KNIFE IN THE WALL: THREE EXAMPLES OF A RARE TOOL-FORM ON NUKU HIVA, MARQUESAS ISLANDS, EASTERN POLYNESIA•

KÉS A FALBAN: HÁROM RITKA ESZKÖZFORMA NUKU HIVÁN (MARQUESAS-SZIGETEK, KELET-POLINÉZIA)

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Abstract

Between 1994 and 1998 Judit Antoni worked on Nuku Hiva, under the direction of Pierre Ottino, archaeologist of the O.R.S.T.O.M. (Institut francais de recherche scientifique pour le développement en coopération). It was in 1998, that the permanent archaeological technician of the staff, the Marquesan Alfred Falchetto discovered a crescent-shape basalt tool, hidden in the wall of one of the structures on Kamuihei site, near Hatiheu village. Later on J. Antoni found another tool of the same shape (but made of different raw material) in the Bishop's Office collection at Taiohae and in 2002 she had the chance to take photos and drawings from a third one.

Because of the lack of any possibility to investigate these tools in-depth (for example analysis of the raw material's provenance) the current communication is intended only to make them acquainted for the public and to suggest opinions on the method of their use.

Kivonat

1994 és 1998 között Antoni Judit Nuku Hiván dolgozott, Pierre Ottino, az O.R.S.T.O.M. régészének irányításával. 1998-ban a csapat állandó tagja, a marquesasi Alfred Falchetto felfedezett egy félhold alakú bazalt-eszközt, a Hatiheu faluhoz közeli Kamuihei közösségi központ egyik épületének alapját képező nagy bazalttömbök közé rejtve. Később Antoni J. talált egy hasonló alakú, de más, helyidegen nyersanyagú eszközt a Püspöki Hivatal gyűjteményében, Taiohae-ban, majd 2002-ben sikerült lefényképeznie és lerajzolnia egy harmadikat is. Mivel nincs semmiféle lehetőségünk e tárgyak alaposabb vizsgálatára (pl. a nyersanyag származási helye vagy a használati nyomok szempontjából), jelen közlemény pusztán arra szolgál, hogy megismertesse az eszközöket és ötletet adjon a használatukkal kapcsolatban.

KEYWORDS: BASALT, POLYNESIA, NUKU HIVA, TAIOHAE

KULCSSZAVAK: BAZALT, POLINÉZIA, NUKU HIVA, TAIOHAE

Introduction

From November 1994 we participated in the archaeological and ethnographical researches led by Pierre Ottino on the Marquesas Islands, mainly at Nuku Hiva, the largest island of the archipelago.

The aim of the researches among others was to study the sites selected as scene for the Festival of Arts of the Marquesas Islands on the turn of the year 1999/2000.

One of these sites is the architectural complex near the actual village of Hatiheu: the *me'ae* (ceremonial center, sacred site) of Te I'ipoka, the tohua (communal site for public festivities) Kamuihei and the *tohua* Tahakia, with their *paepae* (habitation site, house platform) all around.

Hatiheu is situated on the northern coast of Nuku Hiva, in a large bay. The valley, which is opened to the sea is about 2.3 km long and 4 km wide, is emerging in the direction to the mountains (**Fig. 1.**).

