

How Dare *Our* ‘Prehistoric’ Have a Prehistory of *Their* Own?! The interplay of historical and biographical contexts in early French archaeology of the Pacific

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ABSTRACT:

At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, France was securing its presence as a colonial power in the Pacific. Some of the early French settlers quickly began to take notice of relics: petroglyphs, monumental buildings, buried ceramics and human remains were those most commented upon. A rich and sometimes surprisingly detailed literature appears, describing these objects and their antiquity. In the interpretations proposed, a recurrent theme emerges: the apparent need to appeal to waves of migrations or cataclysms to explain traces of a prehistory and ancient ‘civilisations’ where ‘primitive’ people now live – even more so in the so-called region of Melanesia. In this paper, the ideas of three principal authors in the early archaeology of the region are presented: Gustave Glaumont, Marius Archambault and Jean-Baptiste Suas. The ways these authors conceptualised the past of the islands will be discussed in light of the complex relations between their own biographical histories and the intellectual context of the time. It appears that the colliding of the paradigms developed in the new field of prehistory on the one side and in regards to representation of Pacific peoples on the other side created a somewhat confusing intellectual situation for the first archaeologists of Melanesia.

Keywords: Prehistory, History, Pacific, French, Cultural evolutionism

INTRODUCTION

The 1874 volume of the *Bulletins de la Société d’Anthropologie de Paris* contains what can be described as the first known publication on the archaeology of Melanesia. Indeed, during the June 18 meeting of the Society, Jean-Baptiste Gassies, director of the Museum of Prehistory of Bordeaux, presented a short but significant communication on an axe discovered in ‘Quaternary’ deposits on the small islet of ‘Koutoumo’ (Koutomo), close to the Isle of Pines, southern New Caledonia. This find, he asserted, ‘demonstrates the antiquity of man in New Caledonia and destroys some of the hypotheses put forward by anthropologists, that the archipelago must have been peopled by successive immigrations of Papuans from New Guinea, at a fairly recent time’ (Gassies 1874: 496).¹ The communication of Gassies is significant in two aspects. First, it is amongst the first publications, with the more in depth studies of von Haast in New Zealand (von Haast 1871), to present archaeological finds and analyses in the Pacific: by which I mean (i) presenting the discovery of material culture remains for which a degree of stratigraphic context (or evidence of antiquity, for surface remains) is recorded

and used for the analysis of the finds, and (ii) offering interpretations of the history of Pacific populations based on such remains. Second, it already characterises the typical and apparently hard to escape pattern of thought that would keep framing the large majority of archaeological interpretations in the region (e.g.: Clark 2011 and references within) up to the early 20th century: the difficulty of linking archaeological remains to an indigenous dynamic prehistory, instead relying mainly on explanations that involved either the social degeneration paradigm or theories of successive migration waves.

Indeed, in his communication Gassies developed the argument that, while ‘the men who made the Koutoumo axe had already reached the first stage of a certain civilisation’, this ‘race inhabiting New Caledonia in very ancient times was then without mixing and must have belonged to the yellow or Malay race’ (Gassies 1874: 497). New Caledonia, he explained, ‘possesses two contrasted types’ and many mixed varieties. The individuals from the autochthonous type are considered to be the ones who are ‘less tall, less dark in colour and with their hair less woolly’, and so a darker race ‘substituted itself by conquest’ to the first, more civilised one and author of the ancient axe (Gassies 1874: 497).

Gassies, a respected malacologist and palaeontologist, had developed a specific interest on New Caledonia and corresponded with several amateurs based on the island;

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most notably his 'friend and Linnean colleague' the Reverend Father (R.F.) Lambert (Gassies 1871: i), author of one of the earliest ethnographic monographs on New Caledonia (Lambert 1900). Hence Gassies received this 'ground-edge' axe made of 'serpentine jade', judged to be different to the ethnographic ones (Gassies 1874: 496). The scientist used his detailed knowledge of New Caledonian ancient mollusc deposits to sustain the idea that the sediments in which the axe was found represented ancient Quaternary levels. He consequently stated:

We therefore think that the discovery of a polished axe in Quaternary aggregates testifies sufficiently of man's antiquity in New Caledonia and that facts of recent immigrations can in no way invalidate this. (1874: 498).

Gassies's assertions and patterns of interpretation of the archaeological data are characteristic of the way French scholars and amateurs, like Europeans in general, thought about the past of Pacific Island societies when they first started investigating ancient material remains observed on the islands – i.e. at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Of particular interest is the intellectual process that appears to have been widely accepted in academic circles of the time, consisting of the following inference path: remains showing change in material culture = migrations = racial successions (or mixing) (also see Howes, this volume). This process has been analysed before as a typical product of colonial archaeologies, especially constructing an 'archaeology of dispossession' that served to legitimate European invasion and domination of the Islands (Clark 2011; McNiven & Russell 2005; Sand 2005). However, there are also contextual intellectual influences to take into account in order to understand how such patterns of thought became so deeply ingrained. Two sets of influences appear to be at play here. First, the dominant paradigms developed by the newly defined discipline of prehistory and cultural evolutionism tenets during the 19th century (Groenen 1994; Trigger 2006). Second, the complex range of representations inherited from the very first European travels in the Pacific, in particular the Polynesian/'Mongoloid' vs Melanesian/'Negroid' racial and cultural hierarchisation, attached to the tropes of 'natural man' and lost civilizations (Clark 2003a; Suárez 2004; Jolly 2007; Douglas & Ballard 2008; Tcherkézoff 2008; Jolly *et al.* 2009). These appear to have influenced differently approaches to the past and its material remains in the three defined regions of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia.

