

Unit 13: Wallis and Futuna, Niuevalu burial site

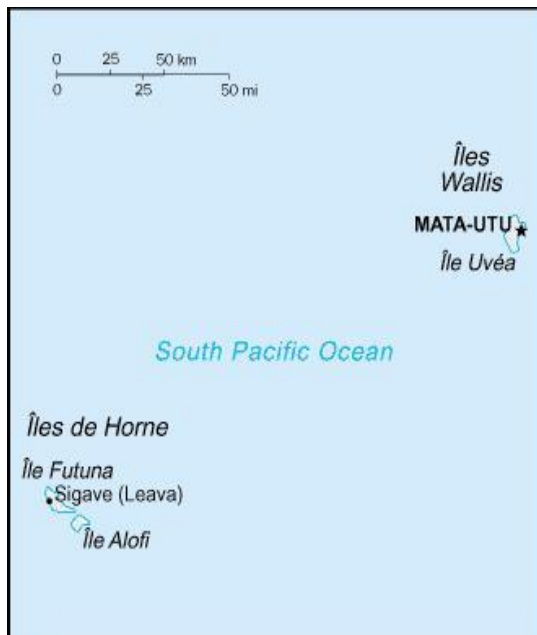
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Facts

Capital:	Mata'utu
Population:	15, 289 inhabitants (July 2009 estimate)
Highest Point:	Mount Singavi (765m)
Language:	Uvean/Futunian and French
Government:	French Overseas Territory

Glossary

<i>Fale</i>	A Uvean house.
<i>Hau</i>	Title given to the main chief.
<i>Kava</i>	A drink made from the root of the kava plant.
<i>Tapu</i>	Meaning something which is sacred, prohibited, under restriction.
<i>Toki</i>	A Uvean axe.
<i>Faihu</i>	A pardon ceremony



After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- identify the location of the burial site
- imagine the history of famous Uvean ancestors
- explain why the dead are important to living people
- suggest different ways of preserving burial site

Figure 13.1 Map of Wallis and Futuna

This chapter is about a burial site on Niuvalu, Ha'afuasia, Uvea (Wallis Island).

Uvea (Wallis Island) is the home of the cultural site called Niuvalu at Ha'afuasia. Wallis and Futuna are known as a TOM (*Territoire Outre Mer*, or French Overseas Territory). Wallis and Futuna consists of 3 main islands; Wallis (Uvea), Futuna and Alofi.

The three islands together, Uvea, Futuna and Alofi, cover approximately 142 square kilometres. Uvea is a low island, of volcanic origin. The highest point of the island is about 151 meters.

Niuvalu Burial Site

In 1982 an archaeology research team from France headed by Bernard Vienne and Daniel Frimigacci undertook a survey of Uvea and Futuna. They wanted to locate the first settlements on the island, to map, excavate, and restore them. They used oral tradition to help them identify the different sites. Many sites had been damaged by vegetation and because people had taken stones from the sites to build churches.

During their survey, the archaeologists discovered a very ancient burial site in Lausikula in the west of the island. According to a legend it was here that the *hau* Puhi, one of the first Tongans to come to Uvea, was buried.