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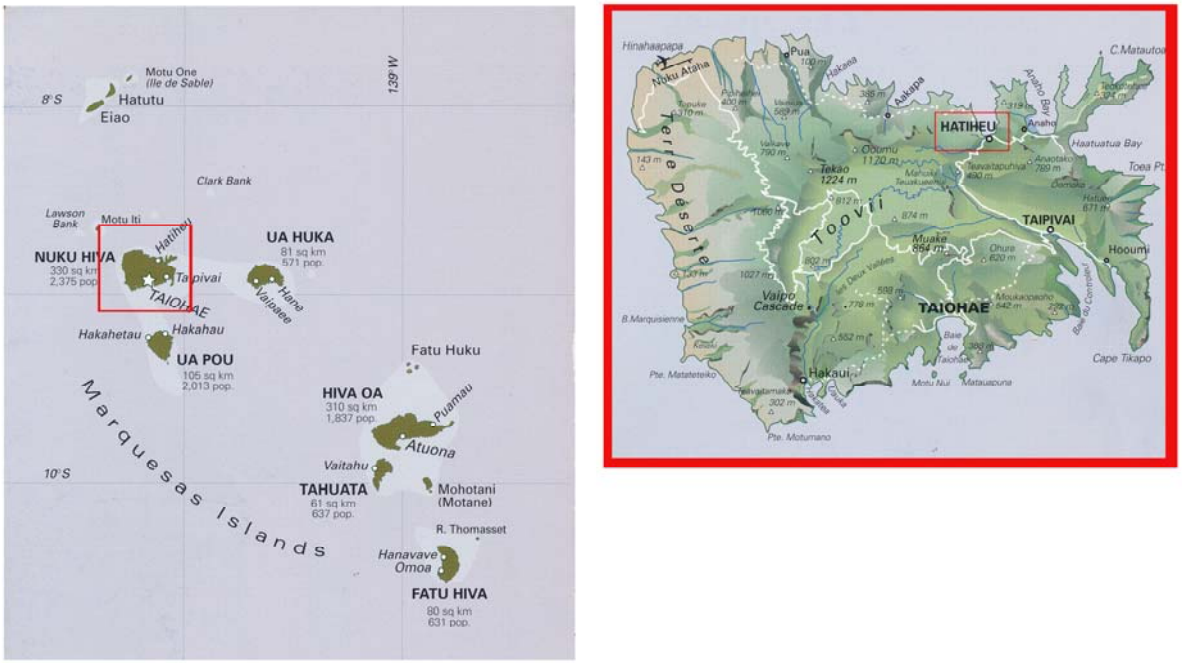

Fig. 1.: Map of the Marquesas Islands and Nuku Hiva Island, respectively (after Chester, et al. 1998)

1. ábra: A Marquesas-szigetek és Nuku Hiva térképe (Chester et al. 1998 nyomán)

