

Anuta

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Anuta

ETHNONYMS: Cherry Island, Nukumairaro

Orientation

Identification. Anuta is a volcanic island in the eastern Solomon Islands. Its inhabitants are physically, linguistically, and culturally Polynesian. The island's European name was bestowed in honor of a Mr. Cherry, who first sighted it from the HMS *Pandora* in 1791 while searching for the *Bounty* mutineers. Nukumairaro, meaning "land from below," is said to be an archaic name deriving from the fact that Anuta is "below" (i.e., to the east of) Tikopia, its nearest populated neighbor, about 112 kilometers distant.

Location. Anuta is at approximately 169° 50' E and 11°40' S. It is a small volcanic island, roughly circular, and three-quarters of a kilometer in diameter. Its southern portion is coastal flat; the northern part is covered by a hill, rising to a maximum altitude of 78 meters. The climate is tropical and may be divided into two seasons. The trade-wind season (*tonga*) lasts from mid-April to mid-October. It is relatively cool and dry, although the sky is frequently overcast, and a brisk wind blows constantly from the southeast quadrant. Weather during the monsoon season, or *raki*—mid-October through mid-April—is more variable. Periods of hot sun alternate with drenching rains. Winds may be calm for days at a time, but during this season Anutans also experience occasional devastating hurricanes.

Demography. The population at the time of European contact is unknown. In the early twentieth century, the population numbered between 100 and 150 people. In March 1972 there were 162 people living on Anuta and 42 Anutans residing overseas, mostly on Tikopia and in the central Solomons. People return and depart with every ship. However, if one takes the resident population to be 160, population density is on the order of 1,000 persons per square kilometer, making Anuta one of the most densely populated islands in the Pacific. Between 1972 and 1988, the resident population rose to more than 200 people, with another 50 or so living overseas.

linguistic Affiliation. Linguists have classified Anutan (Anu) as a Nuclear Polynesian language, within the vast group of Austronesian languages. However, in contrast with the languages of other western Polynesian "outliers," Anu includes many words of Tongic origin. The extent to which this is due to direct Tongan contact as opposed to indirect borrowing via East Uvea is a matter for debate.

History and Cultural Relations

Archaeological remains show Anuta to have been inhabited by humans for almost 3,000 years. According to Anutan oral traditions, however, the island's present population arrived much more recently—about 300 to 350 years ago—from Tonga and Uvea (most likely East Uvea or Wallis Island). The first chief was the Tongan leader known as Pu Kaurave. The Uvean leader was named Pu Taupare. When Pu Kaurave's

son, Ruokimata, left no heir, the chieftainship passed to the Uvean line. Later there were immigrants from Samoa and Rotuma, as well as extensive contact and exchange with Tikopia. Visitors from Tuvalu (formerly the Ellice Islands) and Taumako in the Santa Cruz group made little lasting impact.

Settlements

Dwellings are distributed in a somewhat ragged line along the island's southern shoreline. The closest the Anutans have to a term for "village" is *noporanga*, which literally means "dwelling place." Villages are not demarcated by any physical boundary. Anuta has two distinct naming systems for the Villages. Initially there were two *noporanga*: Mua or "Front" to the east, and Muri or "Back" to the west. The first church house was constructed to the west of Muri, and a number of houses were subsequently erected near the church. These houses took on the church's name, St. John, and came to be designated as a third *noporanga*. According to the newer System, Mua and Muri are grouped together under the name Rotoapi and contrasted with houses to the west, known as Vatia in this system. Houses have a rectangular floor plan and are built low to the ground, with steep roofs. Frames are made from coconut and other durable woods; the walls are thatched with sago leaves and roofs with coconut fronds. Doors are less than a meter high, so that entry and exit is by crawling on hands and knees.

Economy

Subsistence and Commercial Activities. The economy emphasizes subsistence agriculture and fishing. Major crops include manioc, *Colocasia* and *Cyrtosperma* taro, coconuts, papayas, bananas, and tobacco. Less important foodstuffs include sweet potatoes, yams, pumpkins, watermelons, and a host of minor crops. Tools include digging sticks, poles for harvesting fruits and nuts, and (in postcontact times) steel bush knives. Anuta's intensive agricultural system involves crop rotation, terracing, weeding, and mulching. Fishing is done on the fringing reef, with nets and spears, and on the open sea, mostly with hook and line. Ocean fishing is usually done from a canoe. Techniques include bottom fishing over an inshore reef, trolling, and night fishing for flying fish with a light and long-handled net. Shellfish are sometimes collected and birds hunted. Chickens are raised and occasionally eaten.

