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Culture and Heritage Department (SCP)

Sources: SCP.

“Tumu-Ra’i-Fēnūa – Taputapuātea”, the Polynesian original foundation as Outstanding Universal Value

On 23 June 2015, in Paris, French Polynesia will present to the *Comité des Biens Français* (French Committee for the Protection of Culture and Heritage), the logic and progress of the examination of the application in order to defend the candidacy of the “Cultural Landscape” called Taputapuātea for inscription on Unesco World Heritage List. If this step is completed without any problem, the dossier shall then be submitted by France to Unesco by January 2016. This is a true challenge for the enhancement of Polynesian culture that intensively mobilises all the French Polynesian stakeholders concerned in order to make this major project a success. This would then mark the history of our *fenua* (country) as this would be our first Unesco World Heritage site.

Many people have mobilised themselves since 2005 for this federating project that covers more than 2,500 hectares of the Taputapuātea Cultural Landscape. The objectives of this candidacy are numerous:

- Reveal the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) represented by the Taputapuātea “Cultural Landscape”, which, in the mythical times, gave birth to the immense, vast, oceanic and terrestrial “Mā'ohi Civilizing Space” with its boundaries always pushed back beyond the Great Mythical Ocean, at the same time unique and original;
- Protect its integrity and authenticity, and enhance the value of that exceptional natural, social, worship and cultural space;
- Federate local communities but also all those descending from those ancient lineage engendered by that space (the Great Family of the Great Ocean of Hīvā) who, regularly, come back to glorify, honour and feed on the *mana* of that Mythical-Mother;
- And, lastly, pass such heritage down to the future generations.

The expectations are heightened by the fact that the Unesco label, beyond the international recognition it implies, would make it possible to sustainably manage the site, to raise even more the awareness of the local community regarding its history and to significantly increase the number of its visitors.

«Tumu-Ra'i-Fēnūa – Taputapuātea», a wide spiritual, social and cultural space

More than a space made of remains and memories, that “landscape” actually comprises a dramatic continuum*:

- the worship, social, cultural and archaeological complex, called Te-Pō (the origins / the deep), which actually consists of a set of structures such as the *marae*, platforms, and natural elements such as springs, ridge point, rocks, essences, on a headland called Mata-hira-i-te-ra'i overlooking the lagoon;
- Toa-Hīvā Bay in 'Ōpoa and Toa-Tapu Bay in Hotopu'u;
- the lagoon facing the complex, including the *motu* (islet) Atāra;
- Te Ava Mō'a pass, opening onto the ocean, and a 300m-wide ocean strip beyond the fringing reef;
- lastly, at the back of the complex, stretching inland, the 'Ōpoa and Hotopu'u valleys that share a very steep ridge leading to the iconic peaks of the “Cultural Landscape” - Tea'etapu and 'Oro-fātiu, 772 and 824 metres high, respectively.

Te-pō – commonly known as Taputapuātea today – is a highly sacred ceremonial site. It is both a place of worship, dedicated in its last worship era to the god of alliance and peace 'Oro, but also a place of power, strategic negotiations and alliances. The archaeological area consists of 8 principal structures, among which:

- the eponymous *tahua-marae*, the largest one, dedicated to socio-political cut-and-thrust and spiritual and worship rituals;
- *marae* Hauviri, *papa* (foundation) of the elders, well-known container of the famous foundation stone of all *marae* and on which the great chiefs and supreme chiefs were enthroned;

- *marae* 'Ōpū-Teina dedicated to the younger lineages;
- *marae* Tau'aitū located on the land Hititai dedicated to the *Mythical Illuminated*;
- *marae* of Hiro-ari'i, a semi god and famous navigator on the Great Ocean of Hivā;
- several basalt-paved platforms, one of which was dedicated to archery (archers' platform);
- many wooden constructions built to preserve objects, relics and sacred attributes (*Fare Iamanaha*), those for worship purposes (*Fare Atua* and *Fare Tūpāpa'u*), outrigger canoe shelters (*Fare va'a*), whose existence is attested by testimonies of oral tradition and written texts and ancient iconography, would in the past complement that ceremonial complex.

A monumental site with dazzling beauty

At the back of the site, the slope gets rapidly steep towards the mountain ridge. Prospecting campaigns in 'Ōpoa valley in 1995, 2008 and mainly 2013-2014, including Hotopu'u valley, identified about 350 archaeological remains, *tahua* and platforms with upright stones; substructures including the residence of a famous chief (Pani); remains of houses; traces of irrigation and cultivated terraces, and grotto containing *ari'i* graves.