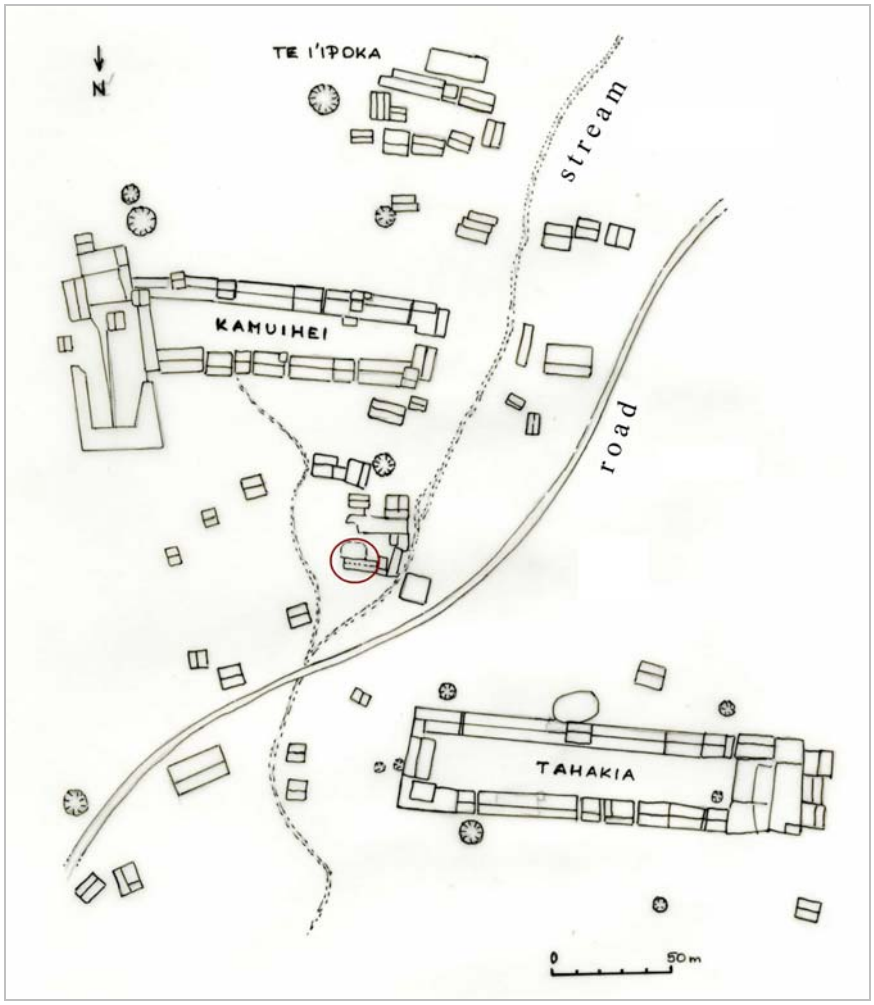

Fig. 2.: Locality of the knife (1) shown on Fig. 3. (after Ottino 2001)

2. ábra: A 3. ábrán látható kés lelőhelye (Ottino 2001 nyomán)

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The western part of this valley was inhabited formerly by the tribe Puhioho, known after their reputed warriors. Their territory (about 10 hectares) was important because of the protective role against the enemies arriving from the nearest villages (Aakapa on the west or Taipivai on the south).

In 1998, Pierre Ottino registered 189 structures in the complex (Ottino, 1998: 47–62): beside the parts of the *me'ae* and the two *tohua*, more than 80 *paepae*, some funerary structures, 8 *ua ma* (pits for fermented breadfruit) and many others (**Fig. 2.**).

The structure No. 110, between the *tohua* Kamuihei and Tahakia, is like a *paepae*, but after Ottino, it can be a part (stairs) – with other structures nearby – of a little *tohua*. (Ottino, 1998: 55)

On one of the great stone blocks in the wall there is a petroglyph (*mata tiki* = eyes of god) and an other block is a polishing stone with many hollows.

Discovery of the crescent-shape knife

In the north-east corner of the structure, in 1998, A. Falchetto discovered a crescent-shape tool, hidden between the great blocks of the wall.

It was nearly invisible, but in the moment, when he passed before the wall to see the petroglyph, suddenly something „strange" catched his attention in the slit, between two blocks.

The crescent-like object – a tanged blade – was made of a fine grained slate-grey material (basalt) with greenish-grey patina on its surface. It is 18.5 cm high, the width is 23.3 cm, the greatest thickness is 1.6 cm and it weights 410 g. It is very flat and retouched all around the rim. On the side „**A**" we can see three little spots where the tool was polished, and there are traces of wear on the rising lines (on the edges of the knapped parts) on each side, not only on the cutting edge but on the „handle", too, although here they are less intensive. The use wear traces are shining. (Crescent shape knife (1), **Fig. 3.**)

Analogies of the knife

A year later, in 1999 we had a chance to discover a similar object in the Bishop's Office collection at Taiohae ((Crescent shape knife (2), **Fig. 4.**). It is different from the first one: the shape is nearly the same, but the raw material is flint, not basalt. The tool has a yellowish-brown colour on the retouched surfaces, on the splits, the colour is like that the honey. Its length is 21.7 cm, the width is 17.8 cm and the greatest thickness is about 4-5 cm. We have no data about the weight: it must be about 5-600 g.

On the Marquesas Islands, this material is unknown, therefore we can suspect that it has arrived in the form of a block of flint with some european ship as ballast and it was thrown out in the Bay of Taiohae. It was a Marquesan master who formed a tool from the block seeing the good quality of the stone. On the „**A**" and „**B**" surfaces, in the middle, there is the rest of the original surface – the cortex – of the block, and the edges are retouched all around on each side.

The „handle" is wrapped around with a dark-brown coloured braided cord made of the fibres of a coconut shell. Under it, fixed with this cord, there are three, about 9-10 cm long yellowish braided and knotted cords, each ending in a loop – for hanging on something? – made of the same material. We have'nt any information where it was found, but surely on Nuku Hiva: it was given by someone from the village to the Bishop's Office.

The third object was found before 2002, by one of our Marquesan acquaintances. After his information, it was lying on the eastern seashore, in the Bay of Taiohae, near the Residence.

The tool is not so elegant in form like the first one and its surface is worn and eroded. The edges are damaged too, mainly because of the sea-currents. There are little fractures on it (some are relatively fresh) on each side and on the cutting edge (Crescent shape knife (3), **Fig. 5.**).

