Monumental architecture provides a key epistemological bridge between residential neighborhoods and the greater community. Temples (marae) are the main form of public architecture in Easter Polynesia and they provide a material index of ideological control and social power. In this talk, I will briefly discuss the history of marae research in the Society Islands which up until recently relied heavily on typological analyses of surface architectural remains. Utilizing data from a new case study in the ‘Opunohu Valley, Mo’orea, I will discuss current methods of dating marae. These new data are interpreted within an explicit spatio-temporal approach, touching upon several broad research themes, including the role that ideology played in the long-term development of socio-political complexity in the Society Island chiefdoms. I will end with a discussion of how spatial relationships can help us to understand marae function and how marae elaboration appears to be associated with the rise of occupational specialists in the late prehistoric Society Island chiefdoms.

Dr. Kahn has held the post of Assistant Anthropologist at the Bishop Museum since 2007. She received her Ph.D. in 2005 from the University of California, Berkeley for her work on late prehistoric household and community organization in the Society Islands. During 2006-2007, as a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Queensland (Australia), Dr. Kahn completed analyses of museum collections to study the production and use of adzes at residential and quarry sites in Eastern Polynesia. Over the last sixteen years she has conducted archaeological field research in Polynesia and Melanesia, working in the Hawaiian Islands, the Society Islands, the Marquesas Islands, and New Caledonia. Her research interests include studies of the political economy, socio-political complexity, and the emergence of hierarchical relations.

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