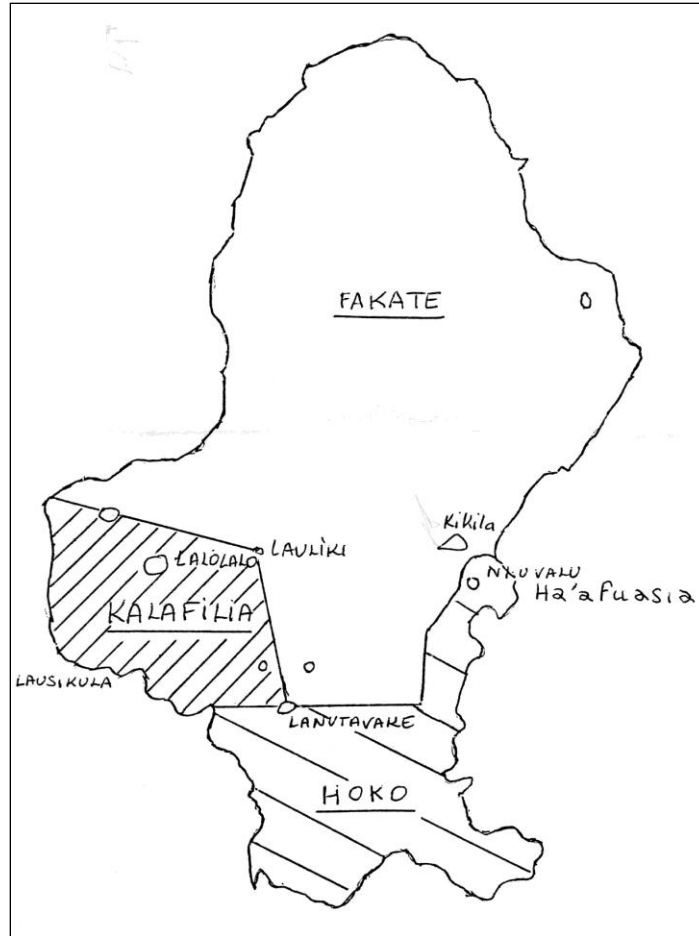


Figure 13.2. Uvea. Can you find Niuvalu and Ha'afuasia?

Niuvalu at Ha'afuasia, one of the burial sites located in the east, is interesting because it is linked to an oral tradition that started around 1450 AD. This is the story of Tauloko and the rising of the Tongan chiefdoms in Uvea.

Niuvalu is the tomb of Tauloko, who came from Tonga to colonise Uvea. Hoko or Tuuhoko chose him as **hau** from Tonga. He settled in Ha'afuasia because the port there had easy access for canoes. The nearby hill could serve as a fort. Tauloko lived in Havaiki at Ha'afuasia for about 25 years. The descendants of his family call their chief Hoko.

After Tauloko's death, Ga'asialili became **hau**. Three chiefs, Hoko, Kalafilia and Fakate guarded him. They met at Lanutavake (a volcanic lake) in order to divide the country into three parts (see *Figure 13.5*). They started arguing with each other and built forts to protect themselves. The use of forts died away around 1600 AD after the influence of Tonga faded.

Questions and Activities

1. How many islands are there in Uvea and Futuna?
2. Why did the archaeological research team go to Uvea?
3. What is the local name for the burial site in Ha'afuasua?
4. What was the name of the man buried in the tomb?
5. Why did he choose this site to settle?
6. Why did they build forts?

Description of the tomb

In the old days, corpses were not buried in holes in the earth, but laid on the ground and covered with earth afterwards. The corpse of a chief was laid on five or six other corpses lying on their backs on the ground. Their skulls were wounded by *toki*, which shows they were probably guards killed to follow their chief. At the four angles were four other corpses on their knees (see *Figures 13.3 and 13.4*).

Taukolo's grave was surrounded by large rectangular slab stones and was very high. The higher the mound of the grave represented the higher the rank of the chief. The grave site was oriented east west lengthways.

Modern History

Nowadays tombs are used for their spiritual power. People use these tombs for ritual prayers. Uveans have been converted to Christianity since 1830 but they still believe in the power of their ancestors' spirits.

For example, during the night preceding their cricket match, they put their bats and balls on the tomb to get the *malohi* (strength) of famous deceased persons. The spirit and strength of the deceased are supposed to come over the players and make them victorious. In older times, they used to sleep near these tombs.

These tombs are usually *tapu*. However, in 1979, Mikaele Tagane, chief of the village of Ha'afuasia, one of the descendants of Hoko, decided with the advice of the King and the villagers to build a chapel for Saint Michael near the tomb.

The Uveans from Noumea gave money to help build the chapel. But, as the villagers were digging to lay the foundations they destroyed the tomb. They uncovered the bones of the *hau* and his family and guards. All the bones and necklaces and belts with pearls and carved bones were put in woven bags under a *fale*. Some people took necklaces and belts home.

A few days later the chief became crazy. He was ill for two years. All the workers were ill too. In order to be cured they went to see a sorcerer (*tagata faifaito'o*) who said it was necessary to do a *faihu*. Then they came to see the King with a root of *kava*. The King said the villagers had to dig a hole to bury the bones, necklaces and belts again.

