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## Then Dig

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Spatial Dynamics in Oceania

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# April 2014 on Then Dig: Spatial Dynamics in Oceania



A few months ago, I had the great pleasure of attending a conference on the archaeology of “spatial dynamics in Oceania” at the Institut Nationale d’Histoire de l’Art in Paris, France. The conference was organised by Frédérique Valentin and Guillaume Molle on behalf of the ArScAn Équipe ethnologie préhistorique, and featured an international group of archaeologists from North America, Europe, and the Pacific Islands.

Presentations at the conference were all based in the region comprising Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, and ranged across a number of topics, including the circulation of stone tools, the evolution of agricultural techniques, the construction and use of monumental architecture, symbolic beliefs embedded in island landscapes, and more.

Archaeologists who work in the Pacific are often surprised that more people aren’t interested in what is happening in the region. Many people can immediately think of the pyramids of Egypt and Mexico, pueblos in the American Southwest, and ancient ruins in Italy and Greece as places where archaeology “happens”. When it comes to the Pacific, though, most people simply imagine pleasant climate, pristine beaches, and grass skirt-wearing islanders. (Rapa Nui, or Easter Island, is perhaps the one exception here, though even that island is mostly thought of in terms of its iconic moai, which are only a small part of the story).

What isn't discussed is the fact that the dunes on those beautiful beaches often hold great archaeological treasures, especially for understanding the early settlements on many islands! This is not simply an academic issue, as people are much happier to bulldoze the dunes away in order to build yet another resort hotel when they don't realize (or don't want to acknowledge) that they are wiping away a major part of island history by doing so. Of course, many Pacific Islanders as well as archaeologists (in many cases the two labels can apply to the same person) are quite vocal in noting their awareness of this.

This month, we will present a selection of the many excellent papers that were presented in Paris earlier in 2014 as short-form posts to Then Dig. There were, of course, many more presentations at the conference that for one reason or another won't make it onto this blog, but interested readers should look for a future edition of the *Séances de la Société Préhistorique Française* (link to the website [here](#)), which is an open-access publication that will feature papers in both English and French from the conference.

It is our hope that these posts on Then Dig will help to show how dynamic the work of archaeologists in Oceania is, both in terms of the interesting aspects of the past that we uncover, and our ongoing commitment to working closely with living Pacific Islanders.

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(Guest Editor for Then Dig, April 2014)

