony is used after which every one is at liberty to treat and play as many tricks with the new King as he pleaseth during the remainder of the day' (Cook 1968:135).

The Arioi society

Cook (1968:128) refers to the obligation of childlessness for Arioi members. He also mentions that the women indulged in 'indecent dance [...] In the Course of which they give full liberty to their desires [...]'. Banks' description (1962, I:351-2) is more or less identical with Cook's. Infanticide is mentioned by Wales (1969:844).

First fruits

Though Cook is not very clear on this subject, the following statement suggests first-fruit offerings: 'I am of the opinion that they offer to the Eatua (= atua) a strip or small piece of every piece of cloth they make before they use it themselves and it is not unlikely but what they observe the same thing with respect to thier (sic) Victuals' (Cook 1968:135).

The god Oro

During Cook's first voyage, Banks touched an Oro image (Banks 1962, I:318, note 4). Banks also describes in detail the great Oro marae of Papara, which was destroyed after the defeat of Papara (Banks 1962, I:303-4). In the course of an offering of a human sacrifice witnessed by Cook on his third voyage, an Oro image was displayed (Cook 1967:203).

Feather girdles (maro)

Solander (1773:71-2) mentions a red feather girdle, and says: 'Lorsque l'ERE'I [...] ceint pour la premiere fois cette marque de son autorite, toute l'ile se livre à des rejouissances publques [...]'. Neither Cook nor Banks refers to a girdle of this kind in the records of their first voyage, nor is such a girdle mentioned by the Spaniards in connection with Vehiatua. Cook does state, however, that Tahitians always negotiated for red feathers (Cook 1969:383, 411; see also G. Forster 1983:554), which he connects with religious ceremonies (Cook 1969: 411). Georg Forster (1983:325) saw yellow feathers used in confirmation of a promise. He mentions later that the ari'i Potatahu (of Atehuru) offered Cook his wife in exchange for red feathers (G. Forster 1983:564-5). On Cook's third voyage, the interest in red feathers was still strong in Tahiti (Cook 1967:187). The Tahitian Omai (who sailed with Cook on this journey) made a maro with yellow and red feathers, which passed into the possession of Vehiatua (Cook 1967:189-90). After the offering of a human sacrifice (described by Cook in
a maro was spread out in front of the priests. It was made up of yellow and red feathers and included an English pendant left by Captain Wallis. After that the Oro image was displayed.

**Human sacrifices**

Banks' journal contains what may be interpreted as an allusion to human sacrifices (Banks 1962, I:318), though the finds he describes may also have been war trophies. Cook on his second visit saw a human corpse in a marae (Cook 1969:233-4, 238) and was told that such offerings were 'demanded' by the priests. Something similar is described by J.R. Forster (1996:328-30), after first stating 'nor did I ever hear that they sacrifice men' (p. 328). Shortly after Cook's arrival in Tahiti on his third voyage, a human sacrifice was prepared. It was to be offered to Oro in a marae at Atehuru, and Tu (= Pomare I) had to be present during the ceremony. Cook and some of his men also attended the ritual, during which a priest held up the royal maro and a bundle containing the Oro image. Other priests held tufts of red feathers. An eye of the person sacrificed was offered to Tu, and in the end the victim was buried (Cook 1967:198-202). The next day another ceremony was held in the marae, during which the maro was spread out in front of the priests. The people to be sacrificed were selected from among the lower class and were killed by surprise (Cook 1967:204). Some days later Tu again went to Atehuru to be present at the offering of a human sacrifice (Cook 1967:209), and a few days later again had the maro (ura) put on in the same marae at Atehuru (Cook 1967:217). Anderson, the surgeon, who attended the ceremony with Cook, gives a similar description of what happened at the marae (Anderson 1967:978-84).

**Titular ownership**

No mention is made of this phenomenon either by Cook or by his crew.

**Visitors at the end of the eighteenth century**

Before citing the data presented by the missionaries, I should mention some other eighteenth-century visitors. They included William Bligh, who visited Tahiti three times (first with Cook, then on the Bounty, and finally, in 1788, on the Providence, again in order to procure breadfruit plants), and William Morrison, one of the Bounty mutineers, who lived in Tahiti from May 1789 till May 1791. The British explorer George Vancouver, who visited Tahiti at the end of 1791, does not have much to add to the observations by Cook, Bligh, and others before him (Vancouver 1800). He was mainly interested in the political situation and frequently mentions that everyone had to uncover their shoulders in the presence of the young Tu. In this section also I will concentrate on the features enumerated at the beginning of this article, to which I will add 'inauguration of the ari'i rahi'.
Sacred character of the ari'i

Morrison (1966:137) states that the ari'i was a sacred ruler and that everything touched by him became sacred, so that no ordinary person was allowed to use the object concerned any longer (Morrison 1966:138-9; one is tempted to speculate here about how the ari'i handled sexual contacts). The ruler was connected with the god Tane. In 1788 Tu (named Tinah at the time) was regent for his eldest son (Bligh 1952:47). Tinah was fed by one of his attendants (Bligh 1952:48, 55, 1988:82). Bligh in 1788 visited Tinah's son, who lived in Pare with Tinah's other children. This son now occupied the highest rank in the island (Bligh 1952:51). He was carried on the shoulders of a servant, and everyone was supposed to uncover their shoulders in his presence (Bligh 1952:53; Morrison 1966:138). This rule also applied to anyone passing the ari'i's house or land. In 1792 the boy was more approachable (he had somehow become less tapu), though he still rode on the shoulders of a man (Bligh 1988:60). When a British officer inadvertently broke a branch off a tree in a marae and tied it to the house occupied by the British, all Tahitians immediately left the house: it had become tapu for them. Only Tinah was able to lift the tapu (Bligh 1952:82). Some time later one of the ari'i put a stop to the sale of hogs in his district, as there were only a few hogs left there (Bligh 1952:97). The prohibition was a rahui, of which Morrison (1966:161) gives many details, saying: 'C'est une interdiction ou un embargo mis sur les provisions et le bétail en totalité ou en partie, dans un ou plusieurs districts et institué pour empêcher l'épuisement des réserves de nourriture, par consommation ou par transport d'un district à un autre'.