The raw material is a greyish basalt, it is 1.5 cm high, its width is 14.9 cm and it is 1.5-2.2 cm thick. The weight is 495 g. On each surface („**A**" + „**B**") there are some traces of wear (see **Fig. 5.**) but they are not so clear and not so well preserved because of abrasion in the sea.

Currently we have no possibility to investigate the raw material source of these objects, or to analyse the trace-wears on them, we only want to publish the pieces, in hope that someone will interested it and can make the necessary researches in the future.

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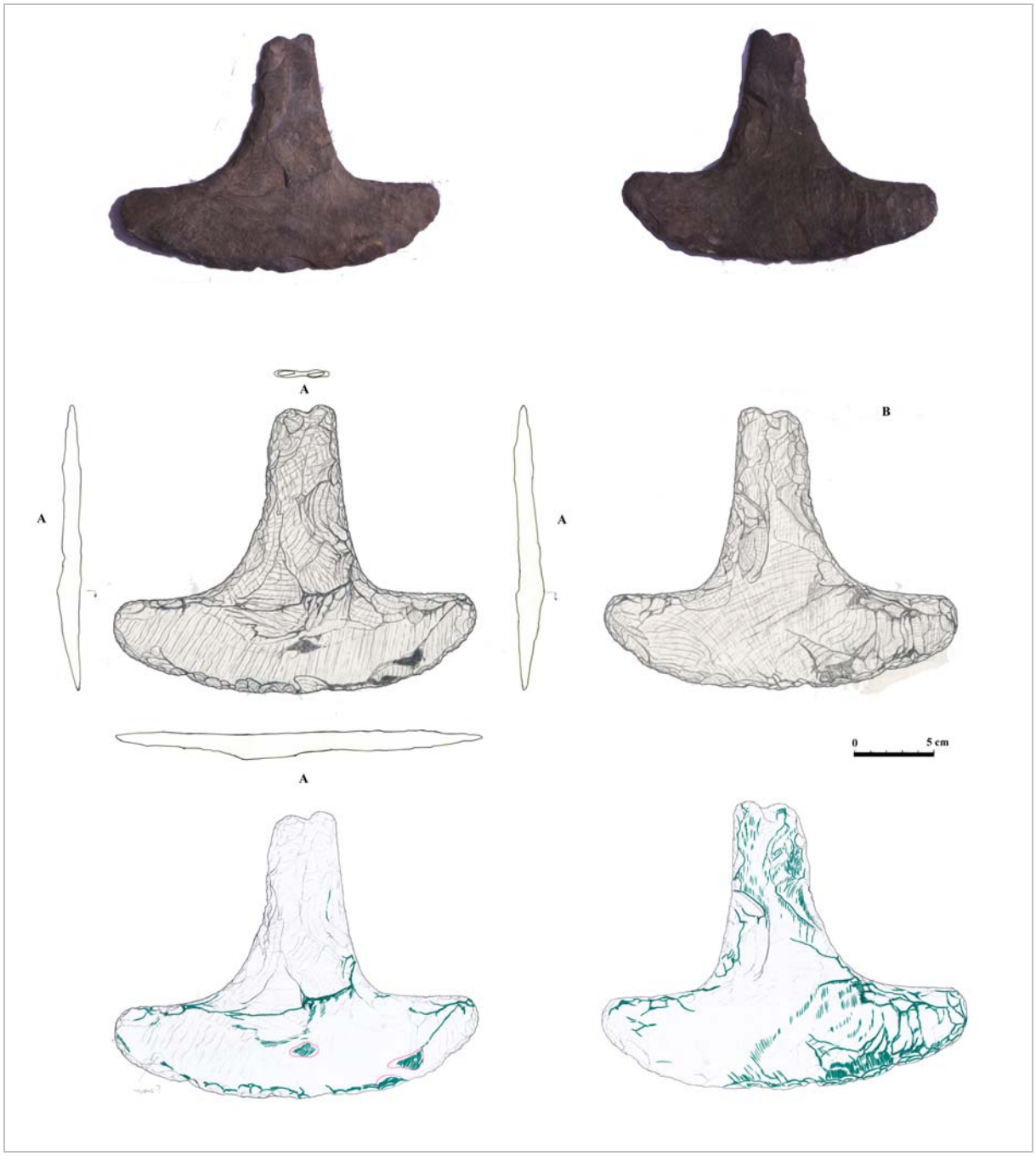