In this paper, I focus on the way the first French amateur archaeologists interpreted their data on Melanesian islands. The ideas, from published and unpublished material, of three principal authors in the early archaeology of the Pacific will be presented: Gustave Glaumont in New Caledonia and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) in the 1880–90's, Marius Archambault in New Caledonia in the 1900–10's and Jean-Baptiste Suas in the New Hebrides

in the 1900–10's. What can be reconstructed of their personalities, networks and personal experiences in the islands will be summarised, as it will be shown these are important factors of differentiation in their receptiveness to evolutionary frameworks of interpretation. The ways these early archaeologists thought about the past of the islands were evidently impacted by the prevailing intellectual paradigms of the time, both in prehistory and in regards to representations of Pacific populations. But it is also the collision of these notions that produced hard to escape frames of thought for archaeological analyses in the Pacific. Indeed, as the 19th century unfolded Europeans were simultaneously encountering² two key figures of otherness: the 'pre-historic' of Europe, and the 'savage' of Oceania. When confronted with, and trying to make sense of, remains of a possible pre-historic past in the Pacific islands, the authors considered here were facing an intellectual dilemma: How was it possible to think about a prehistoric evolution for those who had remained primitive men?

GUSTAVE GLAUMONT AND THE 'AUTOCHTHONOUS', 'INDUSTRIOUS' MELANESIANS

One of the two first French archaeologists of the Pacific (with Alfred Marche³), Gustave Glaumont arrived in New Caledonia in 1884, at nearly 30 years of age, serving in the colonial penitentiary administration (Patole-Edoumba 2013). He concluded his stay in New Caledonia with a three months expedition to the New Hebrides in 1890. Well-educated and from a reasonably wealthy family, Glaumont worked on various placements in the colony as a secretary or clerk. He authored several anthropological studies and communications in French academic journals and at least three monographs between 1885 and 1899 (see Patole-Edoumba 2013 and below). Glaumont also appears as an independent, bright and impertinent personage: on administrative reports, he was often judged as very intelligent but too bold and disobedient, and as a consequence was sent to various remote posts in the archipelago as measures of isolation – while also gaining the sympathy of the island's governor (Patole-Edoumba 2013: 9–10). The first of these placements took him to the Isle of Pines after just a year in Noumea. There he met the R.F. Lambert, who introduced him to the anthropological study of the 'Neo-Caledonians' or 'Canaques'. This appears as a decisive experience for Glaumont, who extensively used the manuscript that Lambert would eventually publish in 1900 to write his own monograph on the inhabitants of New Caledonia (Glaumont 1888). In the preface of his 1888 monograph he 'warmly thanks' Lambert for 'enabling' him to carry on his work, and writes:

It was when reading the book of R.F. Lambert on Neo-Caledonians that I was struck for the first time by the many similarities that seemed to exist between the tra-

ditions and customs of the Canaques and those of the populations of Asia⁴. Was there any link between these populations, however currently so removed from one another?

In another unpublished manuscript written by Glaumont on the lithic technologies of New Caledonia (Glaumont 1889–1890), Elise Patole-Edoumba noted instances of his enthusiastic interest in the Canaques⁵, contrary to many of his contemporaries: ‘Bourail, for any other than a canacophile, if I may use this word, would be an absolutely stultifying stay. (...) I hence fully devoted myself to my studies of predilection: to the Canaques.’ (Glaumont 1889–1890: 5; cited in Patole-Edoumba 2013: 17). Archival records⁶ and Patole-Edoumba’s researches on Glaumont further show that he corresponded with Théodore Hamy, then director of the Trocadéro Museum and editor of the *Revue d’Ethnographie*, as well as other European prehistorians. He was in touch with developments going on in the fields of anthropology and prehistory at the time and appeared particularly inspired by the works of Gustave de Mortillet, the dominant figure of late 19th century French Prehistory (Patole-Edoumba 2013: 15–22) (Figure 1).

Glaumont’s writings, the methods he defended and the interpretations he advanced clearly record the influences of the cultural evolutionist paradigm then dominant in prehistory and anthropology. However, this free-minded, self-taught and enthusiastic character does appear to have been able to ‘think outside the box’ from which respectable European thinkers of the late 19th centuries had to draw their theories. For his approach to the problem of the origins of the Canaques, or Melanesians in general, and their inter-regional contacts, he advocated a method using comparative ethnography, ‘anthropology’ and linguistics (1889b: 141). He also explained that, as part of his efforts to understand the past of this people he ‘researched, excavated, and found a lot’ (1889a: 214). In his 1889 ‘excavations in Bourail’ communication and in an 1899 monograph on his New Hebrides expedition, Glaumont indeed presented details of some archaeological excavations. He recorded depths and stratigraphic contexts of finds, being careful in ‘having them photographed first’ before excavating the objects or features (1889a: 214). He also produced one of the first published stratigraphic profiles from the Pacific, relating to his observations in the New Hebrides (2013: 85) (Figure 2).

Based on these investigations, Glaumont stated that ‘you will see, from the *fire-chipped* (stone) objects, that the Neo Caledonians of today are almost prehistoric’ (1889a: 214, emphasis his) and explained in the conclusion of his 1888 monograph (p.182):

the New Caledonians and their brothers the Melanesians, isolated on their islands, have remained through their traditions, customs, implements, weapons, industry, the men of the Quaternary hiatus. They

are not worthless and degraded beings, they represent one of the stages of humanity, more civilized than was the Cheullean man of Europe.

In these passages where the influence of de Mortillet’s divisions of prehistoric times (1883) appear obvious, the willingness of Glaumont is also apparent to rehabilitate his ‘Canaque friends’ (1889a: 214). In fact, Glaumont started his

150

Tableau comparatif du Magdalénien et du Robenhauzien, c'est-à-dire, de l'homme quaternaire autochtone de l'Europe et de l'envahisseur étranger.