On Bligh's second visit he was given to understand that there were only two ari'i rahī in Tahiti: Tu (Tinah) and Vehiatua (from Tiarapu). When their line died out for lack of successors, only the Pare Arue lords remained (Bligh 1988:151). The Papara ari'i rahī line had considerably declined in power since they had lost the war. Their Oro image and maro' had been taken away from them and they were no longer a factor of any consequence in the power game (see Oliver 1988:159 ff.). Bligh later stated, however, that 'Tevvyootah [Teva-i-uta, the cooperating south coast polities] is governed by a Person who certainly has had equal and like Power to Otoo'. This was Tomaree (= Teri'irere, the son of Amo and Purea), who had the eye of the human sacrifice presented to him and wore the maro, and for whom every person uncovered (Oliver 1988:215). It is not clear which

5 Such rahui sometimes also had political implications, as is apparent from the attempts of high-born women to break a prohibition imposed by Amo and Purea of Papara in preparation for the inauguration of their son Teri'irere (see Arii Taimai 1964:36-9). Oliver (1974:1072) confirms the political aspects of rahui, though he does not underestimate the underlying economic interests. Rahui-like phenomena are also found in other islands. For example, in the Tonga Islands the Tui Tonga used to impose a taboo on all kinds of food for a period of time in preparation for the inasi – a first-fruit ritual (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:219, 277).
maro he wore at the time, or how he had managed to regain his former position.

Inauguration of the ari'i rahi
Morrison was the first visitor to give an eye-witness account of this ceremony (April 1788). The young 'king' was invested with the maro ura, or red feather girdle, which was seldom worn and was kept in a sacred box guarded by priests. 'Cette cérémonie fut célébrée à Pare, sur le nouveau marae construit pour recevoir le marae mobile etc. que nous avions rapportés d'Atahuru et dans lequel ces objets étaient maintenant conservés' (Morrison 1966:91). The chief priest put the maro around the hips of the young prince and hailed him as the great ari'i of Tahiti. Three human sacrifices were offered, and an eye of each victim was presented to the prince. Large quantities of pigs and food were also offered (Morrison 1966:91-2).

The Arioi society
'The arreoys are highly respected, and the society is composed of men distinguished by their valour or some other merit, and great trust and confidence is reposed in them' (Bligh 1952:56). Tinah, being an Arioi member, had killed his first child, but later left the society (Bligh 1952:56). Of another ari'i it was said that he and his wife had killed each of their eight children at birth (Bligh 1952:57). During a dancing feast, Arioi members removed the clothes of the women and performed erotic dances (Bligh 1952:63, also pp. 90 and 96). A group of travelling Arioi members organized a heiva (feast) for Bligh (Bligh 1952:91). Morrison (1966:185-8) also mentions heiva, adding that some of the dances were rather indecent. He characterizes the Arioi society as a society 'composée de jeunes gens [...] qui consacrent leur jeunesse à une vie de plaisir et de débauche' (Morrison 1966:195). He also refers to the custom whereby Arioi members could demand any piece of clothing they liked, adding: 'et ils se saisissent toujours des jolies femmes du pays'. Arioi members were childless, which was achieved by infanticide (Morrison 1966:195). Morrison states with some emphasis that Arioi members never participated in war (Morrison 1966:196).

The god Oro
Morrison (1966:145) states that Oromatua (= Oro) was the son of the high god Tane. It was he 'qui préside à la guerre et à la paix et qui punit les chefs de maladie ou de mort lorsqu'ils négligent leurs fonctions'. Bligh was informed that Oro was the great god of the Tahitians and that there were many more gods (Bligh 1952:62). He stated in his 1792 journal that those who fell in battle had their eyes taken out, one of which was presented to the god Oro and the other to the ari'i, who did not eat it (Bligh 1988:92). In April 1792
Bligh observed that 'The Temple of Oro their God, which is always kept near the residence of the Erreeahigh (ari'i), was brought up in a Canoe with him, it is to remain here until tomorrow, when after a meeting of the Parties, Otoo returns to Oparre (Pare)' (Bligh 1988:114). The acting priest was Tootaha (also known as Ha'amanemane). Oro's temple was temporarily placed in a canoe for the purpose of transporting the image of the god, and the canoe temporarily bore the name Taputapuatea – the name of all major Oro temples (Bligh 1988:125). It was the only place where human sacrifices could be offered (Morrison 1966:148). The Oro image, wrapped in cloth and red feathers, was in the canoe with some other sacred things (Bligh 1988:119; see Morrison 1966:148). The young ari'i rahi Tu (the son of Tu/Tinah/Pomare I) presided over the rituals.

**Feather girdles**

With the assistance of some of the Bounty mutineers the red feather girdle, or maro ura, was 'removed' from Atehuru (where it was kept at the time of Cook's visits) to Pare, where the Oro image was also kept (Bligh 1988:121). 'The Marro Oohrah, or feathered Belt, which is put on the Erreeahigh when the Sacrifice is first made and the Eye presented, is about 12 feet long, and about 14 inches wide, one half is made of Yellow Feathers stitched on Cloth, and the other half is some Red English Bunting without any feathers' (Bligh 1988:125). The Oro image and the feather girdle had been captured from the Taputapuatea temple at Atehuru (Bligh 1988:126). It should be mentioned here that the journal of Lieutenant Watts, who visited Tahiti in 1788, shows that by that time the interest in red feathers was waning and the Tahitians were more interested in iron (Watts 1789:238).

**Human sacrifices**

Bligh attended a ritual conducted by Ha'amanemane in the marae at Pare. The Oro image, wrapped in red cloth, lay in front of him, next to the body of a dead man. The young Tu, seated on the shoulders of a man, was also present. The idol was unwrapped and the maro was taken out and spread out, 'so that I had a view of every sacred thing that belonged to them' (Bligh 1988:123). An eye of the victim was offered to the young Tu. At the end of the ceremony the Oro image and the maro were covered again. Bligh learned that human sacrifices were offered to secure 'assistance and success', and that after a victory it 'is their most sacred way of returning thanks' (Bligh 1988:124). The victim was 'always a bad Man', the Tahitians said. Later a few more references to human sacrifices are found (Bligh 1988:150). Bligh states on this subject: The absence of Otoo (Tu) prevents any thing being done until he returns, when the Eye will be presented, and the Etuah supplicated [...] I am now perfectly satisfied that Human Sacrifices are common and very frequent.
If a Chief or Powerfull Man seriously offends the Erreerahigh he is obliged to obtain forgiveness by this means. It is not to be refused, so sacred is it as a pledge of faith and good will. It is evidently not confined to making Peace or declaring War, or supplicating the Etuah on an emergency, or any general calamity.' (Bligh 1988:207.) Bligh gives a similar description of another sacrifice, offered when Tu was invested with the maro 'and had it put round him in the manner the common Marro's are worn round the Hips' (Bligh 1988: 231).