Industrial Arts. Anuta has no full-time specialists. However, some specially skilled people devote inordinate amounts of time to canoe building, house construction, carving bowls, bailers, and paddles, and plaiting mats and baskets.

Trade. As of the early 1970s, there was no trade store on the island. Therefore, trade was confined to passing ships or was conducted by relatives visiting other islands—especially Guadalcanal, site of the Solomon Islands' capital. In addition, regular exchange with Tikopia—the nearest populated island—has occurred for many generations.

Division of Labor. Men do most of the fishing, including all fishing on the open sea. Both men and women garden and cook food, with women putting somewhat more time than men into these activities. Carpentry is performed by men. Mat making is almost entirely a female occupation.

Land Tenure. Land is owned and worked collectively by the elementary domestic unit, known as the *patongia*. This consists ideally of a group of brothers, their wives and Children, their sons' wives and children, and assorted adoptees. If members of a domestic unit cannot get along, they divide their land and become separate units. Most crops are under the jurisdiction of the domestic unit on whose land they are growing. A few, like coconuts and papayas, however, are regarded as collective property of the community regardless of where they are found. In addition, chiefs may overrule Domestic units' decisions regarding what, when, where, and how to plant, cultivate, and harvest.

Kinship

Kin Groups and Descent. Anuta has three types of corporate groups. In increasing order of inclusiveness, these are the patongia, *kainanga* (clans), and *kanopenua*. Members are recruited to these units on the basis of patrilineal descent and *aropa*, or positive feelings as expressed through economic support and cooperation. The patongia is the elementary Domestic unit (see above). There are four *kainanga*, each of which consists of a group of patongia that trace descent through a line of males to a founder about nine generations ago. The *kanopenua* is the entire population, including all persons born to Anutan fathers and any long-term visitors who have been incorporated into one of the patongia. The term *pare*, or "house," may denote a patongia or a group of related patongia. *Kano a paito* can be synonymous with *pare*, or it may refer to a "kindred." If unqualified, *kano a paito* refers to paternal kin; the maternal kindred is *te kano a paito i te paai o te papine*, "the kindred on the woman's side."

Kinship Terminology. Anutans use an Iroquois-type System of nomenclature for kin in the parent's generation. Hawaiian-type cousin terms are used. The system emphasizes generation rather than relative seniority.

Marriage and Family

Marriage. Genealogies show a few particularly important chiefs to have practiced polygyny. Otherwise, monogamy has been the universal practice. Divorce has always been a rare occurrence, and since missionization it has been entirely prohibited. One must marry outside of one's domestic unit, and sibling marriage is forbidden. Otherwise, there are no absolute prohibitions. Normally one marries cousins, and the more distant the connection, the more appropriate the Marriage. A married woman joins her husband's domestic unit and moves into his household.

Domestic Unit. The domestic unit, or patongia, approximates a patrilateral extended family. A married couple and their children may live in a separate house, but members of the same patongia share ownership of garden land, crops, buildings, canoes, and all other forms of property. They harvest and prepare food collectively, and normally they eat Together as a single unit.

Inheritance. Since property is owned collectively by the domestic unit, how to dispose of it upon a person's death is rarely an issue. Occasionally, garden land is transferred upon marriage from a woman's natal unit to that of her husband; and at the time of a funeral, it may be transferred to the unit of the deceased's mother's brother. Should a patongia *die* out, its property may pass to units of the leader's close collateral kin or units with whom the extinct patongia has been in a close cooperative relationship.

Socialization. Children are cared for by all adults and older siblings in the domestic unit. In addition, adoption is common and children spend much of their time with Members of their adoptive patongia. Training emphasizes respect for rank and for property belonging to other domestic units. Children may be scolded and restrained from getting into trouble, but physical punishment is unusual and rarely severe.

Sociopolitical Organization

Social Organization. Anuta is a small-scale Polynesian chiefdom. Anutan society is hierarchically organized on the basis of age, sex, and proximity to a chiefly line. In addition, Anutans admire strength, intelligence, and skill at navigation, storytelling, carpentry, gardening, and other crafts. This provides a degree of social mobility in a system that otherwise seems rigidly stratified on the basis of genealogical criteria.