<i>Magdalénien.</i>	<i>Robenhauzien.</i>
1° Climat froid et sec, avec températures extrêmes.	Climat tempéré beaucoup plus uniforme.
2° Existence de la dernière grande espèce fossile le Mammouth.	Le Mammouth n'existe plus.
3° Ossements, Mammotte, Bouquetins dans nos plaines.	Retirés sur le sommet des montagnes.
4° Renne, Saïga, Gloutons, ours gris, etc... dans le centre de l'Europe.	Ces animaux ont émigré vers le nord, d'une manière permanente.
5° Hygiène et grands félins.	Plus d'hygiène et de grands félins.
6° Pas d'animaux domestiques.	Anim ^{aux} domest ^{iques} très abondants.
7° Type humain uniforme.	Type humain fort varié.
8° Population nomade.	Populations sédentaires.
9° Chasseurs, pêcheurs, sans agriculture.	Agriculture très développée.
10° Instruments en pierre, simplement taillés.	Instruments en pierre, en partie polis.
11° Pas de poteries.	Existence de la poterie.
12° Pas de monuments.	Monuments, dolmens, menhirs.
13° Pas de sépultures, aucun respect pour les morts.	Ensevelissement des morts qui sont mieux traités que les vivants.
14° Aucune idée religieuse.	Religiosité développée.
15° Sentiment artistique, très vague et très profond.	Aucun sentiment artistique.

Figure 1: ‘Comparative table of Magdalenian and Robenhausian, i.e., of the Quaternary man autochthonous to Europe and of the foreign invader’, By Glaumont (1888), based on G. de Mortillet works (1883).

Glaumont uses the table as part of his argumentation that the Canaques have a culture similar to the Cheullean of Europe – more advanced than the Quaternary man and originating from Asia, just like the indigenous populations of Melanesia (extracted from Glaumont 1888, p.150, and reproduced with the authorisation of the Centre Tjibaou Research Library, New Caledonia).

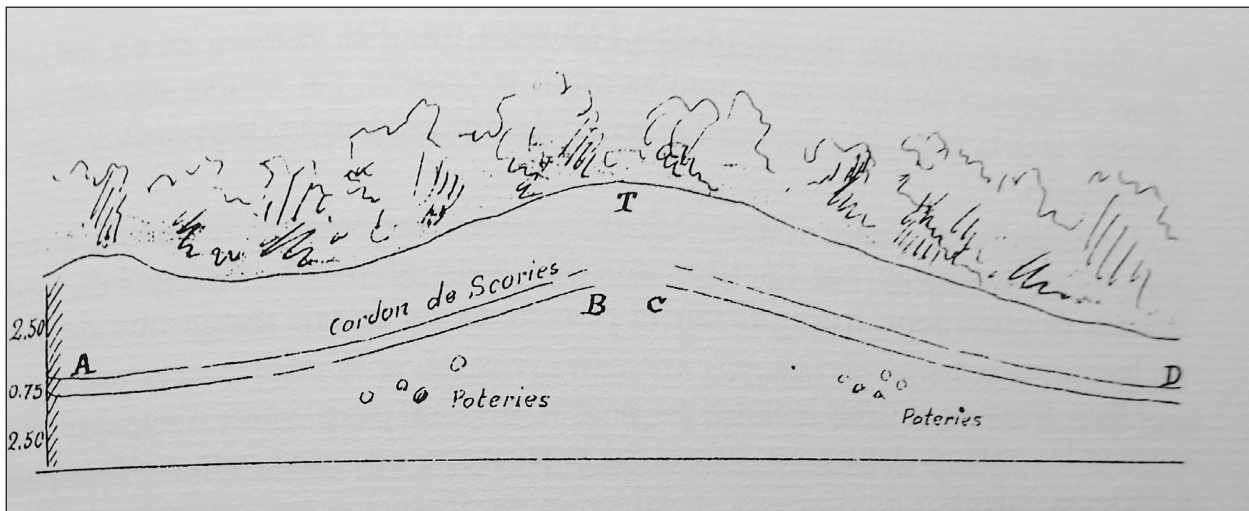


Figure 2: Stratigraphic profile from Ambae, Vanuatu, recorded and described by Glaumont in his 1899 monograph (extracted and reproduced from Glaumont [2013], with the authorisation of Elise Patole-Edoumba, Museum de la Rochelle, France).

1888 monograph by declaring that the Canaque ‘has been represented too often as a worthless being’ while ‘he is on the contrary proud, industrious’, and by hoping ‘one will have after reading this manuscript an opinion far more conforming to the one he really deserves’ (1888:1).

In another non-conformist development of ideas, Glaumont associated the remains of ancient human cultures he found in the islands to the direct ancestors of the current Melanesians both in New Caledonia and the New Hebrides⁷: not only fragments of lithic tools, buried hearth features or pottery sherds uncovered by him in the two archipelagoes he visited (1888:160–162; 1889a:214; 2013:84), but also New Caledonian petroglyphs that he was the first to document (Bonnemère 1895)⁸. Glaumont offered detailed interpretations of the engravings by working closely with his Canaque guides and in particular ‘Massavero’, chief of the Ouá Oué tribe (Bonnemère 1895:64). He saw in the carved signs representations of various artefacts and landscape features from different periods of the Canaques’ past. Interestingly, Glaumont (as cited by Bonnemère) analysed the techniques used for the engravings and the features represented to recognise successive stages of progress in the past of the Canaques: from ‘a very distant period, maybe when the Canaques lived in caves’ as simple gatherers to the time when they settled on the hills and started agriculture and finally experienced ‘tremendous progress’, especially in agriculture with the advent of yam and taro drained/irrigated cultivation techniques, at times deemed to be ‘distant’ in the past (Bonnemère 1895:64, 66–67, 71). Overall, it was possible to see in ancient material remains that ‘their intelligence progressed and their way of life became happier’ (1895:66).

Here, Glaumont quite boldly departed from the dominant view of the time that ‘savages’ such as the Canaques represented static primitive men. Indeed, in the discus-

sion that followed the communication at the *Société d’Anthropologie*, none other than Adrien de Mortillet, Gustave’s son, intervened to remind the audience that ‘the objects in question are prehistoric, that is to say anterior to the European conquest: that’s how their antiquity should be understood’ (Bonnemère 1895:72). Glaumont apparently shared this idea when he started investigating Melanesian societies in his 1888 monograph, where he stated: ‘the inhabitants whom received no or few immigrations remained what they were, no progress being possible on a small landmass’ (Glaumont 1888:180). However, it seems the two subsequent years he spent excavating and exploring the islands, living with the indigenous populations, and the further five years reflecting on his finds led his ideas to evolve. One thing did not change however, his – unique – opinion that all these data were proofs that ‘demonstrate that Melanesians in general, and New Caledonians in particular, are autochthonous on their islands’ (Glaumont 1888:180).