**First fruits**

According to Morrison (1966:151) 'Les premiers fruits de toutes sortes sont offerts au dieu puis au chef et au Seigneur du lieu avant d'être consommés et il en est de même pour les poissons [...] les premiers poissons pêchés vont toujours au marae où ils sont offerts par le prêtre avec des prières [...] il ne peut jouir des fruits de son labouer avant que ceux-ci n'aient été tous servis'. The first pig was likewise offered, as well as the first chicken.

**Reports by missionaries**

The reports of missionaries are the most important sources for our knowledge of Tahitian ideology. This is in the first place because the missionaries lived on the island for many years and were fluent in Tahitian. Moreover, because they tried to convert the Tahitians, they had to discuss all kinds of ideological matters with them and learned a lot about their views in the process. Finally, some of the missionaries were genuinely interested in the religious views of the islanders. The most important reports are those by William Ellis and John M. Orsmond. I have also used John Davies' History of the Tahitian Mission, which covers the period from 1799 to 1830 (Davies 1961). The well-known report of the voyage of the Duff (Wilson 1799) will also be used, though sparingly, as most of the data it contains are found either in the older reports or, in an elaborated form, in the later works of the missionaries. The same holds for the journal of the inspectors Tyerman and Bennet (Montgomery 1831). Because of their orthodox Christian background, the works of the missionaries should be used with discrimination, for they often pass harsh judgements on Tahitian customs. However, a careful weighing of all the sources is essential (Claessen 1994:24-5; Claessen and Oosten 1988).

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6 Ellis lived in the Pacific eight years and wrote Polynesian researches, which was published in two volumes in 1829. The work was reprinted several times. I have used the second edition, of 1831, which appeared in four volumes.

7 Orsmond's report was offered for publication to the French government in 1848. It became lost in the process of publication, however. Orsmond's granddaughter, Teuira Henry, spent many years reconstructing this report from the documents she had inherited. On her death in 1915 she left an almost finished manuscript to the B.P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu for publication, which eventuated in 1928. I have used the French edition of 1951 here.
Sacred character of the ari'i

The missionaries of the Duff several times mention that the young Tu and his wife were carried on men's shoulders (Wilson 1799:62, 63, 64, 200) and that they never entered a house or came aboard the ship because of their sacredness (Wilson 1799:63, 65, 67, 329). The missionaries moreover observed that the Tahitians preferred iron to red feathers (Wilson 1799:69). Ellis states that 'the god and the king were generally supposed to share the authority over mankind. The latter sometimes personated the former, and received the homage and the requests, and at other times officiated as the head of his people, in rendering their acknowledgements to the gods.' 'The genealogy of the reigning family was usually traced back to the first ages of their traditionary history; and the kings, in some of the islands, were supposed to have descended from the gods. Their persons were always sacred [...] (Ellis 1831, III:94.) 'Everything in the last degree connected with the king or queen – the cloth they wore, the houses in which they dwelt, the canoes in which they voyaged, the men by whom they were borne when they journeyed by land, became sacred' (Ellis 1831, III:101). 'It was on account of this supposed sacredness of person that they could never enter any dwellings, excepting those that were specially dedicated to their use, and prohibited to all others' (Ellis 1831, III:102). Lastly, people had to bare their shoulders in the presence of the ruler (Ellis 1831, III:105).

Human sacrifices

According to the missionaries of the Duff, only criminals were offered as sacrifice, and women were never chosen for this (Wilson 1799:351). Ellis (1831, I:347) states that the victims were often taken from the same families. The body of the victim was placed before the image of the god, and the priest took an eye and gave this to the ruler. Some time after the ceremonies, the body of the victim was buried. The offerings were made to ensure success in war or to cure the ari'i when he was ill. Human sacrifices enabled the ruler (or the chiefs) to dispose of people who had incurred their displeasure (Ellis 1831, III:133). Henry (1951) also repeatedly mentions human sacrifices. According to her, humans were sacrificed on the occasion of a royal birth (Henry 1951:190, 195), a visit of the young prince to different parts of his 'kingdom' (Henry 1951:196), the inauguration of an ari'i, and many other events. She connects the increase in human sacrifices with the arrival of the Oro cult (Henry 1951:204 ff.).

The god Oro

According to the missionaries of the Duff, the image of Oro was kept in the marae at Atehuru (Wilson 1799:210-2). This marae was higher in rank than the one at Pare, where Pomare resided (Wilson 1799:214). The chiefs of Atehuru,
'as not being of royal rank', were not entitled to use the image and the feather girdle. 'To Attahuroo, therefore, on all great solemnities, were all the other chiefs obliged to repair [...] (Wilson 1799:326). The missionaries also mention that Pomare had succeeded a few years earlier in getting this image to Pare with the help of the Bounty mutineers (Wilson 1799:326). Oro was one of the gods to whom human sacrifices were offered (Ellis 1831, I:357), and there was a close connection between him and Pomare (= Tinah). 'He was justly considered as the principal support of the idolatry of his country' (Ellis 1831, II:68). The Oro image appears to have been moved around quite a lot, for Davies (1961:41) reports that it had been taken back to Atehuru, and that in 1802 (p. 46) Tu (= Pomare II) 'rescued him from the hands of the Atehuru people'. Davies describes a rather obscure ceremony in the Oro marae at Atehuru in 1802, where Pomare and a number of people sat around the image of the deity, with several of these people 'exposing themselves in a most shameful manner' (Davies 1961:45). Some time after this ceremony, Tu stole the image from the marae (Davies 1961:46). In 1803 the Oro image was back in the marae at Atehuru again, and Pomare II demanded that it be sent to Pare, where it belonged (Ellis 1831, II:65). Human sacrifices had to be offered in Atehuru again (Davies 1961:61, 62). During the inauguration ceremony Oro was proclaimed to be the 'father of the king' (Ellis 1831, III:113). According to Henry (1951:127) Oro was the god of war. His marae was invariably named Taputapuatea. His image was a 'pièce de bois d'environ 2 mètres long, couverte de plumes rouges, jaunes et noires pour lui donner tous les attributs du terrible Dieu' (Henry 1951:137). Elsewhere Henry states, in connection with the Arioi, that Oro was also regarded as a god of peace, bearing the epithet Oro-i-te-tea-moe, which she translates as 'Oro à la lance déposée' (Henry 1951:237). She further relates how the god Oro, after casting off his previous wife, married a girl from Porapora. Later this couple became associated with Raiatea, where the ruler, Tamatoa, founded the Arioi society in honour of Oro (Henry 1951:238-40). According to Tyerman and Bennet (Montgomery 1831, I:529), the island of Raiatea was the centre of the Oro cult, and its rulers, who were all named Tamatoa, were sacred.

