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THE AITU NAFANUA AND THE HISTORY OF
SAMOA: A STUDY IN THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL POWER

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the Australia National University

July 2002

**Except where otherwise stated, I declare that this study is an original work based
on my own research.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K D Schmidt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

K D SCHMIDT

July 2002

PREFACE

My understanding of the complexities of Samoan history resulted from a total of three years spent in Samoa. A gradual realization that there were competing claims and alternative versions of the Samoan past grew from interviews and conversations with a number of people. Slowly an understanding also evolved that changes in political regimes were explained as having true legitimacy because it was the 'will' of the spirits that such changes occur. Human motivations were not enough. Nafanua, a powerful *aitu*, or spirit, sanctioned such changes in the Samoan polity.

My understanding of Samoan history was also tempered by a sense of sanctity and respect for genealogies and 'family histories'. This sanctity is also revealed in the literature relating to Samoa. Few Samoans of recent times have published such 'sacred knowledge'. The majority of recent publications and theses by Samoan historians have tended to focus upon the colonial era and provide a refreshing voice in re-evaluating this experience from a more indigenous viewpoint. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, a Samoan high chief and politician, is one who has had the courage to speak of the Samoan past and inform 'outsiders' of the importance of honorifics, names, and the meaning of poetical language in Samoan history. His works have provided a challenge for me to consider more deeply Samoan source material and modes of imparting knowledge that I was initially unaware.

Much of Tupua's revelations of taboo subjects are also contained in 'revelations' in archival material I have examined in the archives in Samoa, Germany, Australia, Fiji and New Zealand, which in itself is symbolic of Samoa's fractured past in terms of colonial intervention. This study draws on material from these archives and published material in the Samoan, English and German languages. By examining these sources, again an awareness evolved that just as Samoa's history is multi-layered, there are also competitive and variant claims revealed in the foreign language sources, which often reflect the alliances made by the English, American and German residents and consuls who resided in Samoa in the colonial era. This study hopefully benefits from an examination of events from multiple viewpoints. A methodological approach is taken, wherein the same event is perceived from different angles. The work, because of this

approach, is not only concerned with history, but historiography, due to historical constructs of Samoa's past being, at times, limited by restricted access to source material in only one or two languages.

One of these historical constructs is Gilson's seminal work on the history of Samoa. This work was the first history of Samoa I read and I have often relied on this work as a reference. Of immense assistance also were his detailed notes, which are held at the Australian National University. Other influential 'touchstones' have been the publications of the early German ethnographers Krämer and von Bülow and the more recent publication *Lagaga*, which offers a history of Samoa from a Samoan viewpoint.

There are certain conventions followed in this study, which need some initial explanation. One of these is that given the extensive sources in Samoan, and in particular in German, the study would become unmanageable if all original sources were also placed in the text or in footnotes, along with the English translation. The study also concerns itself with the relationship between Samoa and Tonga. Again the Samoanized Tongan names are used and the Tongan – Samoan relationship is largely discussed from a Samoan point of view. In this sense there may be differentiation between Samoan and Tongan genealogies and historical understandings that would be disputed by Tongan sources and historians.

I have many people to thank for assistance in this study. I thank the Australian National University for granting me an ANU scholarship in the Division of Pacific and Asian History. The scholarship allowed me to study and travel to archives, as well as providing me an inspiring environment to work in. Working in the Division allowed instant access to many Pacific scholars and students who were literally just 'down the hall from me'. When such an environment exists, scholarship feeds on scholarship.

I thank my panel, Professor Donald Denoon, Dr Deryck Scarr, and most particularly, Dr Niel Gunson. Niel has been the source of encouragement and inspiration. His own extensive knowledge led to questioning and challenges that have caused me to examine and re-examine my notions of the Samoan past and have allowed this work to be more comprehensive than it would have been otherwise. I would also like to thank Professor Hank Nelson and the Cartography Department.

The study has relied on discussion with many people in Samoa. I have chosen, however, not to name these individuals as the composite nature of this study does not necessarily portray the intentions and perceptions of those who were willing to discuss their histories with me. Most often these discussions have not come to light in this study in the light in which my 'informants' would have intended.

In general terms I would like to thank the village of Matiu and the Lafoa'i family who were so kind to me, and I appreciate the hospitality granted to me. I also thank Galumalemana Netina Schmidt, of the Registrar of the Lands and Titles Court, who, during my fieldwork, afforded me such kindness and openness. This work does rely on some Land and Titles court cases. Again I have tried to respect living individuals by not revealing individual testimony, except in cases where this has already been made public.