MARIUS ARCHAMBAULT AND THE LOST CIVILIZATION OF THE ‘MYSTERIOUS LAPIDARISTS’

The name of Marius Archambault has long been associated with the petroglyphs of New Caledonia. He recorded and analysed hundreds of sites, publishing more than 10 papers on the subject, even though he was not quite the pioneer discoverer he had hoped – his first observations dating to nine years after the initial mention of petroglyphs by Glaumont in 1889 (Archambault 1901; Sand and Monin 2004; Sand 2005; Boulay 2013; Duband 2016). Archambault is also renowned for his clearly racist interpretations, linked to strong colonialist opinions (Monin and Sand 2004; Sand 2005; Duband 2016), most certainly related to his life experience. Archival records show that

Archambault arrived in New Caledonia at a young age with his parents. They appear to have settled in Moindou, on the south-western coast of New Caledonia's Grande Terre in 1879 when he was 15 (Duband 2016: 8). The young man became an employee of the Service of Post and Telegraphs at 20 years of age: the various placements provided him with the opportunity to visit extensively many isolated parts of the islands, especially the east coast, between 1886 and 1899 (ANOM⁹; see also Duband 2016). It was at the end of this period that he 'discovered' his first petroglyphs, between Houailou and Canala. Throughout the following twenty-two years of his life, while being mainly based in Noumea for his employment, Archambault would extensively survey the Grande Terre to record new petroglyphs, conducting a few unreported excavations and using the weathering or vegetal cover of engravings to assign them great antiquity (1901; 1902; 1908; 1909a,b,c). In 1909, Archambault managed to obtain an official 'archaeology mission' from the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts to carry on his research (ANOM¹⁰; see also Duband 2016).

At this time, the amateur archaeologist had already published 8 papers and spent a year in Paris giving seminars on the subject, especially through the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* where he seems to have benefited from the interest and support of Adrien de Mortillet (de Mortillet and Archambault 1919). Another connection of importance made by Archambault during this period was with the Pastor Maurice Leenhardt, a central figure in Kanak ethnology. The Pastor himself wrote, in the weeks following his landing in Noumea in 1902: 'there are a lot of ancient traces on the island. A Mister Archambault has been excavating and found engraved rocks. I will try to get in contact with him.' (ANC¹¹). They indeed met just a month later. Archival records, including extracts from the journal of Archambault conserved by the Leenhardt family, document the ongoing encounters and exchanges between Archambault (a Protestant himself) and the Leenhardt couple (ANC¹²; and see Duband 2016). Finally, while Archambault's journal shows that he had a somewhat complex attitude toward the educated and strong-minded Jeanne Leenhardt, one of the influential supports he benefited from to obtain his 1909 mission was in fact her father, the highly respected André Michel, conservator and professor of Art History at the *Musée du Louvre* (ANOM¹³; AN¹⁴).

Archambault hence managed to build himself a network of influential supporters and some scientific recognition. However, most of his personal relations, in particular with the indigenous 'Canaques', seemed rather difficult and tainted by what appears as an overall negative personality. His letters and manuscripts not only demonstrate that he often considered himself as an under-recognised intellectual, but also that he had a strong disdain for non-Europeans and especially for the Canaques: a 'negroid race only slightly developed, slightly industrious, and most of

all slightly artistic', representing a 'primitive dominated by material concerns' and 'incapable of the abstract thinking required to compose such subjective hieroglyphs' (Archambault 1908:308; 1909a:517) (also see Sand 2005; Duband 2016). Administrative reports by his superiors show that, while generally perceived as intelligent, he was first noted as 'docile', 'serving with dedication', and towards the end of his career was remarked upon as a 'fussy' and 'difficult' person creating issues with colleagues (ANOM¹⁵). These traits, his longing for recognition and strong colonialist ideas might have made him particularly open to typical contemporary evolutionary frames of thought.

Indeed, throughout his writings on the New Caledonian petroglyphs, Archambault adopted a pattern of interpretation apparently based on the premise that the 'primitive' Canaques currently inhabiting the island were simply not on the same evolutionary step as the 'men from the glyphic period' pertaining to an 'ancient civilization' (Archambault 1901; 1908:308; 1909a:520; 1909b). From his very first publication on the topic (1901), to his last known unpublished manuscript dating to 1919¹⁶, Archambault was convinced that 'these monuments should not be attributed to the canaque mob currently inhabiting the island' but 'to a race that would have occupied the island a long time before the modern canaques', probably 'massacred or absorbed by the men from the Melanesian race' (1901:266). This also explains, he thought, why the Canaques showed simultaneously 'extremes of delicacy and crudeness' (1901:266): accordingly, any Canaque undertakings judged as ingenious or beautiful – such as irrigation systems, carefully made lithic tools and pottery – were attributed to inheritance from the preceding civilized race (1901; 1909a; 1909b).

To support his interpretation, Archambault often cited the fact that he had been unable, throughout his many years of explorations with many Canaque guides, to collect any oral tradition – other than those he judged meaningless. Here, the opposition is revealing with Glaumont's ability to collect and integrate local oral traditions – paralleled by the latter's positive relations with the Canaques. Indeed, in 1901, Archambault wrote that 'the most intelligent of them ignore the majority of (the petroglyphs) existing in their native country and are incapable of giving any signification to the mysterious figures engraved on these stones' (1901:266). In 1909 his analysis was that, when confronted with the petroglyphs

the canaque imagination is in a blatant state of impotence; this race even so skilful in self-explaining the incomprehensible by ingenious approximations, has been unable to assimilate this heritage of a past far too foreign to his mental processes (1909a:519).