Inauguration of the ari’i rahi
Ellis gives a detailed description of the ceremony, which I will quote extensively here (Ellis 1831, III:108-13). The main ceremony was the girding of the ari’i rahi with the maro u ra, or red feather girdle. The pageant was staged on land and water. At the Oro marae the image of the deity was adorned with all the emblems of his divinity and placed on a kind of bed. Then everyone left the temple in procession, with the priests carrying the Oro image in front, followed by the prince, again a large number of priests, and finally the people. At the seashore there were canoes waiting, and Oro was placed in his sacred
canoe. The prince waited on the beach until he was given a signal to advance into the sea. 'The priest of Oro then descended into the water, bearing in his hand a branch of the sacred mero [...].' 'While the king was bathing, the priest struck him on his back with the sacred branch [...].' 'The design of this part of the ceremony was to purify the king from all mahuru huru, or defilement and guilt [...].' 'When the ablutions were completed, the king and the priest ascended the sacred canoe. Here, in the presence of Oro, he was invested with the maro ura, or sacred girdle, interwoven with the feathers from the idol.' The priest uttered an *uba* (prayer), asking that the king's influence might extend across the sea to the sacred island. After this prayer the multitude on the beach 'greeted the new monarch with loud and universal acclamations'. The canoe was then paddled to the reef, to indicate the king's dominion over the sea. 'During this excursion Tuumao and Tahui, two deified sharks, a sort of demi-gods of the sea, were influenced by Oro to come and congratulate the new king on his assumption of government.' On its return, the procession went to the Taputapuatea marae, with the king being borne on the shoulders of four principal nobles. In the temple the king and the god Oro were placed upon a stone platform, 'and the king here received the homage and tribute of allegiance of the people. A veil must be thrown over the vicè with which the ceremonies were concluded.' 'The abominations continued until the blowing of the trumpet on board the canoes required every one to depart from the temple.' Henry (1951:203) is slightly more specific, saying that 'Le groupe des gens nus dont plusieurs étaient montés dans les arbres criait au Roi qu'il était le souverain de leurs personnes, le tout étant accompagné de gestes et de paroles impossibles à décrire ici'. With respect to the other ceremonies, she informs us that the prince was seated next to Oro, 'son père spirituel'. During the boat trip, 'le grand prêtre prononçait le pure-fau-fenua, déclarant le Roi seigneur de la terre et de la mer ainsi que de tout ce qui s'y trouvait [...]' (Henry 1951:202).

**Feather girdles**
Ellis (1831, III:108) describes the 'Wallis' maro, the feather girdle to which Captain Wallis' pendant was attached. During the manufacture of this girdle several human sacrifices were offered.

**Titular ownership**
Ellis (1831, III:116) states that every chief was the owner of his territory. The ruler also owned land, his 'hereditary estates'. However, there are no indications that the *ari'i rahi* was a kind of titular owner of all the land. Ellis states elsewhere that a lord was succeeded by his son 'in his possessions and office', with 'a fresh appointment from the king'. It is not clear from this if the proprietary rights or the political position had to be confirmed, though the con-
text suggests that this applied to the political position, for the king could not appropriate the lands of a chief (Ellis 1831, III: 119-20).

The Arioi society
The missionaries of the Duff mention an Arioi member who killed his child to prevent loss of privileges as a member of the society (Wilson 1799:153-4). About the Arioi itself they remarked that 'This society is constantly wandering about from island to island. They are the finest persons we have seen, are said to have each two or three wives, which they exchange with each other; and inhumanly murder every infant that is born among them.' 'They never work; live by plunder; yet they are highly respected, as none but persons of rank are admitted among them' (Wilson 1799:174). Ellis (1831, III:129) characterized the Arioi as 'a worthless train of idlers', saying that 'When they entered a district that was perhaps well supplied with provisions for its inhabitants, if they remained any length of time, by their plundering and wanton destruction it was reduced to a state of desolation'. Henry also has a lot to say about the Arioi. In her description of the various Tahitian districts she is careful to mention the Arioi houses (Henry 1951:76-95). She characterizes the society as a 'secte des comédiens' and connects it with the god Oro 'of the downward lances' – indicating the peaceful aspect of both Oro and the society (Henry 1951:237). She further states that the Arioi society originated together with the Oro cult in Raiatea, and thence came to Tahiti (Henry 1951:240). The society included eight grades, and only people of noble birth could be admitted to the highest grades. Henry pays much attention to the elaborate feasts and rituals of the society, and it is clear from her description that a visit from the Arioi left a district drained of its resources. Enormous quantities of food were consumed, and the most valuable goods were exchanged as presents. Though Henry also mentions infanticide, and throws 'le voile sur leurs agissements', she points out as well that the Arioi 'flattaient et ridiculisait impunément petits et grands sans en excepter les prêtres et redressaient ainsi de nombreux torts' (Henry 1951:242-8). All in all, Henry's description is more positive than those of the other missionaries, who seem to have noticed only the vices, not the virtues.

First fruits
Henry (1951:185) relates how 'Chaque année, dans tout l'Archipel de la Société, était célébrée une fête nationale au moment de la récolte des premiers fruits de la terre. Cette saison se place en général entre la fin de décembre et le début de janvier. A cette occasion les chefs et les populations des districts apportaient des offrandes de nourriture qu'ils déposaient sur le terrain de réunion en un tas immense [...] avec des discours appropriés prononcés par les orateurs officiels ils les présentaient aux Dieux et aux gar-
diens du marae royal, à la famille royale et au clergé et se partageaient le reste entre eux.' Ellis (1831, I:350) states that 'religious acts were connected with almost every act of their lives'. He adds: 'The first fish taken periodically on their shore, together with a number of kinds regarded as sacred, were conveyed to the altar. The first fruits of their orchards and gardens were also taumaha, or offered, with a portion of their live-stock, which consisted of pigs, dogs, and fowls.'

The reports of the missionaries contain no specific data on the relation between the ari'i and fertility.

Some other nineteenth-century visitors

To this category belong the British merchant John Turnbull, who, because of the loss of his ship, lived in Tahiti for about two years (Turnbull 1806), the French Lieutenant Edmond de Bovis, who worked in Tahiti in 1844-1848, and 1849-18538, and the Belgian diplomat Jacques-Antoine Mörenhout, who was United States consul here from 1830 till 1835. Their works contain interesting data supplementing the information provided by the sources discussed so far.