Facing the site, *motu* Atāra, bordering the coral barrier and also included in the "Cultural Landscape", through the shape of the clouds above it, would herald various omens. Lastly, beyond the pass and still within the landscape perimeter, tradition reports that a *marae* is immersed at an approximate depth of 80 m. It is one of the abodes of the Great Mythical *mā'ohi* Octopus Tumu-Ra'i-Fēnūa, the expansion and peace generating matrix.

A report drawn up by experts appointed by the *Comité des Biens français* (French Committee for the Protection of Culture and Heritage)

In her son introduction to the exhibition "Tumu-Ra'i-Fēnūa", which was held on the Taputapuātea site from 20 to 26 April 2015, Hiriata Millaud, an ethnolinguist and cultural attaché for GIE Tahiti Tourisme, qualifies the latter as "Myth-Site", where lies "the true story of a people and its civilization, the foundations of its reflection, the principles of its religion, the values of its laws, its rites, its attributes, its prestige, its knowledge, its expertise, its technical skills, its evolution", turning Taputapuātea into a "unique cultural landscape", because it corresponds to human, cultural and primordial values supported nevertheless by a unique social organisation, that of the Polynesian society", as indicated in the report of Wenda Diebolt and Grégory Quenet, the two experts appointed as rapporteurs for the Taputapuātea application by the *Comité des Biens Français*. And they go on: "Taputapuātea is considered by most authors as the most important and powerful among all *marae*, and the only international one that served as a matrix for other *marae* that were then duplicated across the Great Polynesian Ocean". All this determining specificities resulted in the following conclusion of the experts: "Taputapuātea deserves to be on the World Heritage List, both for its material features as "associative cultural landscape" and as a remarkable testimony of a still living ancient Polynesian civilization. Beyond the regional aspect, we consider that it holds values that are common to mankind, in the close relationship between Nature and Man, which it illustrates, in the universal message of peace keeping between the peoples which it signifies, and more widely as the vessel of an actual civilization which

Unesco should pride itself to acknowledge. The site would then bridge an important gap in the World Heritage List. We must not close our eyes to the fact that such historic opportunity relies on a challenge, involving the capability of the project leaders to finalize the application dossier under very tight deadlines and to make the whole local community back up the project. To us, the strong commitment of the stakeholders suggests that such challenge can be met.”

Next step: Paris

A challenge which French Polynesia fervently wishes to take up. A delegation led by the French Polynesian President Mr. Edouard Fritch, is getting ready to fly to Paris in order to defend the Taputapuātea application before the *Comité des Biens Français* during a final presentation on 23 June, that will enable institutional representatives and a technical team ** to demonstrate, beyond the technical quality of the application, the strong commitment from the local communities to sustainably manage that “Cultural Landscape”. The presentation of the application is usually carried out over three sessions. Because of the remoteness of French Polynesia and the costs incurred, the *Comité* has resolved to have the presentation made in one single session. After a marathon, it is therefore a sprint that now lies ahead of the French Polynesian institutional and cultural stakeholders. The finish line? Make France support, in January 2016, the application of “Taputapuātea Cultural Landscape” before Unesco.

But we are not there yet. If the scenario actually turns out as expected, we will need to welcome on the site (September 2016) experts mandated by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) who, after assessment and control, will give their assessment report to the World Heritage Committee, along with a proposal for a decision. Then the application will be examined by the World Heritage Committee, an institution consisting of 21 States that are parties to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. It would then only be in July 2017 that the World Heritage Committee would make its final decision and that we would then now whether the “associative Cultural landscape” — bearing the primordial and mythical name of Tumu-Ra’i-Fēnūa, called Taputapuātea for the widest communication and appropriation by everyone, will be on the prestigious Unesco World Heritage List.

What is the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)?

The Outstanding Universal Value is the feature that justifies the inscription of a property on the Unesco World Heritage List. It may be based on science, heritage, spirituality or history... But it is also the value it represents for its communities, before being important to the rest of the world. The World Heritage List currently has 1,007 properties inscribed. What do these so different properties (types, places, size, age) have in common? The “Outstanding Universal Value” is the criteria that brings such properties together, as testimonies of the diversity and the richness of mankind and natural environments”.