Political Organization. Anuta is divided into four ranked "clans" (*kainanga*). The two senior *kainanga* are led by chiefs (*ariki*); the remaining two are not. The senior chief is known as Te Ariki i Mua ("The Chief in Front") or Tui Anuta; the junior chief is Te Ariki i Muri ("The Chief in Back") or Tui Kainanga. The two *ariki* trace their ancestry to a pair of chiefly brothers who lived about nine generations ago. A chief is normally succeeded by his eldest son. In the 1890s, Anuta was incorporated into the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. In 1978 the Solomon Islands became an independent nation and claimed sovereignty over Anuta as well as neighboring islands. The national and provincial governments provide some shipping, medical care, and schooling. Anutans, however, continue to assert local autonomy by refusing to pay taxes, run for government office, or vote in elections.

Social Control. Under normal circumstances, social control is maintained by the high value placed on traditional custom and an appreciation of the importance of such custom. In addition, it is encouraged by a belief that disrespect or disobedience directed toward a person of superior rank is Certain to produce disease or other misfortune. In extreme cases, a chief has the authority to have an offender flogged or exiled to the ocean. At present, government or church authorities might also be called upon to intercede. This action is Unusual, however, because it compromises local sovereignty.

Conflict. Anutans relate several tales of visitors from other islands being killed or driven off. Internal conflicts have arisen over control of the chieftainship and access to garden land during times of famine. In recent years, external political and economic pressures have led to development of factions and ongoing conflict.

Religion and Expressive Culture

Religious Beliefs. Precontact Anutan religion involved a form of ancestor worship. For most of this century, the island has been Christian. Since about 1916, the entire population has been affiliated with the Anglican church. Still, belief in the power of ancestral spirits and the presence of malicious ghosts continues. The major pagan deities were ghosts of deceased chiefs. Other ancestors were sometimes asked for help with household problems. Spirits who had never been human (*tupua penua*, or "spirits of the land") were powerful and Dangerous, although at times they might help people who had shown them respect. Ordinary ghosts (*atua*), on the other hand, were normally malicious and rarely helped the living. Anutans continue to believe in pagan spirits. By far the most important spiritual being, however, is now the Christian God, followed by assorted saints.

Religious Practitioners. Traditionally, chiefs also were high priests. Assisted by "ritual elders" known as *mataapure*, they performed sacred *kava* rites to keep the gods favorably disposed. Spirit mediums, called *vakaatua*, facilitated two-way communication with the spirit world. In contrast with chiefly status, there were no genealogical requirements for spirit mediumship. Since missionization, the community's Religious leader has been a trained catechist. This person is appointed by the chiefs in consultation with a council of advisors (*nga maru*), on the basis of character, oratorical skill, and scriptural knowledge. The catechist, in turn, appoints a number of assistants to aid in performance of services. The Companions of the Brotherhood of Melanesia and the Mothers' Union are voluntary associations established to assist in the conduct of church business.

Ceremonies. Life-crisis rites surrounding birth, marriage, and death continue to be practiced. Other major ceremonies are performed when a young child eats his first fish and when he is taken to the hilltop for the first time. These ceremonies occur when the child is about a year of age. Sometime prior to adolescence, a major ceremony is held to honor the first boy and the first girl in each "house." Male initiation, at the time of puberty, involves ritual circumcision. Christian celebrations of Christmas, Easter, a number of saints' days, baptism, and confirmation have been added to the ceremonial calendar.

Arts. Visual arts include tattooing and designs carved into canoes, clubs, and dance paddles. Performing arts include storytelling, song, and dance. Traditionally, the only musical instruments were sounding boards and human voice and body. Today, these are augmented by a few guitars and ukuleles.

Medicine. Most illnesses are attributed to the activity of spirits or taboo violation. Effective treatment requires confession of the misdeed and forgiveness by the offended party, accompanied by prayer. Some Western medicines are available via the Solomon Islands government.

Death and Afterlife. When someone dies, the population divides into several groups to wail funeral dirges (*puatanga*) in the house of the deceased. This is followed by an exchange of goods between the deceased's closest kin and every other household. A funeral service is held in church, and the corpse is buried by the deceased's mother's brother or members of the mother's brother's "house." Anutans take Christian ideas about the afterlife quite literally, believing that one goes to Hell or Heaven depending on one's moral virtue while alive.

See also [Santa Cruz](#), [Tikopia](#), [Tonga](#), [Tuvalu](#), [Uvea](#)

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