Archambault's ideas display an interesting mix of influences from both cultural evolutionism and hyperdiffusionist concepts: the Canaques are representative of

typical primitives while ‘advanced’ sociocultural features and remains must be attributed to a an ancient civilized, distinctive, race, which must have come through successive waves from a unique (European-related) source. This interpretation became more romanticized at the end of his life, triggering opposition to his theories in academic circles (AN¹⁷; Duband 2016: 46–48). Working hypotheses comparing the engraved signs with others known from ‘lost’ civilisations around the world (from South America, the Mediterranean and especially the Celtic regions) are present throughout his work and at first do not strongly contrast with mainstream approaches of the time (i.e. Archambault 1901, 1909a, de Mortillet and Archambault 1919) (Figure 3). But his first texts also already contain more declamatory passages where his interpretations allude to an ancient widespread ‘race’, carrier of civilization as inherited by modern Europeans:

the minds that like to revive the slow evolution of the enigmatic Humanity, (...) will enjoy collecting, beyond the first glimmers of history in the semi-darkness of this mysterious neolithic civilization, the signs of a race adventurous enough, with a heart heroic enough, to plunge into the most fabulous wanderings and travel infinite distances without fear (...). Aren’t they admirable these humble ancestors who (...) established closed and unsuspected links between the most opposed places on the vast planet, between the foggy celtic lands (...), the Peruvian coastlines (...) and this modest “*ni-aouli* land” bathed by the South Sea (1902: 711)

In one of his last writings, in 1920, Archambault presented an offended response to the Minister refusing to publish his report, while he was offering French science ‘the ultimate capital discovery Archaeology could reserve’:

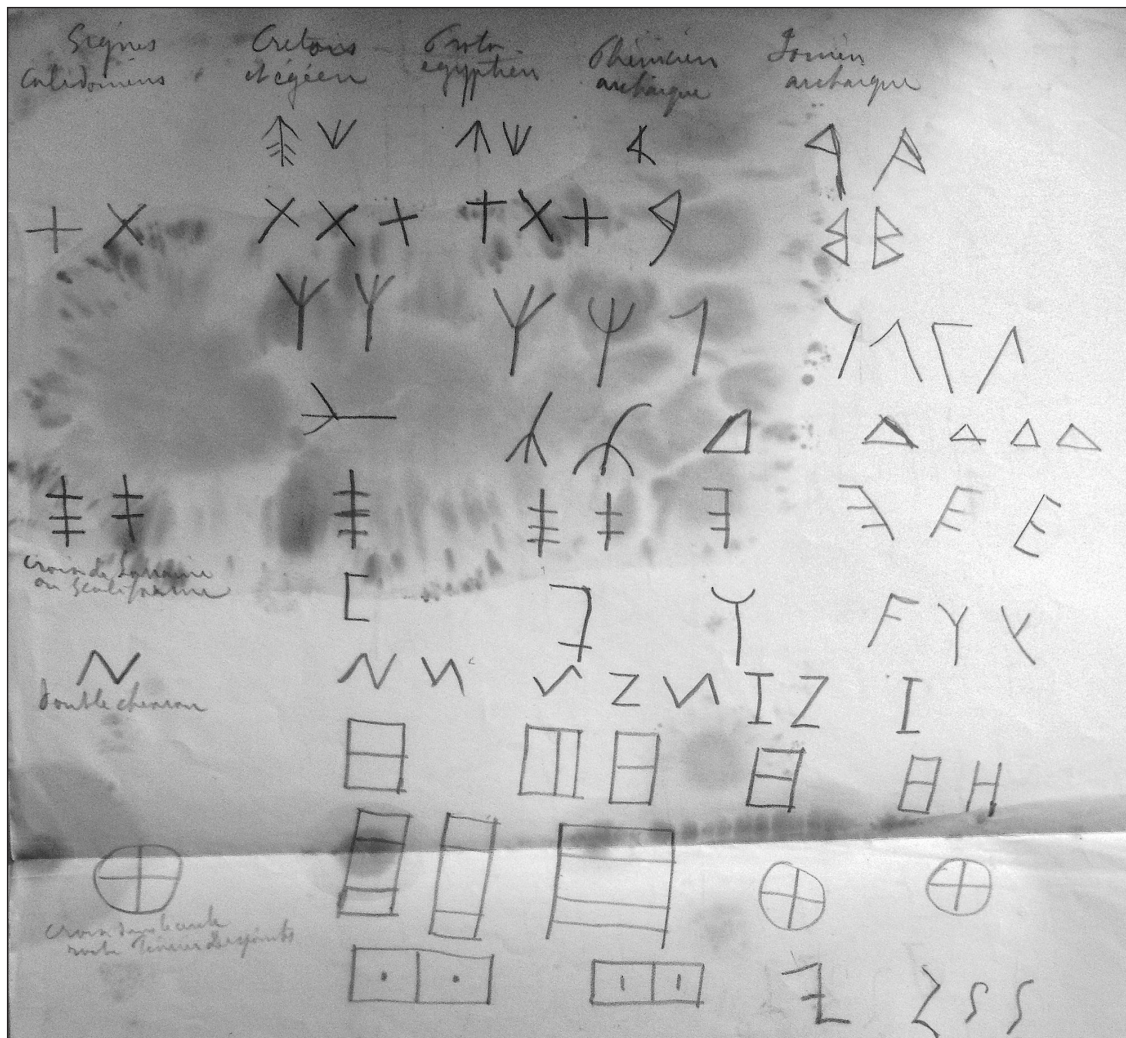


Figure 3: Unpublished notes of Archambault comparing ‘epigraph’ signs from the New Caledonian petroglyphs and from ancient civilizations: ‘Cretan and Aegean’, ‘Proto-Egyptian’, ‘Archaic Phoenician’ and ‘Archaic Ionian’ (archives from the Dossier des Collections Archambault, MQB, 71.1904.11 [D000700/34715], reproduced with the authorisation of the Department of Archives and Documentation of Collections of the MQB).

iconographic remains of ‘the primitive andediluvian civilization, the one which the legends preserved the memory of under the aspects of the Golden Age or the Eden’¹⁸. He would die just a few months later, before being able to publish his grand theory and to return to New Caledonia one last time.