In 2015, the World Heritage List has therefore 1,007 properties that, according to the World Heritage Committee have an Outstanding Universal Value as cultural or natural heritage. The list includes 779 cultural properties, 197 natural properties and 31 mixed properties, distributed over 161 States Parties.

Oceania has 28 sites inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage List: 19 in Australia, 1 in Fiji, 1 in the Marshall islands, 1 in Palau, 1 in Vanuatu, 3 in New Zealand, 1 in New Caledonia, 1 in Hawaii. 38 French sites belong to the list including 2 overseas properties (the lagoons and reefs of New Caledonia and the Pitons, cirques and remparts of La Réunion), both falling in the natural sites category. Up to this day, no cultural site in a French overseas territory has been listed ...

+ d'infos : <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>

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And the selected name is... "Taputapuātea"

"Te puna ō te hiro'a mā'ohi", "te puna ora", "te puna mā'ohi nō te Mōana-nui-ō-Hīvā", or "sacred landscape", "mā'ohi place of recollection"... Dozens of proposals were made in order to best describe such "Cultural Landscape". But the official name under the application to the Unesco World Heritage List is simply "Taputapuātea". That choice is justified on the one hand by the common, shared, generalised and popular use of that name, and, on the other hand, by the strong resonance of the symbolic and semiotic wave it spreads across the whole Polynesian oceanic world of Oceania, says Hiriata Millaud in her ethnolinguistic report. It is the name which, according to us, is most likely to gain the approval of a very large majority of people from all communities of French Polynesia: it is short; it refers to a famous ceremonial and worship place recognised by all in French Polynesia; it has a strong symbolic and cultural resonance across the whole Polynesian triangle; it has an iconic shine over all Oceania; it also has a significant international weight in the promotion of cultural and spiritual tourism of the destination Tahiti and her islands".

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«Tumu-Ra'i-Fēnūa», the primordial matrix, the Mother-Myth

By Hiriata Millaud, ethnolinguist

"Its name is Tumu-Ra'i-Fēnūa; within it lies the power of creation, the might of the divine, the essence that generates life and death. It is the primordial and original (*tumu*) Myth that governs the existential cause of any thing and of any being. (...) It is the Myth of the divine (*ra'i*) that tells the birth of the "sacred race of immortals still living" (...) It performs the ritual (*tapu*) that makes any thing and any being intangible, inviolable, and inalienable. It engenders the life-saving and merciless gods (*atua*), endowed with immeasurable powers. It is the Myth that generates and re-generates all the beings and all the things that make the perpetually moving world (*he'e-nū/fēnūa*) of *mā'ohi* women and men. It sets out and describes the one thousand and one routes of oceanic expansion (*he'e*). In the hearts and minds, it instils the primordial values of life (*ora*), humility (*ri'i*), respect (*tura*), love (*ipo*), sharing (*tau'a*), goodness (*maita'i*), peace (*hau*) and joy (*'oa'oa*). (...)

Within it, the silent shadow is watchful; within it, the almighty light rests; within it, the primordial vital essence lies. Such is the founding and tri-dimensional "Mother-Myth": it is intangible and inviolable, even though it has a material, sensitive and understandable representation in a unique entity that is the "Myth-Site" or "Vā-Na'ana'a-rahu-ao", the "Cultural Landscape" or "Vā-Pariāfēnūa", the "Civilising Space" or "Vā-Mō'a" whose

sanctified heart (*tapu*) consecrates and civilises (*tapu*) in the far reaches (*ā-tea*) of the Great Ocean of Hīvā.”

* *Continuum*: set of elements laid out in such a manner that it is possible to continuously go from one onto the other

** ***Institutional representatives***: Mr. Édouard Fritch, President of French Polynesia; Mr. Heremoana Maamaatuaiahutapu, Minister responsible for Culture; Mr. Teddy Tehei, Head of the Culture and Heritage Department; Mr. Thomas Moutame, Mayor of the municipality of Taputapuātea; Mr. Richard Tuheiava, Project Leader; Mr. Guy Tauatiti, President of the 'Association Na Papa e Va'u responsible for the Management Committee; Mr. Lionel Beffre, High-Commissioner of the Republic of French Polynesia.

Technical team: Officers of the Culture and Heritage Department (value enhancement and spread, programming and coordination, archaeology and history, oral traditions, documentation, development and communication), cultural attaché Tahiti Tourisme, consultant responsible for the preparation of the file (GIE Océanide).

*** For further information: <http://portal.unesco.org>