Fig. 3.: Crescent shape knife (1), Hatiheu, Kamuihei site, feature nr. 110. Top row: photo, central row: drawing with sections, bottom row: traces of utilisation (in green); marked pink, traces of polishing (by J. Antoni)

3. ábra: Félhold alakú kés. Lelőhely: Hatiheu, Kamuihei, 110 sz. objektum. Felső sor: az eszköz fotója, középen rajz a metszetekkel. Alsó sor: használati nyomok (zölddel), csiszolás nyomok (rózsaszínnel)

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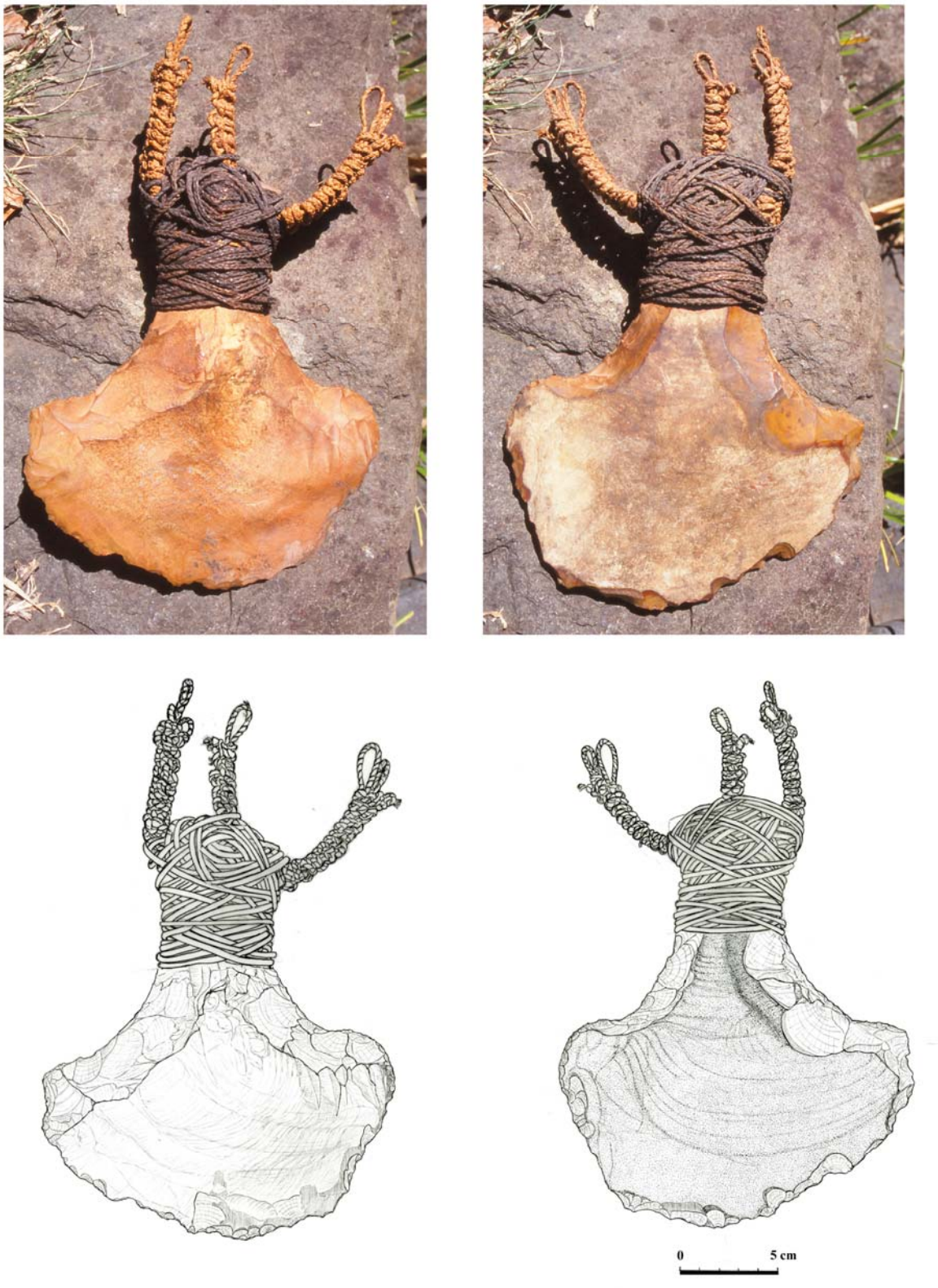