I acknowledge archivists and librarians in the many institutions I have visited. I have nearly always felt that these individuals have been helpful and willing to assist in any way possible, including assistance with translations at times and suggestions of other materials I could have easily overlooked.

I thank my fellow students, especially those concerned particularly with Samoa, namely Ioane Lafoa'i, A Saleimoa Va'ai and F Ben Liua'ana, and Andrew Hamilton. I also thank Asofou So'o, who also spent some of his valuable time in assisting in translations and checking some of my own.

I thank also the Divisional staff, especially Dorothy McIntosh, Marion Weeks, Jude Shanahan and Melody Walker, who, in the final months of preparation, have been of immense assistance.

Finally I would like to acknowledge my family and friends, of whom many have already been mentioned above. I thank my family, especially Chris and Val and all my brothers and sisters. I would like to thank especially my brother Andrew who was incredibly supportive, and had faith that I was capable of writing this history, especially in those many moments of self-doubt. I likewise thank my brother Nathan for his encouragement and support, my sister Helen and my niece, Kate, who spent half of one

school holiday period going through my notebooks and double-checking that I had not left anything out of my bibliography. I also thank Helina Schmidt for all her assistance.

I dedicate this work to Niel Gunson. I am Niel's last student, due to his retirement and I acknowledge not only the assistance granted me, but to the many PhD scholars whom he has not only supervised but assisted and inspired in so many ways.

ABSTRACT

This history of Samoa breaks new ground in using largely neglected Samoan and German language sources. The history examines the relationship between spiritual and temporal power in Samoa and concentrates on Samoan motivations and Samoans themselves.

The narrative focuses most particularly on the *aitu* Nafanua – a powerful female ancestor god whose will and suggestions, received through her spirit mediums, enabled the family she speaks through to take action and bring about changes in the Malo or Government. She acts not only as a harbinger of change, but also spiritually legitimizes changes in the Samoan polity.

The study is divided into two sections. Part I examines the pre-Christian history of Samoa. It discusses origins and the close relationship between Samoa, Fiji and Tonga. The study recognizes the significant interaction between the leading families of these islands, prior to, and even after the European powers ‘colonised’ them. The currently held impression that they were isolated from each other by vast oceanic distances and cultural difference is evaluated. It reconstructs the relationship between Samoa, Fiji, and Tonga in particular as being significantly closer than that which has come to exist into the 21st century.

The study examines the nature of sacred chiefs and orators, the latter often having a spiritual function akin to priesthood. Chapters three to seven focus more exclusively on Nafanua and the Tonumaipe’a heritage in Samoa. The Tonumaipe’a title has Nafanua and her father Savea Si’uleo at the genealogical apex. The early descendants of the title are all female and are represented by title-holders embodying the deeds, achievements and sacred power of the former holders. Nearly all the major political transformations in Samoan history have been presented, by Samoans themselves, as either having been caused or legitimized by Nafanua or her agents. Nafanua provides spiritual legitimacy for new regimes (Malo). She does this by means of the shamans or chiefly priests whose bodies she enters and speak through to reveal her will. She is also assisted by the *alataua* villages

designated to assist her designs through her warriors, geographically situated in the villages on the southern side of Savai'i.

Nafanua's and the Tonumaip'e'a lineage reaches a peak in the time of Levalasi and Salamasina, the first regent of Samoa. The Salamasina inheritance continues until the time of Leiataua Leloga and his son Leiataua Tonumaip'e'a Tamafaiga. It is said that Nafanua was displeased with the former Malo in Upolu and entered the body of Tamafaiga of the island of Manono. Tamafaiga himself was viewed as a powerful god due to his being the embodiment and 'voice' of Nafanua.

Part II examines the struggle between the old Malo of Nafanua against the new, namely the arrival of the Christian missionaries in the form of the London Missionary Society, and examines the tensions between the old religion of Nafanua and the new. Nafanua is accredited with foretelling the arrival of the missionaries and promising that the Malietoa family would have the opportunity to assume the mantle of national leadership. The new religion provided this family to achieve leadership of the Malo, and it did so because it is believed that Nafanua allowed this transformation to occur. The Manono people, and the old areas of Satupa'itea and the *alataua* on southern Savai'i would not give in to this supposed promise to Malietoa and fought vehemently against the new political power of Malietoa throughout the 19th century. They did so by choosing to become adherents of rival Christian denominations. The old leaders of Upolu, the daughters and sons of Salamasina, also fought against the new religion of Nafanua.