Sacred character of the ari'i

Turnbull (1806:98) writes that on board the ship Pomare was fed by a servant but on shore he often fed himself. He casts serious doubts on Pomare's religiosity, saying: 'Ich zweifele gar nicht dass er nicht in dieser Hinsicht ein ausgelernter Heuchler war, und im Herzen eben so wenig an die Gottheit des Oro glaubte als ich selbst' (Turnbull 1806:324-5). The chiefs enjoyed supernatural support, and the people were afraid of their powers (Turnbull 1806:345, 371). Everyone was obliged to uncover their shoulders in the presence of an ari'i, and the ruler and his wife were carried on men's shoulders (Turnbull 1806:367), which custom was observed until after the king had gone through the inauguration ceremony at Atehuru (Turnbull 1806:367). De Bovis (1980:15) states that a prince 'descended in direct line from divinity. The marae where this divinity was worshipped was also established by him.' He continues: 'the priest was only an emanation of the chief's power in the simple assignment of his religious ceremonies' (De Bovis 1980:18). 'The Ari'i were sacred personages who were endowed with power and miraculous virtues. The food they touched became mortal poison for all except those who belonged to the same blood.' (De Bovis 1980:50.) 'Among the Ari'i there was a head of the family to which all others were subordinate. He often was

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8 Edmond de Bovis was a French colonial official in Tahiti, who published the results of his researches in French in the Revue Coloniale, 1855, 2nd series, vol. 14, pp. 369-407, 512-39. For this article, I have used R.D. Craig's English translation of 1980.
a child and almost always a young man because as soon as he had a son this child was the legitimate head and the father only acted as a regent.' (De Bovis 1980:18, 28; see Moerenhout 1837, II:13.) Moerenhout (1837, II:5 ff.) also states that ruling princes were sacred and were the favourites of the gods.

The god Oro
According to Turnbull (1806:112-3) there was a great deal of tension between Pomare and the inhabitants of Atehuru with regard to the marae here. The image of Oro was kept there, so that important political meetings, as well as all kinds of religious ceremonies, had to be held in that marae.

During a ceremony at this marae in 1802 Tu tried to carry off the image, but did not succeed (Turnbull 1806:114, 116). In 1803 Pomare again prepared for war against Atehuru, in order definitely to lay hands on the Oro image, without which his son could not be inaugurated. Oro was the eldest son of Ta'aroa and Hina, and was regarded as 'the ruler of the world' (De Bovis 1980:40). Almost all marae were consecrated to Oro.

Inauguration of the ari'i rahi
'Auf dieser heiligen Stätte [the Oro marae at Atehuru] sollte der neue König Otu nach dem Verlangen der Landesgebräuche sich einigen bestimmten Ceremonien, z.B. der Beschneidung u.s.w. unterwerfen, ehe er von dem Staate öffentlich als König anerkannt wurde' (Turnbull 1806:113, 311). The ceremonies at the marae in Pare were inadequate for this purpose. Pomare tried several times to capture the Oro image (Turnbull 1806:114, 116, 311) to ensure the inauguration of his son, Tu. In 1803 he succeeded in conquering Atehuru without striking a blow (Turnbull 1806:313). Moerenhout's report of the inauguration is detailed (Moerenhout 1837, II:22-8). What is more, this author does not feel obliged to throw a veil over the activities of the Arioi. After a description of human sacrifices, the prince's bath, during which two sharks came to greet him, and the donning of the maro ura, Moerenhout describes the rituals in the marae. Here 'plusieurs hommes et femmes, entièrement nus, entouraient le roi, et s'efforçaient de le toucher des différentes parties de leur corps, au point qu'il avait peine à se préserver de leur urine et de leurs excréments, dont ils cherchaient à le couvrir' (Moerenhout 1837, II:27). This ceremony is performed only in the context of the inauguration of a highly placed ari'i (Moerenhout 1837, II:28).

Human sacrifices
Human sacrifices were offered in the course of ceremonies in the Oro marae. In Turnbull's view, especially Pomare insisted on this kind of sacrifices, expecting that the custom would decline considerably after his death (Turnbull 1806:324). The victim was not usually killed by the priest, but by one of
the ari'i's servants (Turnbull 1806:391). Turnbull estimates that at Tu's inauguration at least twelve to fifteen people were offered (Turnbull 1806:392-3). De Bovis mentions that the prince was offered one of the victim's eyes and pretended to swallow this (De Bovis 1980:19, 51). The princes had the victims killed at the request of the high priest (De Bovis 1980:51). Moerenhout (1837, I:510) states that the victims usually came from the same families.

*The Arioi society*

Turnbull (1806:267-9) describes a *heiva* by Arioi members. He was deeply impressed by the songs of the dancers. The dances (with one exception) were hardly indecent in his eyes, though elsewhere he speaks of 'eine so zügelllose und verruchte Gesellschaft, dass man glauben sollte, sie würde die Strafe des Himmels auf sich herabrufen. Der Hauptgrund ihrer Verbindung ist die Gemeinschaft der Weiber, und die Ermordung aller von ihnen erzeugten Kinder beiderlei Geschlechts, sogleich nach ihrer Geburt.' Even so, the Arioi were highly respected by the Tahitians (Turnbull 1806:369). De Bovis is very negative about the Arioi. He refers to the killing of infants and a life 'divided between debauchery, ecstasy and dance' (De Bovis 1980:35). Members of the society were expected to be brave in battle; they were idle only in peacetime. 'The society was a nursery of warriors who recruited one another but did not reproduce its kind' (De Bovis 1980:36). Moerenhout (1837, I:435, 492) mentions that heaven was nevertheless especially designated for deceased Arioi members. The Arioi were devoted to the god Oro (Moerenhout 1837, I:484, 492), whose worship was their principal duty (Moerenhout 1837, I:503). They indulged in promiscuity and killed their children at birth (Moerenhout 1837, I:495). Moerenhout believed, like other visitors, that the purpose of infanticide was to keep elite numbers down (Moerenhout 1837, I:498). He further states that most dances were performed 'dans un état de nudité complète' (Moerenhout 1837, II:127). High-ranking Arioi members never participated in these activities (Moerenhout 1837, II:133).