FATHER SUAS AND THE ‘INTELLIGENT RACE’ OF THE FIRST NEW HEBRIDEANS

Marist father Jean-Baptiste Suas arrived in the New Hebrides as a freshly ordained priest in 1892, at nearly 27 years old, with the task of establishing a new mission at Olal on Ambrym Island (O’Reilly 1957; Monnier 1991). He remained on the island for nine years, before successively moving to Pentecost and Efate for a few years and finally settling for 22 years on Ambae in 1909. He published oral traditions and ethnographic notes of the islands he visited, in at least seven papers between 1911 and 1922 (O’Reilly 1957; Monnier 1991). However, his very first publication reports an archaeological discovery: that of ancient burials on Ambrym, first related in a communication to the journal of the *Missions Catholiques* in 1902, and described again in a later more extensive paper on ‘the first Hebrideans’ (Suas 1917–1918). Although Suas did not commit himself to archaeological research, his archaeological findings are among the very first ones from the New Hebrides (Bedford 2006: 13), just a few years after Glaumont, and are important as well in being the first ones published in an academic journal.

Suas does not seem to have been particularly integrated within French academic circles of the time – nor to have been interested in this. The strongly anti-clerical atmosphere of French society in general and of the scientific community in particular in the early 20th century was clearly not favourable¹⁹. This probably explains why all of Suas’s academic communications were published in the German journal *Anthropos*, recently created by the renowned Oceanic linguist Father Wilhelm Schmidt as an international review of ethnology and linguistics. A Catholic priest himself, Schmidt intended the journal to be a platform for missionaries, especially in Oceania, to present their ‘inestimable knowledge’ about ‘strange people and cultures’, even providing an ethnographic questionnaire for missionaries to use (Schmidt 1905)²⁰. As suggested by the editing of Schmidt on some of Suas’s papers (i.e. Suas 1911, 1912), this was also a way for him to collect a wide range of raw ethnographical data. Some of Suas’s papers do show that they were sent as letters to Schmidt and it can be assumed that the two Priests would have corresponded²¹. Finally, the lack of reference to other works in anthropology or prehistory (contrary to the two previous personages) and his own explanations make it clear that Suas was only interested in collecting myths as far as they could show the existence of a universal tradition similar to the Bible’s Genesis. He considered his archaeological observations to

be useful for other ‘competent men for whom this question could offer some interest’ (1917–1918: 205). Indeed, he preceded his own conclusions on the archaeological finds by a humble warning²²: ‘As for me, simple and uninitiated on the issue, I can only affirm and I affirm the following facts, happy if they can serve as milestones to the professionals, so as to deduce something useful’ (1917–1918: 205).

Suas is remembered as a ‘cheerful’ but determined and courageous pioneer within the Marist congregation: a real ‘*broussard*’ from the field, who managed to bring about many conversions, was liked by the people and created Catholic schools (including for girls) in isolated missions (O’Reilly 1957; Monnier 1991; Father Rodet pers. com. 2015). However, in his journal and correspondence with his superior Bishop Douceré, a somewhat different aspect of his character appears, often contemptuous and embittered. It is also clear that his relations with some of his colleagues and most importantly with the indigenous people among whom he lived for most of his life were difficult and tainted by deep mutual incomprehension. For instance, after nine years in Olal (and several months after he exhumed the burials), the sudden death of a child among the small converted community brought about a violent reaction against the Father. He wrote ‘How agreeable, after nine years of sweat and suffering servicing these scoundrels’. The Bishop travelled to Olal and managed to calm down the situation, but Suas was unconvinced – ‘you need to be the Reverend Father Douceré to treat in this way such bad canaques to whom we owe nothing’ – and fearing for his life, asked to be brought back to Port-Vila (MAPV²³). This state of mind and complex relations remained unchanged for the rest of his life – as represented in his archives – and, surprisingly, there are less than ten occurrences of anthropological notes throughout both his journal entries and letters to Douceré. The first of these are two slightly different records of his archaeological discovery of ancient burials in Olal. The two notes, preceding the more accomplished 1917 paper, already demonstrate the typical mode of interpretation that disconnected the remains of an ancient civilized past from the modern primitive indigenous population.

The earliest record is that of his 19 January 1901 journal entry, where Suas talked about the chance discovery of ‘a round pit containing the bones of a man’, at a depth of 7 metres. He noted that the corpse must be from a time preceding the period of deposition of a stony, 3 metres wide, undisturbed layer, and concluded:

This is a proof that existed here a primitive race that happened to be buried down when the volcano deposited this solid soil layer. That also explains why the current race did not preserve the memory of the clay pots we find everywhere at a significant depth. This pottery was without doubt made by this intelligent race, which had already completely disappeared when the current one appeared. (MAPV id)

In a note kept among the archives of Bishop Douceré, apparently an edited copy of what was sent to the *Missions Catholiques*, dated 31 August 1902, Suas reported the same thing. However, some details on the width and depth of the layers encountered were added or changed and this time he talked about 'two tombs' being discovered in a sandy layer buried under the consolidated one. More details were provided, especially that 'from the disposition of the leg bones it was easy to see these men were buried in a squat position in circular pits and not laying down as done today' (MAPV²⁴). The 1917 paper presents further variations of these details, in particular relating this time the discovery of three tombs from which virtually all the bones were too decomposed to be collected (1917–1918:204).

While there is no record of any conversation with the local population about the tombs at any time in his journal, in the 1902 note (and in the *Missions Catholiques* communication) Suas related how 'all the indigenes of the surroundings' came to see the tombs and to give him explanations – as he would narrate again in his 1917 paper. In these versions, it is the local inhabitants themselves who declared that these were ancient people not related to them, and were responsible for the remains of earthenware pots found in the islands. It was also these early people who were buried by the volcano before the current population arrived but whose existence was remembered in traditions about 'a different race inhabiting the country in ancient times' (1917–1918:204). Earlier in the paper, Suas explained that pottery remains were found in large quantity everywhere on the islands he visited, with 'some even adorned with nice designs'²⁵. Throughout the article, Suas insisted on the fact that the modern inhabitants had absolutely no knowledge about ceramics. Even the size of the original pots, that Suas tried to estimate using a compass and rim fragments, was used to demonstrate that the makers of the pots had completely different traditions to the current people. In a manner that leaves no doubt as to his racist opinions and his inability to consider that 'civilized' ancient remains could be related to the current population, Suas wrote:

these sherds are rarely of large dimensions, with a mean diameter of 4 to 5 cm. It is really as if the current population persisted in destroying these relics of a civilization that was a constant humiliation for the retarded of today (1917–1918:202).