Fig. 4.: Crescent shape knife (2), Taiohae, Bishop's Office Collection. Top row: photo, bottom row: drawing (by J. Antoni))

4. ábra: Félhold alakú kés (2). Lelőhely: Taiohae, Püspöki Hivatal gyűjteménye. Felső sor: az eszköz fotója, Alsó sor: az eszköz rajza.

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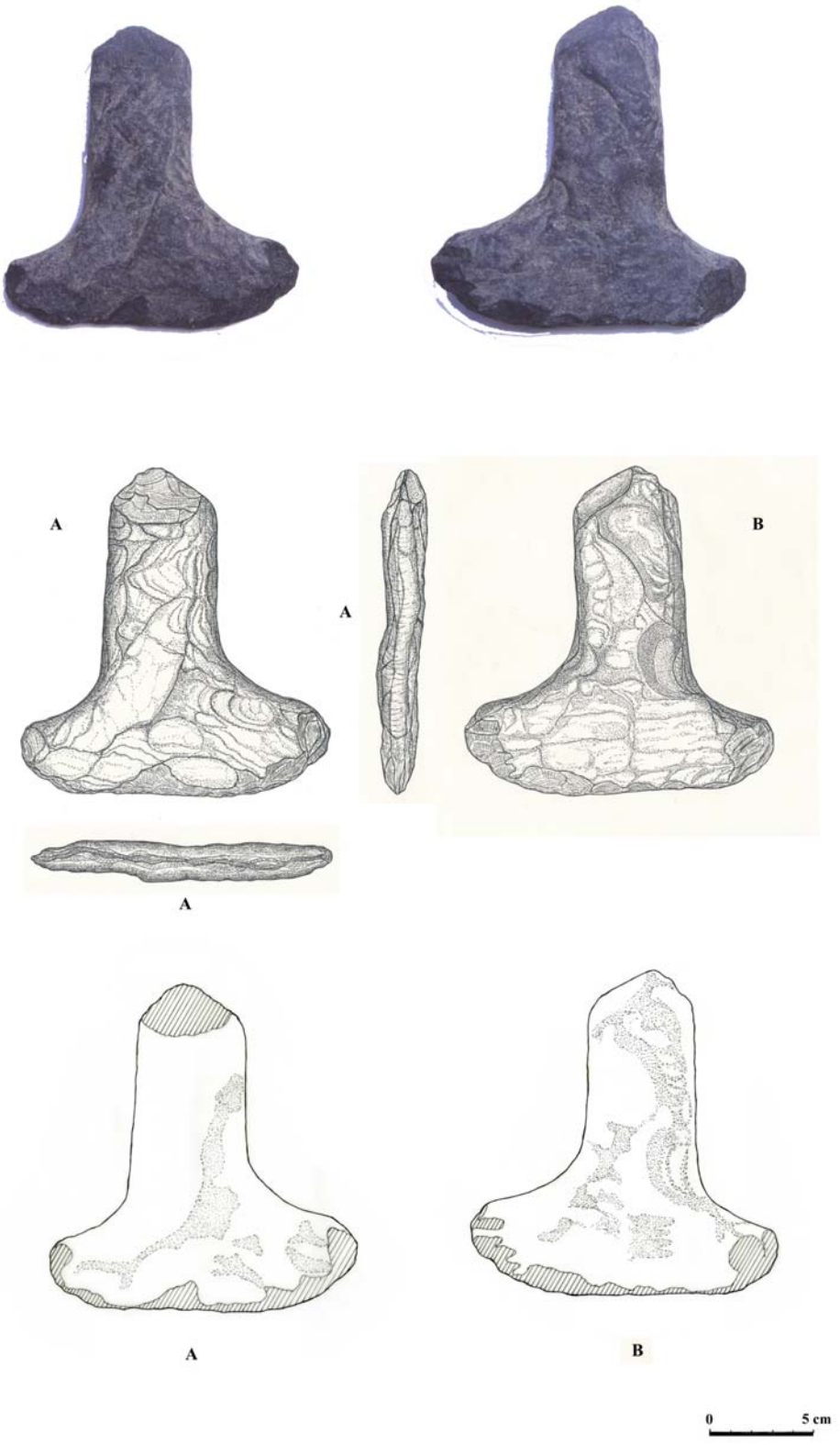