*Feather girdles*

According to De Bovis (1980:15) the *maro ura*, or red girdle - a sign of royalty - came from Ra'iatea, and the *maro tea*, or yellow girdle, from Bora Bora. Both girdles came to Tahiti in later years. Moerenhout (1837, I:472) gives a general description of the *maro ura*, which could be worn only by the highest Arioi leaders, as well as by the ari'i rahi, 'mais seulement dans quelques occasions solemnnes, comme le jour de son installation'.

*Titular ownership*

De Bovis (1980:22) states that Tahitian property has the particular characteristic of being hereditary and indivisible among the members of the same fam-
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ily. It could be alienated through war, through voluntary gifts, or even through confiscation.’ The ar'ì'i 'owned' their marae, as well as some sacred places such as mountain peaks. Moreover, 'the princes owned the reefs with the most fish and the most frequented passages'. Commoners could use these, but had to pay for the privilege (De Bovis 1980:24). The land ceded by Pomare to the missionaries thus was not given to them in ownership, but was only meant for their use (Moerenhout 1837, II:426). According to Moerenhout (1837, II:9) the elite had inalienable rights to their land. Not even the prince could break this rule. The elite was, however, obliged to contribute to the maintenance of the prince (Moerenhout 1837, II:12).

First fruits

De Bovis (1980:46) mentions the custom of holding a festival in springtime, when the Tahitians 'would offer the first of their fruits'. According to Moerenhout (1837, I:517 ff.), the first fish of the season was offered to the gods. The next day's catch was for the chiefs. The first fruits were offered at the end of December, when ‘on apportait aux dieux les premices de tous les fruits, de tous les comestibles et même ceux de l'industrie'. Only a small quantity of the offerings went to the gods, the remainder being given to the ar'ì'i rahì, who in his turn distributed the food and other offerings among the priests, nobles, and common people (Moerenhout 1837, I:520).9

Fertility

After stating that most of the Arioi dances were the most wanton and obscene imaginable, Moerenhout adds that they were somehow intended to represent fertility (Moerenhout 1837, II:131).10 He emphasizes that during certain parts of the year the Arioi did not travel or perform, but withdrew from the public view 'pour pleurer l'absence et la mort de leur dieu' (Moerenhout 1837, I:503).11

An early twentieth-century source

The source in question is Arii Taimai's famous Mémoires from 1901. Though heavily edited by her husband, Henry Adams, the book contains important data on early Tahiti. I have used the French edition of 1964.

9 Oliver (1974:259-64) gives an extensive survey of all the data on this ritual. In his opinion there were two different types of such offerings. However, the descriptions he gives of the second type are vague, to say the least. Following Morrison, Oliver distinguishes offerings to the spirits and offerings to the chiefs. The latter, according to Moerenhout, were redistributed.10 Oliver (1974:1023) casts doubts on the fertility hypothesis. He is inclined to think rather in terms of a ceremony of 'indignity' – to remind the exalted ar'ì'i of his vulnerability. Although this factor may also have played a role, the connection with fertility seems to me more dominant.11 This ritual seclusion is also emphasized by Babadzan (1993:78-80), who connects it with the end of the season of abundance and the beginning of a period of hardship. The Arioi returned –
Feather girdles

Arii Taimai mentions three feather girdles: the maro tea, belonging to the ari’i rahi of Papara, and two maro ura, belonging to the ari’i rahi of Vaiari and the great chief of Punaauia respectively (Arii Taimai 1964:6). The first ruler of Papara was one Teva, who had the right to wear the maro tea (Arii Taimai 1964:12). In actual fact, the Papara chiefly line was a junior branch of (and hence socially inferior to) the Vaiari one, though politically the Paparans were superior to the people of Vaiari, even though the ari’i here had the right to wear the maro ura (Arii Taimai 1964:15). Purea and Amo prepared the inauguration of their son Teri’irere in the new marae of Papara, where he was to wear the maro (Arii Taimai 1964:49). In preparation for the festivities they had imposed an extensive rahui (the rahui referred to in note 5 above) on their estates. A war with other Tahitian chiefs put a stop to the inauguration, however. ’Tutaha et les districts du Nord-Ouest emportèrent le symbole de la suprématie, l’étendard et la ceinture des plumes, du marae de Tooarai et Mahaiatea, et le placèrent dans le marae de Maraetaata dans le district de Paea dans Oropaa, ou Atahuru. Amo et Purea furent contraints de traiter comme ils le purent avec Tutaha, et de reconnaître à Otoo un droit à la dignité de Maro-ura à Maraetaata.’ Teri’irere kept the maro tea, however, as well as retaining his social status. Tu (= Pomare) had the right to wear a maro ura inherited from a Raiatean prince (Arii Taimai 1964:72). Pomare (= Otoo) was only allowed to wear the maro ura in the Atehuru marae (Arii Taimai 1964:63). Tu succeeded in 1790, with the help of the Bounty mutineers, in capturing the maro ura kept since 1768 in the marae at Atehuru. He brought this maro to his own marae at Pare (Arii Taimai 1964:87).

Sacred character of the ari’i rahi

The chiefs of Papara, Vaiari, and Punaauia were sacred, and all the other ari’i had to uncover their shoulders for these persons (Arii Taimai 1964:6). However, ’tout sacrés qu’ils étaient, probablement aucun [...] ne conservait ce like the dead among the living – at the beginning of the fertile season. During their period of seclusion, they prepared bark cloth – normally a female occupation (Babadzan 1993:266 ff.).

12 The Papara chiefs at that time possessed a yellow as well as a red girdle. The yellow one had come to them, according to an explanation by Arii Taimai (1964:24 ff.) that is not very clear, from a demi-god. Oliver (1974:679) suggests that the demi-god might have been an inhabitant of Porapora, whence the yellow girdle originated. The red girdle had passed into Paparan possession via a marriage of an Opoan chief with a Paparan wife. The image of Oro also came to Papara via this link (Oliver 1974:1214, 1988:159).

13 It is not so certain whether Teri’irere succeeded in keeping the maro tea in his possession. There are reasons to believe that this particular maro was used in the making of the ‘Wallis maro’ (Claessen 1995:287). On the other hand Bligh (1988:215), as we saw above, describes Teri’irere as wearing a maro and presiding over offerings of human sacrifices. Apparently the Paparan ruler had retained his high status notwithstanding his parents’ defeat in the big war of 1768.
caractère dans l'île entière. Ils étaient sacrés seulement au milieu de leurs propres sujets, ou chez leurs alliés par mariage.' (Arii Taimai 1964:7.) Arii Taimai connects the ari'i's rank with the right to a place in a particular marae (Arii Taimai 1964:13). An ari'i rahi could be killed only by a person of equal rank (Arii Taimai 1964:23). 'Autrefois le premier enfant d'un grand chef était toujours porté à sa naissance aux marae de la famille comme un objet sacré, avec offrande aux dieux' (Arii Taimai 1964:136).