In his final writing on the subject, Suas proposed the idea that not two but three different races successively inhabited the country. Indeed, he remarked this time that pottery remains were not found in the same levels as the burials but mainly on the surface: in consequence, there existed in the New Hebrides two ancient races civilized enough to have 'cemeteries' (first 'race') and to make fine ceramics (second 'race'), but both of them disappeared one

after the other, leaving only the recently arrived 'primitive' race of the current population (1917–1918:205).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

On the Difficulty of Thinking Outside the Box and on the Heritage of the 'Savage as Prehistoric' Trope in Pacific Archaeology.

The three early French archaeologists of the Pacific presented here exemplify how life experiences, networks and opinions can interact with dominant paradigms of the time in scientific and intellectual histories - 'real-life science' as approached by Kaeser (2003). In the context of pioneer colonial archaeologies, only a personage as singular and apparently bold as Glaumont appeared to be able to envisage his data through a relatively original point of view, rather than according to orthodox concepts. Although Glaumont's interpretations were still based on European models of prehistory, his open-minded sympathy for the 'Canaques' clearly allowed him a relative freedom from racist evolutionary perspectives. For the majority of Europeans at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, such racist opinions were totally acceptable, supporting *and* supported by evolutionary theories and imperialist enterprises. In the meantime, the already long history of European visions of the Pacific had constructed a well-defined image of the islands' inhabitants.

Based on the Melanesian/Polynesian opposition and the Cannibals *vs* *Vahines* clichés, Oceanians were either the degenerated remnants of an ancient grand civilization or the last specimen of static primitive people (Clark 2003a, 2003b; Boulay 2005; Tcherkézoff 2008; Douglas 2014). This representation was associated with a near-obsession about the question of origins of the Polynesians (more or less encompassing the Micronesians until Dumont d'Urville) but very few considerations of the origins and prehistory of dark-skinned 'Australasians' (Tcherkézoff 2008; Douglas & Ballard 2008; Douglas 2014). Such a mindset was hardly receptive to the possibility that colonised "primitive savages" of Melanesia could have had a dynamic prehistory.

On the one side, the development of prehistory in Europe was seen as demonstrating that evolution was not only a biological process but also a cultural one driven by the forces of progress - as expanded on in the cumulative works of Lubbock, Morgan, Hamy and de Mortillet (Groenen 1994; Schnapp 1998; Trigger 2006). On the other side, the establishments of colonial and missionary enterprises in the Pacific were triggering the proliferation of detailed ethnographies providing the opportunity to observe in real-life 'the physical, moral and religious characteristics of primitive people' (Hamy 1874:11). The complex entanglement of ethnology and prehistory during this period of their early history is well known, as is the classic recourse to (Pacific) ethnographic analogies to interpret (European) prehistoric remains (Schnapp 1998; Trigger 2006; Spriggs

2008): ‘Hommes Fossiles et Hommes Sauvages’²⁶ were but the same incarnation of another, primitive, humanity (Patou-Mathis 2011; Schlanger & Taylor 2012). This idea did not fade when cultural evolutionism and ‘progressionism’ were gradually giving way to the concepts of culture groups and cultural diffusionism in the early 20th century; as these were still making use of direct analogies between living ‘neolithic’ or ‘palaeolithic’ cultures and archaeological remains²⁷ (Schnapp 1998; Trigger 2006). In addition, the development of Classical archaeology provided proof to sustain the concept of a unique and ancient source of civilization in the Middle East or in Europe diffused through migration to other parts of the world. As a matter of fact, interpretative schemes for changes in the archaeological record based on successive migrations – often associated with different races – were widely used by archaeologists throughout the time period envisaged here, including in regards to Europe, as is visible in the same journals where the three authors published (see also Groener 1994; Schnapp 1998; Trigger 2006; and Figure 1).

In this context, what made the situation of early Melanesian archaeologists intellectually complex and even puzzling was the fact that – in their view – they were confronted with the remains of a prehistory, sometimes even showing features usually associated with advanced or civilized stages of humanity, in a land peopled by, precisely, ‘prehistoric’ men. In addition, these people were assumed to be the actual embodiment of European prehistory. As discussed by Testart, it is precisely to be able to think of them as ‘*being our prehistory*’ (as Europeans) that we had to deny them their own prehistory (Testart 2012: 33).²⁸

Faced with the impossibility of thinking about “the prehistory of the prehistoric”, the recourse to explanations based on migratory waves of different races carrying different levels of civilization, appears almost inescapable within the historical and intellectual context of the time. The weight of conceptual frames, as shaped by orthodox models of thought and how each individual’s life experiences echoed these, seems as important as the influence of socio-political conditions in these colonial archaeologies. They also record how the fabric of the prehistoric and of the Pacific savage collided when Europeans met archaeological remains in the islands, leaving today a tortuous heritage for the region’s archaeology.