Fig. 5.: Crescent shape knife (3), Taiohae Bay. Top row: photo, central row: drawing with sections, bottom row: traces of utilisation and fresh injuries (by J. Antoni)

5. ábra: Félhold alakú kés (3). Lelőhely: Taiohae öböl. Felső sor: az eszköz fotója, középen rajz a metszetekkel. Alsó sor: használati nyomok és friss törések.

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Interpretation

We think that each tool is from the last 1-200 years, after the contact with European peoples: the raw material of the second points to this direction, too.

The shape – the tanged crescent – is well-known from different parts of the world, in differents times and different use: as hoe, weapon, blade for cutting something, etc. We do not want to refer on any of them; without trace-wear analyses we cannot establish authentically what they were used for.

We can, however, raise some hypotheses. They are probably in connection with the harvest and the preservation of the breadfruit: in the Museum at Tahiti (Musée de Tahiti et des iles) there are some examples of these tools, under the name of „*fendoir pour le fruit de l'arbre a pain*" (= hatchet for the breadfruit). One of them has a similar form made of stone, but the others, published by A. Lavondes from the Society Islands (Lavondes ed., 1990: 60) are made of wood: one in form of an adze, and two are elongated, U-shaped oval blades with handle and convex cutting edge.

The breadfruit was one of the most important basic food on the Marquesas Islands: because of the possibility for long-term storage in a pit (*ua ma*) in fermented form for many years, in famine it could actually save the life of the people.

Between the utensils used in preparing the breadfruit (*mei*) for food (*ma*), a splitter was used, too, but only in case if the fruit wasn't ripe enough. Linton (Linton, 1923: 351, Pl. LVII. B.) reports on one splitter from the Bishop Museum's collection and he wrote:

„*When properly ripe, the breadfruit are soft enough for the raw pulp to be easily separated from the core with the fingers. Slightly unripe fruits are sometimes cut up for ma making. In ancient times this was probably done with a wooden breadfruit splitter. An implement of this sort in the Bishop Museum is eight inches long, with a maximum width of four inches. It has a long oval blade terminating in a broad flat knob. Only the outer end of the blade is sharpened. It is made of some rather hard, light weight wood*." (about 20 cm x 10 cm)

This splitter is like the two blades in wood, published by Lavondes: these objects can be the antecedents of the hatchets in stone. The only problem for us is the crescent shape of our tools: we think, it is not accidental, but necessary for the use. The hatchets require another, a swinging movement to cut. With our tool-type, on the other hand, we can also do cutting, but with moving it back and forth. We use similar implements for materials like cheese or peat:

Their form are the same, because of the resistence of the solid and elastic material, which is resistant to cutting in one movement. The stored and partially dried *ma* is a material somewhat similar in consistence.

We can imagine – it's only an idea – that these tools were used by the chiefs, in famine, when the chief had to take out the stored *ma* from the pit and distribute them for the people, by cutting up in pieces.

These tools, comparing the thousands of stone artifacts from the Marquesas are extremely rare and have never been published, as far as we know. After their unique shape, their fine elaboration and their rarity, perhaps it is not too erroneous to say that these objects were made and used for a specific purpose, by special persons and for a specific occasion.

The structure 110, where the first tool was discovered, was the property of a prominent family - the ancestors of the mayor of Hatiheu, Yvonne Katupa.

Now the object is deposited in the little museum of the village. Several years later, after our last trip to Nuku Hiva together (2002), one member of the Falchetto family founded on Eiao island a similar tool, which is presented here as first. Alfred saw them in 2011 in the Museum at Hatiheu, so we have the hope to find some others of this type in the future.

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