Human sacrifices
Only the ari'i rahi could order human sacrifices to be offered (Arii Taimai 1964:13). In about 1789 Pomare was invited to come to Papara. Three men had been slain, and his canoe was brought ashore over their dead bodies. The victims were offered to the god in the marae, and Pomare was offered an eye (Arii Taimai 1964:90).

The Tahitian situation and the model

It is now possible to compare Tahitian chiefship with the model presented by Thomas. Before doing so, a few words of caution are necessary. Most of our data refer to late eighteenth-century Tahiti, that is, the period in which the worship of the god Oro began to play a dominant role. This religion had originated on the island of Raiatea and reached Tahiti at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Oliver 1974:891 ff.). The first marae connected with Oro was Taputapuatea, located in the district of Opoa in Raiatea. From the very beginning Oro was associated first and foremost with war, though he was also regarded as the god of fertility. The visitors' observations on ari'i, maro, and local world views all relate to this god. Hardly anything is known of the situation in pre-Oro times (though Oliver, 1974:882-90, gives some data on the gods Ta'aroa and Tane). To this should be added that the European visitors had great difficulty in understanding the complex Tahitian culture, in which a number of princedoms competed for Oro attributes such as the deity's image, the right to wear a (his) maro, and the right to offer human sacrifices. On the other hand, most chiefs were also eager to obtain foreign goods, among which firearms were a favourite. The most important obstacle for the visitors in their dealings with the Tahitians was their lack of knowledge of the language. Cook and his companions reached a 'survival kit' standard in Tahitian, while the missionaries were the first foreigners who, after a long stay on the island, became fluent. As a consequence, much of our knowledge about local ideology and traditions comes from these, sometimes rather biased, preachers. It is not always easy to separate fact from indignant fiction in their reports, from which interesting data have sometimes been
omitted out of prudishness. Only the Belgian diplomat Moerenhout was relatively frank and open in his descriptions. However, he never witnessed any 'indecent' ceremonies in person.

Tahitian chiefship has also been influenced considerably by other developments. The fertile soil of Tahiti made for a tremendous population growth. It is estimated that at the time of discovery by the British in 1767, the population came to about 35,000 (Oliver 1974:34), while this estimate may even be too modest. The first consequence of population growth is the spread of human settlements over a larger area. Most probably junior sons of a senior line left their native area with their descendants and followers to settle somewhere else on the coast. The original ramage thus broke up into a number of sub-ramages, which became more or less independent. Among the leaders of the several settlements some kind of hierarchical relationship – based on principles of primogeniture and seniority – remained, whereby the senior line of the Vaiari polity was considered to be the most senior and therefore the most prestigious (Claessen 1978:444). As the (sub-)ramages increased in size, social stratification became more fully developed (Oliver 1974:1126, 1130) and with time the population became divided into an upper stratum (the ari'i), a middle class (the ra'atira), and a lower group (the manahune) (Claessen 1978:456-60, 1996:345-6). Independent though the several (sub-)ramages may have become, there continued to be frequent contacts between the ari'i of the different ramages. Marriages between members of this exclusive group exalted their lofty position vis-à-vis the other strata still more. As was said above, the introduction of the Oro cult, with the Arioi society as its corollary, considerably increased the complexity of this already complex arena of ambition and competition for power.

Nevertheless, the Tahitian ideological structure did not change fundamentally, and the overall fit between the Tahitian data and Thomas' model is considerable. On points of detail, however, there are some interesting differences.

To begin with, although the role of genealogical rank was certainly important in Tahiti – where the ari'i of Vaiari were of a higher rank than those of Papara, who belonged to a younger branch – status differences did not correlate with differences in political power. The ari'i of Papara were much more powerful than those of Vaiari, for instance. And where all ari'i were sacred, the ari'i rahi of the large districts seem to have been more so than those of the smaller ones, in spite of the fact that these larger polities had often been founded by the junior (and thus lower-ranking) branches of a particular ari'i family. Although there were attempts to preserve the respective differences in rank, higher-ranking though less powerful families were unable to hold their own in the power struggle in connection with the Oro image and the maro, and lost their power, and gradually also their high status. The gradual
decline of the once high and mighty Vaiari ari’i is described in colourful detail by Arii Taimai (1964, and see above).

The connection of chiefs with ‘principal ancestors’ (Thomas 1990:29) is not very clear in Tahiti. This is a result of the introduction of the Oro cult. Before that, the ari’i were most probably connected via long genealogies to the traditional high gods – Morrison mentions Tane in this respect, and Oliver refers to Ta’aroa and Tane. After the introduction of the Oro cult, the establishment of a genealogical link with this god became a matter of the highest importance. That is why the emphasis on a close relationship between the ari’i rahī and Oro became a key theme in the inauguration ceremony. Ellis and Henry both stress how the ari’i was seated next to the image of Oro – his ‘spiritual father’, according to Ellis – who sent the two sharks to meet him (which were not seen by Morrison, the only eyewitness of an inauguration ceremony). The ari’i had the maro ura put on him (did the Paparan chief in a similar way have the maro tea put on him?), the red feathers of which also symbolized Oro. Numerous prayers and incantations were uttered by the high priest, again stressing the close connection between the ari’i and the god. According to Ellis the ari’i sometimes even personated the god, and the god the ari’i.

For a number of years everyone was obliged to uncover their shoulders in the presence of the ari’i rahī. The prince (and his wife) were carried on the shoulders of men, so that their feet would not touch the ground, as anything touched by the ari’i rahī would become tapu for everybody. After a few years these rules were relaxed a little. They were abolished altogether when a son was born to the ari’i rahī. The son (even as a baby) took over the sacred position of the father, who, now unencumbered by the once numerous tapus, became the regent for the young prince.