Again the struggle between the old Malo of Nafanua and the new is discussed chronologically. The traditional forms of religious worship were replaced, but the division between the old Malo and the new took new forms. The old Malo would largely identify with Wesleyanism, and, later, Catholicism. There was also division within Sa Malietoa itself. The celebrated Malietoa Tavita became a Christian, as did his brother, who for some time was courted by the missionaries. This brother, Taimalelagi Tinai became Malietoa after the death of Tavita. Taimalelagi and his 'son', Talavou, however, renounced the London Missionary Society and Talavou who was actually both half-brother and nephew to Taimalelagi, was blessed with the Tonumaip'e'a title. For almost 50 years the Malietoa representative of the 'old religion of Nafanua' would fight against the representatives of the

'new religion', namely the son and grandson of Tavita – who were both educated by the mission and were members of the London Missionary Society church.

Other leading family heads and elites also identified with the different Christian religious denominations. One elite would make an alliance with the LMS. A counter elite would ally with Wesleyanism and/or Catholicism. These religious affiliations reflected the already existent tension between leading family heads prior to the arrival of Christianity and both recognised the import of spiritual legitimacy in gaining political ascendancy. For example, Tupua Moegagogo became a strong Wesleyan convert and Mata'afa a strong Catholic adherent. Mata'afa eventually became the leading chief of the government under the German administration in the early 20th century.

Alliances were also made with rival foreign nationalities, which likewise mirrored the traditional divisional factions within Samoa itself. The Malietoa title-holder supported by the LMS generally had the support of the British and American consuls and residents. The principal chiefs of the old Malo, namely Tupua Tamasese and somewhat reluctantly Mata'afa upon his return from exile, were supported by the Germans.

The story concludes with an overview of the 20th century and discusses the triumph of the new Malo of Nafanua and Malietoa Tavita's reception (and control) of the early missionaries which resulted in him not only becoming the leader of the Malo, but also evidence of the truth of the prophecy of Nafanua to the Malietoa lineage.

The author is well aware that this is only one rendering of the history of Samoa and by focusing on Nafanua, the Tonumaip'e'a family, Manono and Savai'i, other voices and counter histories are not given full voice. Attempts have been made to take in other understandings of Samoa's past and examine events from more than one viewpoint. Attempts have also been made to indicate where regional history and national history merge.

ABBREVIATIONS

Collections

ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library, Manuscripts and Archives section, Wellington, New Zealand.
BA	Bundesarchiv, Potsdam, Germany.
LC /ALC	Lands and Titles Court Cases, Mulinu'u and Tuasivi, Samoa.
ML	Mitchell Library, University of NSW, Sydney, Australia.
NA	National Archives, Wellington, New Zealand.
OMPA	Overseas Marist Provincial Archives, Suva, Fiji.
SSL	London Missionary Society, South Seas Letters. Held at Council for World Mission Archives, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.
SSJ	London Missionary Society, South Sea Journals. Council for World Mission Archives, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.

Abbreviations of Published Material

AAAS	Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. Report of Meetings. Sydney.
<i>A.A.,N.f.</i>	Archiv für Anthropologie, neue Folge, Braunschweig.
<i>IAE</i>	Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, Leiden.
<i>JPS</i>	<i>Journal of the Polynesian Society</i> , Wellington, NZ.
<i>JPH</i>	<i>Journal of Pacific History</i> , Canberra, Australia.
<i>NZJH</i>	<i>New Zealand Journal of History</i> , New Zealand.
<i>RSNSW</i>	Royal Society of New South Wales, <i>Proceedings</i> , Sydney.

