

HISTORY OF FRENCH POLYNESIA – Timeline of Some Highlights

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- 60,000 yrs ago** First *Homo sapiens* migrate, possibly across some stretches of open sea, from Asia to Melanesia
- 6,000 yrs ago** The **Austronesian Migration** begins, from Taiwan/coastal China. Over the next few thousand years these seafaring peoples will spread across and populate a vast expanse of the Pacific.
- 1500-800BC** The '**Lapita Expansion**' - Lapita culture of Melanesia (Vanuatu & New Caledonia) spreads eastward into **Fiji** and then to **Tonga** and **Samoa**, 'the primeval Polynesian homeland'.
- c. 300AD** First Polynesian seafaring settlers reach the **Marquesas** from Samoa
- c. 700AD** First Polynesian seafaring settlers reach the **Society islands** from the Marquesas and/or Samoa
- c. 1000AD** First Polynesian seafaring settlers reach the **Tuamotus and Gambiers**, probably from the Societies
- c. 1100 AD** First Polynesian seafaring settlers reach the **Australs**, probably from the Gambiers
- 1513** Spanish conquistador **Nuñez de Balboa** sights the **Pacific** (looking south from the Panama isthmus into the Bay of Panama) and names it the *Mar del Sur* (South Sea).
- 1521** **Magellan** enters and crosses the Pacific in a 99-day voyage. Having luck with the weather, he names it *Mar Pacifico*. He (likely) sails near **Pukapuka Atoll in the Tuamotus** but his first landfall is in Guam.
- 1526** Spanish mariner **Garcia Loasía** (follow-up to Magellan's expedition) may have sighted the Marquesas
- 1595** Spanish mariner **Alvaró de Mendaña** sights the Marquesas and names them after his patron, the Marquis de Cañete, who was the Viceroy of Peru
- 1606** Portuguese mariner **Pedro de Queiros**, sailing for Spain, possibly sights **Tahiti**
- 1767** British mariner **Samuel Wallis** lands in **Tahiti** at Matavai Bay, claims the island for England, & names it King George III Island. **Philip Carteret** of same expedition reaches the **Tuamotus** and Pitcairns.
- 1722** Dutch mariner **Jacob Roggeveen** sights Bora Bora and Maupiti in the **leeward Society Islands**, as well as Samoa (and was also the first European to visit Easter Island/Rapa Nui)
- 1768** French explorer-soldier-scientist **Louis de Bougainville** lands on the east coast of Tahiti and, unaware of Wallis' visit 10 months prior, claims the island for France, naming it *Nouvelle-Cythère*.
- 1769** **Capt. James Cook** lands in **Tahiti** at Matavai Bay on his first voyage, sent by the Royal Society to chart the transit of Venus. He calls the island by its native name, *Otaheite*. He would return 3 more times on 2 more voyages. William Bligh was his Sailing Master on the *Resolution* on the 3rd voyage.
- 1770s** Spanish mariner **Domingo de Bonechea** claims **Tahiti for Spain** and establishes a mission
- 1780s** Tahiti, the largest island in eastern Polynesia, becomes a crossroads of Pacific voyaging.
- 1788** The **Pomare Dynasty** of Pare, Tahiti (with ancestors from Fakarava and Raiatea) begins its ascent in the windward Society Islands (Tahiti, Moorea, Tetiaroa) under **King Pomare I**.
- 1788** The **Bounty** arrives in April on its breadfruit mission. Bligh is welcomed back, having been there 10 years prior with Cook. Much revelry and trouble ensues!
- 1789** The **Bounty** departs with 1,015 ill-fated breadfruit plants and 19 soon-to-be-mutineers in its crew of 44 [see my 'Mutiny on The Bounty Timeline' handout for all the key details]
- 1790s** **Whalers** begin to arrive in the region, as do increasing numbers of **French, Spanish, British & Dutch missionaries**. Whaling and missionary stations create the **nuclei for European influence** and future incursions. The **London Missionary Society** allies with and supports the powerful Pomare Dynasty.
- 1791** **American sealer/fur trader Joseph Ingraham** stumbles upon the Marquesas and names the islands after his country's beloved President, George Washington.
- 1793** The **Pomare Dynasty** has now **consolidated its reign over all of the Society islands**, and its influence extends to the **Tuamotus** and **Australs**.
- 1813-14** The **U.S Navy** establishes a **base on Nuku Hiva** in the Marquesas during the War of 1812. Capt. David Porter envisages an American colony named Madisonville after Pres. James Madison. **US Congress declares possession of the Marquesas** but does not pursue the claim. Porter and his troops leave the island after becoming embroiled in bloody inter-tribal wars. The **British Royal Navy** lands on **Nuku Hiva** and **declares possession on behalf of the British Crown**..
- 1815** **King Pomare II** converts to Protestantism and becomes **Tahiti's first Christian King**.
- 1818** **Papeete** is now the **chief whaling port** of the South Pacific and becomes a trade center for supplies and refitting of ships. Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas is also a key whaling center in addition to its sandalwood trade. Whaling crews in the region are about 20% Polynesian in this era. (continued)