Nevertheless the chief continued to have bad luck. He lost his eldest son in 1983. He died in 1991. Most of the workers from the village died from illnesses soon afterwards.

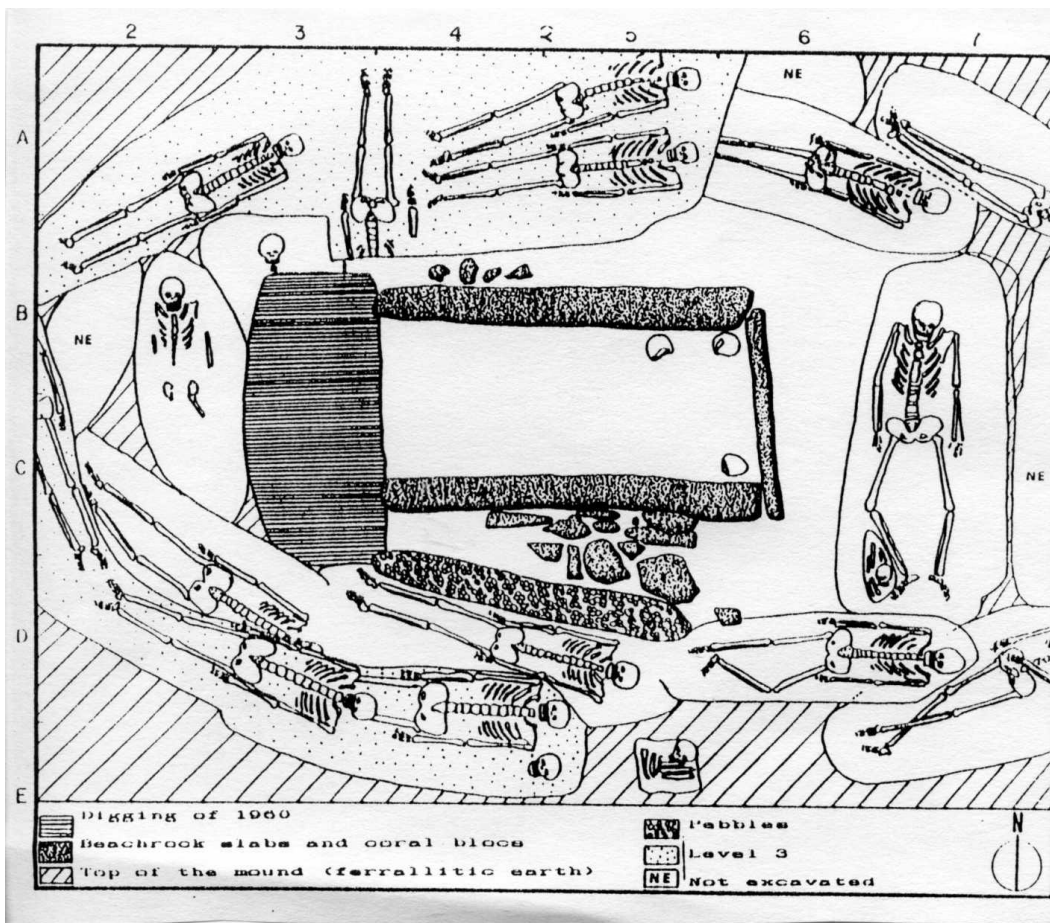


Figure 13.3. Layout of bodies in the tomb

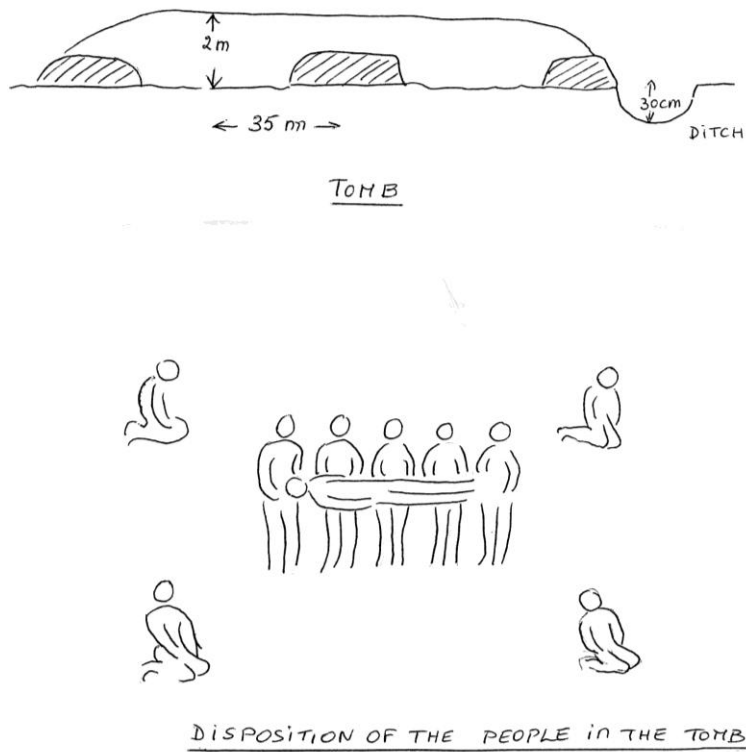


Figure 13.4. Tomb dimensions and disposition of people in the tomb.

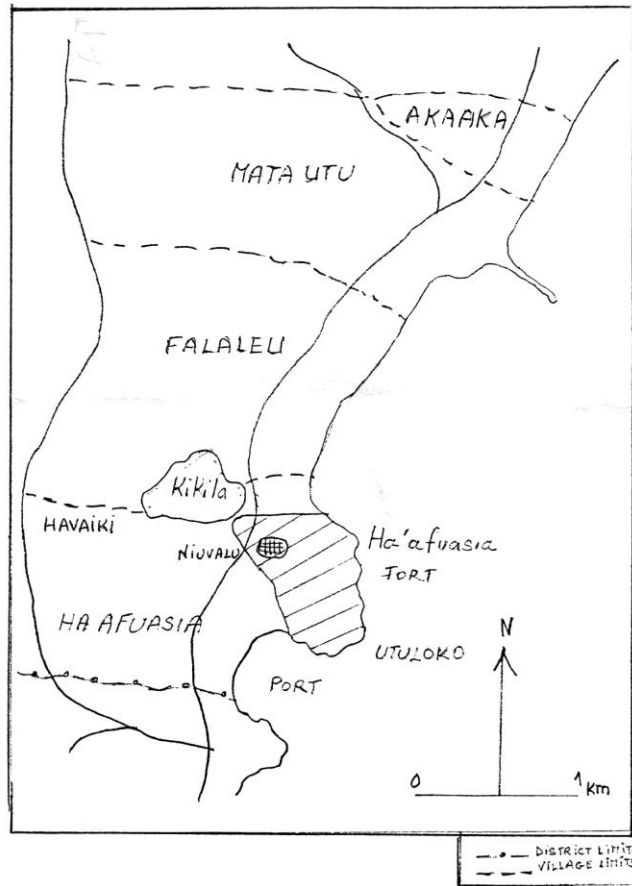


Figure 13.5. Enlargment of Ha'afuasia, showing Niuvalu burial site

Importance of Niuvalu site to the people of Uvea

These stories show that for Uvean people the tombs are not only symbols of old dynasties. Living people and deceased people are connected through the tombs.

Deceased people are still powerful. They need respect in living people's minds, our history and everyday life. For all these reasons Niuvalu burial site is part of the cultural heritage and needs to be protected. Today, several burial sites have been restored and local villagers keep the grass cut and the site clean.

Questions and Activities

7. Why do Uveans put their cricket bats on the tomb?
8. Why did the chief and his villagers have bad luck in 1979, according to Uvean people?
9. Why did some of the people buried with the **hau** have a wound in the skull?
10. Explain the difference between breaking a **tapu** and excavating a tomb for archaeological purposes.
11. List three ways Uvean people help to preserve their cultural sites.
12. Why is the Niuvalu burial site important? (describe in a 50 word paragraph)

Acknowledgments

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