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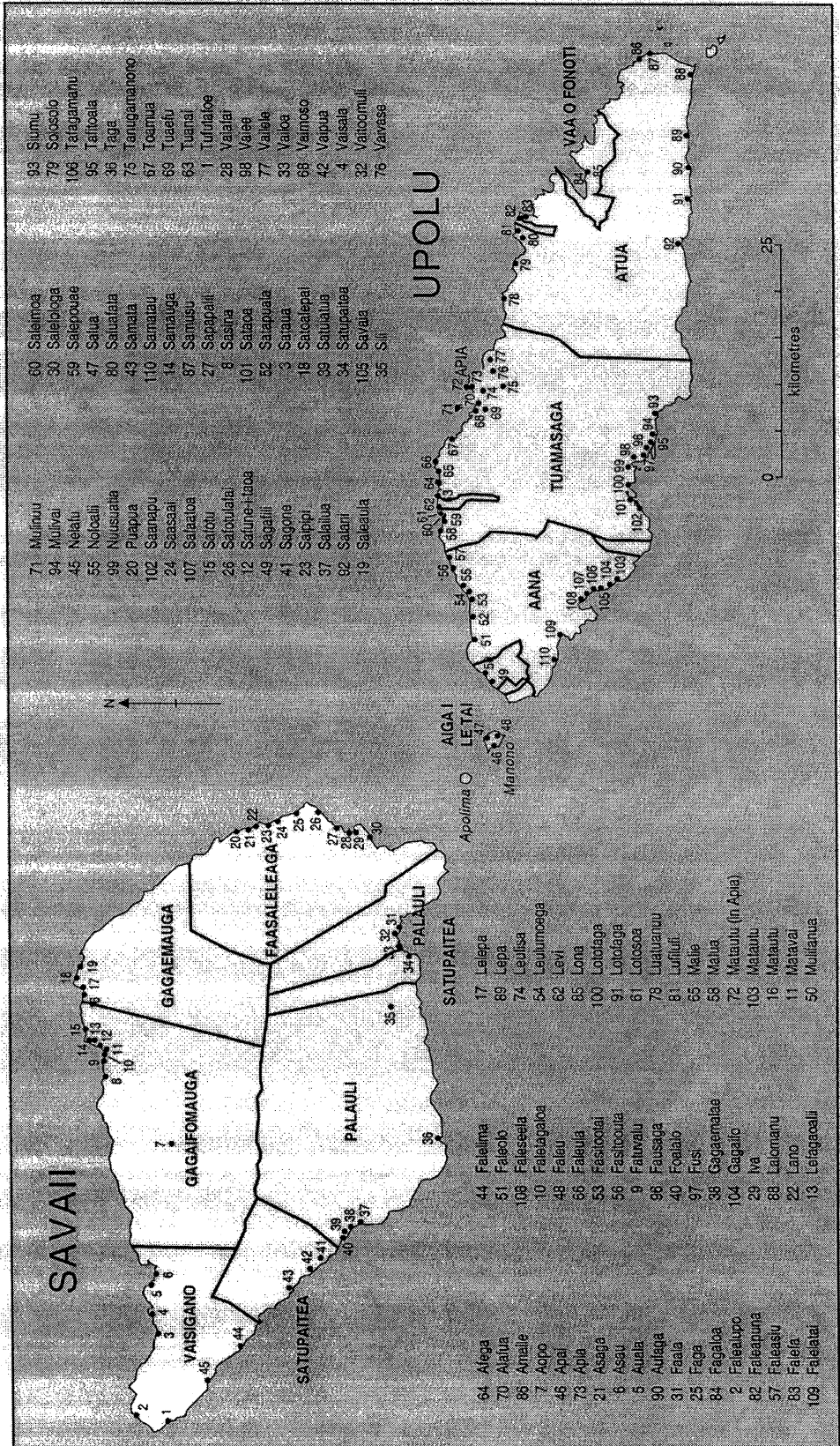
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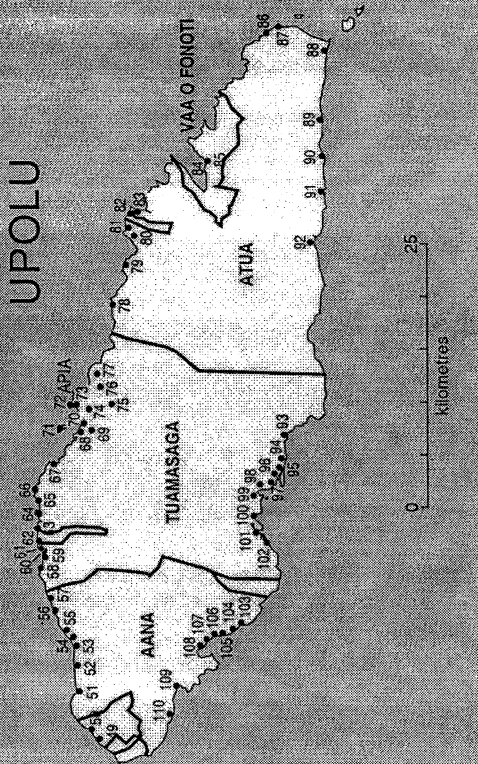
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