- 1834** French missionaries arrive on **Mangareva in the Gambiers**
- 1836** Influenced by **British Protestant missionary George Pritchard** of the London Missionary Society, **Queen Pomare IV expels French Catholic missionaries**, incurring France's wrath.
- 1839** The **U.S. Exploring Expedition ('USExEx')** visits and surveys Tahiti and some of the Tuamotus, but no attempt is made to establish a settlement or colonial interest
- 1842** The French unilaterally declare **Tahiti and the Marquesas a French Protectorate**. French Navy seizes control of the Marquesas. **Queen Pomare IV resists** on Tahiti and is **exiled** to Raiatea. On a side note: earlier that same year, 23-yr-old Herman Melville jumps ship on Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas
- 1843** **Papeete** - 'from 'Water (*pape*) Basket (*ete*) ' in the native tongue - is founded
- 1844** France claims the **Tuamotus**.
- 1844-7** **The Franco-Tahitian War** – The French and anti-Pomare Tahitian allies battle & defeat Queen Pomare's guerilla forces. The British object but do not intervene. The French are unable to pacify the leeward islands & are defeated by Queen Teriitaria of Huahine. France & Britain sign the **Jarnac Agreement** promising to respect Queen Pomare's IV's rule and guaranteeing **independence of the leeward Societies**. The Kingdom of Tahiti protectorate now comprises the windward islands of Tahiti, Moorea, and Tetiaroa.
- 1860s** **Chinese immigrants arrive**, with authorization of the French government, to work coffee & cotton plantations.
- 1871** France declares the **Gambier Islands a protectorate**
- 1872** French naval officer and early South Seas author **Pierre Loti arrives in Tahiti**
- 1880** The Kingdom of **Tahiti is formally annexed by France as a French colony**. France advances its claims to the **Austral island group**, which will be consolidated over the next 20 years
- 1881** The **Marquesas, Tuamotus and Gambiers are formally annexed by France**
- 1887** **France annexes the Leeward Society Islands** in violation of prior agreement not to do so.
- 1891** **Paul Gauguin arrives** in Tahiti, inspired by the writings of Pierre Loti.
- 1897** France suppresses the Raiatean Rebellion and **conquest of the Society Islands is complete**.
- 1903** **Gauguin dies on Hiva Oa** in the Marquesas
- 1907** **Jack London** visits Nuku Hiva, the Tuamotus, and Tahiti in his sailboat *The Snark*.
- 1908** **Phosphate mining** begins in earnest in the **Tuamotus**.
- 1914** **German cruisers shell Papeete** during World War I
- 1932** **Nordhoff & Hall** publish **The Mutiny on The Bounty**, the first book of their Bounty Trilogy
- 1933** The movie *In the Wake of the Bounty* is released, starring Errol Flynn as Christian
- 1935** The Oscar-winning movie *Mutiny of the Bounty* is released, with Clark Gable and Charles Laughton
- 1942** **The US establishes a base on Bora Bora** during WW II. French Polynesia is part of 'Free France'.
- 1945** Islanders are granted **French citizenship**.
- 1946** The islands are **granted limited self-government** and the region is now named **French Polynesia**
- 1950s** **Independence movement** brews. Leader **Pouvanaa a Oupa** is arrested and imprisoned.
- 1958** A **referendum** on independence is held: **64% of residents choose to remain part of France**.
- 1960** **Fa'a'a International airport opens** – putting Tahiti and French Polynesia on the internatl tourist map
- 1962** The re-make of *Mutiny of the Bounty* is released, starring Marlon Brando & Trevor Howard.
- 1963** France moves its **nuclear testing facility** from Algeria to the **Tuamotus**
- 1974** **Atmospheric nuclear testing is discontinued**, but **testing continues underground**
- 1977** Under anti-colonialist pressure, **France grants French Polynesia further internal autonomy**
- 1966** The **first overwater bungalows debut on Raiatea**, a luxury design which will be copied worldwide
- 1984** France grants '**full internal autonomy**' to the islands and renames it an '**Overseas Territory**'. The same year: The revisionist movie *The Bounty* is released, starring Mel Gibson & Anthony Hopkins
- 1985** French agents bomb Greenpeace's *Rainbow Warrior* before a scheduled protest sail to the Tuamotus.
- 1992** **France** (under Mitterand) **suspends nuclear testing**.
- 1995** **France** (under Chirac) **resumes underground testing**. Riots break out in Papeete.
- 1996** **France closes nuclear testing facilities in the Tuamotus** after 33 years.
- 2003** The islands are declared an '**Overseas Collectivity**' with additional autonomy granted
- 2004** French Polynesia is given a '**special designation**' of "**Overseas Country**' to denote its **high degree of autonomy**. However, France maintains control over justice, security, public order, currency, defense, & foreign policy, but (unlike New Caledonia) there is **no established right to declare independence**.
- 2017** **Declassified documents indicate 'gross underestimation' of nuclear fallout health hazards** by French govt.