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Endnotes

- 1 All translations are by the author.
- 2 Although the history of European encounters with Pacific people started as early as the 16th century and was particularly significant during the 18th century (Jolly *et al.* 2009; Douglas 2014), the 19th century saw the first publications and multiplications of anthropological monographs, with the beginning of European settlements in the islands: hence resulting in tangible cultural engagements between Europe and the Pacific ‘savages’.
- 3 Between 1887 and 1889, Alfred Marche conducted a scientific mission in the Mariana Islands where he carried out archaeological excavations and surveys, under the auspices of the French Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts (Carson 2012, Florio 2005). His and Glaumont’s first communications on archaeological ‘excavations’ appear in the same issue of the *Revue d’Ethnographie*, tome 8, 1889. His biography and archaeological works are being investigated as part of the CBAP project.
- 4 Glaumont spent almost a year in Cochinchina (southern French Indochina) in 1879 (Patole-Edoumba 2013) and his writings demonstrate a large bibliographical knowledge of Asian cultures.
- 5 The typically colonial term ‘Canaque’ and the modern self-revendedicated term ‘Kanak’ with regard to the indigenous population of New Caledonia have different histories and meanings. Throughout the text, we hence utilise the term ‘Canaque’ that was used by the authors and their contemporaries when referring to the inhabitants of the Melanesian islands in general.
- 6 Correspondance du Dr Ernest-Théodore Hamy des années 1878–1883 MNHN, Ms 2255; Dossiers des Collections Glaumont, MQB, 71.1894.28 (D000939)
- 7 In the New Hebrides, Glaumont thought the history of migrations and mixing was undecipherable. He noted that where Polynesian groups (‘yellow race’) were present, pottery was absent – hence he associated buried remains, including pottery sherds, with autochthonous Melanesians

(‘Dark race’) while Polynesians represented more recent immigrants in the Pacific (Glaumont 1888, 2013[1899]). As analysed by Clark (2003b), the association of pottery to Melanesian vs Polynesian was a somewhat perplexing issue in the early days of Pacific archaeology.

- 8 Dossier iconographique de Glaumont remis par Bonnemère à la *Société d'anthropologie de Paris*, MNHN, SAP 118.
- 9 Dossier de Personnel Marius Archambault, ANOM, FR ANOM COL EE 1590 1; Dossier Mission Marius Archambault Ministère des Colonies, FR ANOM 50COL63
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Journaux et Lettres de Maurice et Jeanne Leenhardt, ANC 12.J.22
- 12 Dossier Marius Archambault, fonds des Pasteurs Leenhardt, ANC 12.J.58; Journaux et Lettres de Maurice et Jeanne Leenhardt, ANC 12.J.22
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Dossier Mission Marius Archambault, Ministère de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts, AN F.17.17265
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 This is the report that Archambault delivered to the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts: *Le sphinx et le dragon. Études sur l'art et le symbolisme de l'époque diluvienne d'après les monuments lithiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* recently located by Duband (FR ANOM 50COL35; Duband 2016). Academic reviews deemed the report unpublishable (AN F.17.17265).
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Letter of Marius Archambault to the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, 26 July 1922, AN F.17.17265
- 19 See the particular difficulties encountered by Breuil at this period (Hurel 2003).
- 20 See the ‘heritage’ page of the *Anthropos* website: <http://www.anthropos.eu/anthropos/heritage/schmidt.php>
- 21 Such correspondence has not been identified yet in Suas’s papers conserved in the Archives of the New Hebrides Marist Society, Diocese of Port-Vila, Vanuatu.
- 22 Note that by acting so, he also carefully follows the instructions given by Schmidt to the missionaries publishing in his journal (1905). Also compare to Meyer’s similar saying (Howes, this volume)
- 23 Journal of J-B. Suas, 2 and 24 December 1901. MAPV, Dossier Suas, A.III.8
- 24 Ethnology notes of Bishop Douceré, MAPV, A.II.15
- 25 He added ‘for instance here in Oba [Ambae]. I have seen some from more than 10 different designs’. No drawings, collections or further details have yet been found to help identify the pottery type(s) Suas was talking about.
- 26 As in the title of de Quatrefages monograph presenting anthropological knowledge in European human palaeontology and about Pacific populations (1884)
- 27 For instance, the hall of ‘comparative archaeology’ in the Musée d’Archéologie Nationale (St Germain) was reorganized in the 1910’s – in collaboration with Mauss – so as to directly compare European and Middle-Eastern archaeological objects with ethnographic collections, especially

from the Pacific (Gran-Aymerich 1998)

- 28 Testart was discussing here the long denial of Australian Indigenous archaeology.

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 ANC: Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, Nouméa, Nouvelle-Calédonie.
 ANOM: Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.
 MAPV: Archives of the Marist Society, Diocese of Port-Vila, Vanuatu.
 MNHN, SAP: Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Fonds de la Société d’Anthropologie de Paris, Paris, France.
 MNHN, Ms: Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Manuscrits de la bibliothèque du Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France.
 MQB : Service d’Archives, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France.

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Comment nos 'Préhistoriques' osent-ils avoir une 'Préhistoire' pour eux-mêmes? Le rôle croisé des contextes historiques et biographiques dans les débuts de l'archéologie française du Pacifique.

RÉSUMÉ :

Au tournant des 19^e et 20^e siècles, la France consolidait sa présence comme puissance coloniale dans le Pacifique. Parmi les premiers français à s'installer dans les îles, quelques un remarquèrent rapidement la présence de vestiges: les pétroglyphes, les constructions monumentales, les fragments de céramique et les restes humains ensevelis furent les plus commentés. Une littérature riche et parfois étonnamment détaillée apparaît alors, décrivant ces objets et leur antiquité. Dans les interprétations proposées, un thème récurrent émerge: l'apparente nécessité de faire appel à des vagues de migrations ou à des cataclysmes pour expliquer qu'il existe les traces d'une préhistoire et de 'civilisations' anciennes là où vivent alors des hommes 'primitifs', et ce plus encore dans la région dite de 'Mélanésie'. Dans cet article sont présentées les idées de trois auteurs principaux pour les débuts de l'archéologie dans la région: Gustave Glaumont, Marius Archambault et Jean-Baptiste Suas. Les différentes façons dont ces auteurs conceptualisèrent le passé des îles seront discutées à la lumière des relations complexes entre leurs propres histoires biographiques et le contexte intellectuel de l'époque. Il apparaît que la collision entre les paradigmes développés d'une part dans le nouveau champ de la préhistoire et d'autre part au sujet de la représentation des peuples du Pacifique créait alors une situation intellectuelle quelque peu confuse pour les premiers archéologues de Mélanésie.