To exercise his sacred power, though perhaps even more his political power, fully (full sacred power implied the ritual right to offer human sacrifices), an ari’i rahī had to possess a maro, an ‘authentic’ Oro image, and a marae consecrated to Oro. As there were but few maro on Tahiti, and even fewer images of Oro, a fierce competition for the possession of these sacred objects ravaged the country for more than twenty-five years. In the first of the relevant wars, the ari’i of Papara lost their Oro image, as well as both their maro. The leader of the coalition against Papara placed these sacred objects in a marae in Atehuru. This implied that all other ari’i rahī who wanted to offer human sacrifices had to go to Atehuru for this (as was noted by the Spanish interpreter Rodriguez). The ari’i rahī of Pare-Arue, Pomare, eventually succeeded, with the help of the mutineers of the Bounty, in capturing the image and the feather girdle from the Atehuru marae. Somehow the objects showed up in Atehuru again, however, and attempts by Pomare (who in fact had a serious claim to them) to recapture them failed several times.

In Thomas’ model the relation between the ari’i and fertility is a key fea-
ture. The sources on Tahiti are not very explicit about the extent to which the chiefs here conformed to the model. However, some rituals, especially the offering of the first fruits and parts of the *ari'i rahi* inauguration ceremony, do suggest such a relation.

There are several indications of first-fruit offerings – which are assumed to be the expression of a belief in the power of a ruler to influence fertility (as, for example, the *inasi* ceremony in the Tonga Islands, see Bott 1982:39-47 and Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:passim) – in Tahiti. Cook is the first to refer to the custom, though interestingly he mentions lengths of cloth as the first item offered, saying that the same seemed to apply to 'victuals'. Morrison, who is better informed, mentions fruits of all sorts, as well as first fish, pigs, and chickens, adding that people were allowed to eat of these foods only after the offerings had been made. Henry and Ellis give details of first-fruit offerings, too, describing how a great quantity of food was brought together once a year, which, after being offered to the gods, was divided among the priests and the chiefs, who in their turn distributed it among the people. This procedure is mentioned also by Moerenhout and De Bovis (but see the comment by Oliver in note 9 above). It seems correct to assume, therefore, that this custom played a prominent role in Tahitian ideology, where the *ari'i* were believed to present the food (and goods) to the gods.

Regarding the fertility aspects of the inauguration ceremony, it should be recalled that from Cook on, the visitors are quite reticent on the subject in their reports. They speak freely of the priests, the donning of the *maro ura*, the canoe trip, the appearance of two (sacred) sharks, and the return to the *marae*. But from that point on, their information becomes rather vague. Cook speaks of 'tricks' played with the king, Morrison (the only eyewitness) does not mention indecent rituals at all, Ellis throws a 'veil' over the 'vices' and 'abominations', and Henry states that a number of people 'entièrement nus' took part, but deems the ritual 'impossible à décrire'. Only Moerenhout is prepared to say that a number of naked people (Arioi members) tried to touch the prince with their bodies and to cover him with urine and excrement, stating elsewhere that these rituals were intended to express fertility.

Limited though the data are, the conclusion seems nevertheless warranted that there was a connection between the *ari'i rahi* and fertility. It is also plausible that, as Oro played a dominant role in both rituals (first-fruit offerings and inaugurations), there was a connection between this deity and fertility as well. This conclusion makes it possible to place the activities of the Arioi society also against this background.

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14 This conclusion was reached by Kooijman as early as 1964 (see Kooijman 1964:122 ff.), with whose views the recent publication by Babadzan (1993) is wholly in agreement (see Claessen 1995).
The reports on the Arioi are heavily coloured, emphasizing their libertine ways. From Cook on, the obligation of childlessness is stressed and the indecent nature of their dances is mentioned (namely by Banks, Bligh, Morrison, Turnbull, De Bovis, Moerenhout, Ellis, and Henry). Nevertheless, there are also statements — almost hidden behind the indignant comments — showing that there were other aspects as well. Bligh points out that the members of the society were highly respected people, in whose activities the Tahitians placed great trust. Henry gives much attention to their ritual activities. Morrison states, finally, that the Arioi were not responsible for the conduct of war — which is in contradiction with De Bovis' statement that the Arioi were great warriors. Possibly the two views are reconcilable, as Henry informs us that Oro was a god of war but also of peace ('Oro à la lance déposée'), and the Arioi may have represented both these aspects. This is the more likely in view of Moerenhout's statement that the Arioi were dedicated to Oro. Moerenhout further emphasizes that there were periods during which the Arioi did not travel, namely in periods 'pour pleurer l'absence et la mort de leur dieu'. When the season of abundance returned, the Arioi were in evidence again. It might be possible to regard the high costs of their maintenance by the ari'i as a kind of offering to Oro, the god of peace and fertility, the god to whom the Arioi were dedicated.15

There is one point on which Thomas' model and the Tahitian data do not agree, namely that of the chief as titular owner of the land, whereby he was nominally the owner, while in practice other people possessed the land. This situation was not found to exist in Tahiti. None of the sources mention such a practice, while their information on land ownership shows that the ari'i only had ownership rights to their personal estates. According to the statements by Ellis, De Bovis, and Moerenhout, it was not possible for an ari'i to seize other people's land — he could banish, or even kill, landowners, but there always remained other people with hereditary rights to their land. A chief's right to tax people applied in the first place to his 'tenants'. Furthermore, large and small landowners had the obligation to contribute to the ruler's maintenance (for an overview of these obligations, see Claessen 1991: 299-304). Regarding the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the ari'i and the people (referred to at the beginning of this article) the Tahitian case is not conclusive, as food scarcity hardly ever occurred here.

15 Oliver (1974:930) mentions both the peaceful and the fertility aspects of Oro, but does not draw any firm conclusions about this. He states (p. 932) that the Arioi enjoyed periods of rest in their activities, but does not follow this up any further either. These aspects of Oro and the Arioi were elaborated by Babadzan (1993), who stretches the evidence quite far, however.
Conclusion

The results of the comparison of the Tahitian data with the model of Polynesian chiefship formulated by Thomas show that the model offers a solid basis for a study of Polynesian chiefship. Although the Tahitian situation was found to diverge from the general model in some respects, most of the differences can be explained as being the outcome of particular historical and demographic developments. Moreover, differences between the general model and specific island cultures are only to be expected, as Thomas himself pointed out. For each of the islands had its own historical development and its own ideology. The general features of the model were easily recognizable, however, except for that of titular ownership of the land, which was the only feature that was clearly absent in Tahiti. The question of to what extent this was peculiar to Tahiti, or whether it was also found on other islands, falls outside the scope of this article.  

16 Data from the Hawaii Islands suggest that the ali'i nui there was not only the nominal but also the factual owner of the land (see Van Bakel 1991). Nominal land ownership was also found in the Tonga Islands, where formerly all land rights were vested in the tui tonga (Gifford 1929:171, 174; Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:29).

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