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The Ancient Samoan Government.

REV. S. ELLA.

THE ANCIENT SAMOAN GOVERNMENT.

By the Rev. S. ELLA.



A mistaken notion prevails that Samoa had no settled government and was without any political constitution, and that a state of anarchy and lawlessness characterised its people. This error arose chiefly from the constant intertribal wars which distracted the country, and the slight amenity to law manifested by the people. The fact is an established constitution existed from ancient times, but foreign powers have ignored the native constitution, and sought to establish a policy of their own construction, and their injudicious interference has aroused resentment and opposition in the minds of the natives. Much of the disquietude which has recently prevailed might have been averted had an effort been made to ascertain what constituted the native policy, and how their ancient customs and *régime* could be regulated so as to give satisfaction to the people, and maintain a government on their own principles. Instead of doing this the Americans, in the first instance, with Steinberger as their tool, sought to found a government which promised to be most favourable to their nation; and afterwards the Germans, having large commercial interests in Samoa, remodelled the plan more in accordance with their views. They deposed and exiled the king, and placed another claimant to sovereignty in his room. This step gave umbrage to the majority of the people, and especially to the ruling chiefs of Atua, the eastern division of Upolu, who then put forward the high chief Mataafa, as possessing the stronger claim to be made king of Samoa. To understand aright these conflicting claims, and to perceive clearly the blunders committed, a review of the government of Samoa from ancient times will be helpful.

The earliest form of government appears to have been patriarchal. The chiefs were the heads of families or leaders of expeditions which first occupied the land. There is no tradition or legendary trace to show that the country was inhabited before the present race occupied the soil, yet there are some vestiges or signs which indicate that other races existed in Samoa prior to the advent of the present. As families increased, the heads of families were called *tulafale* (foundations), and they appointed their head of clans, *al'is* and *faipules* (chiefs and rulers). These, too, after a time varied in rank and influence according to differences in their family descent. When Samoa became divided into distinct districts or states, a head chief of each state or division was appointed and recognised as king or lord of that division, and received the title of *tui*, synonymous with king. The most potent and influential of these were the *Tui-Atua* and *Tui-Aana*, ruling over the eastern and western divisions of Upolu. The central division of Upolu, Le Tuamāsanga, although possessing no chief with the title of *tui*, yet administered the same rights and authority through their supreme chief of the head village, which took the title of *laumua* (the fore-rank). Savai'i also was represented in the general

government, under the name of *Le Pule-o-Salafai*, of which the town of Safotulafai, on the south side of Savai'i, is the chief land and seat of the authority. Besides these supreme chiefs there were others of high rank, distinguished by the title of *ali'i-paia* (sacred chiefs), probably so called on account of their holding the office of priesthood as well as chieftainship. I may here remark that it is difficult now to ascertain the origin of these names and titles. The genealogies now extant are in some instances confused and disconnected, more or less substantial or mythical.

The *tulafales* are the heads of families and land proprietors, and correspond with the *rangatira* of New Zealand. These hold great influence in the Samoan government. They have power to appoint and depose chiefs, though of late years this prerogative has been but rarely exercised. Occasionally chiefs were deposed and banished to the island of Tutuila. A *tulafale* was selected by the chief to act as his orator and prime minister.

The *ali'is*, or chiefs, are the heads of tribes or clans, and their position, though not absolutely hereditary, is maintained in the tribe by the general recognition of the *tulafales*. Much care is exercised to sustain and strengthen their position by suitable marriage, and a *mésalliance* always occasioned difficulty and a loss of dignity and prestige. A chief had power to appoint his successor, and this was often done in cases where there was no legitimate heir, or where the chief preferred another member of his family to the rightful heir, and in some cases in order to strengthen the position of his clan, by giving his title to the chief of another clan. Such appointments, however, had to be sanctioned by the *tulafales*.

Chiefs are of various ranks, and differ in distinction and authority. Some are termed *ali'i-paia* (sacred chiefs), and are of superior rank and influence, to whom very great deference is shown. They are a highly privileged class, and are beyond the influence of the *tulafales*, although they derive their titles from the districts they represent. Of the *ali'i-paia* are the supreme chiefs of the three divisions of Upolu: Atua, Le Tuamāsanga, and Aana. These possess special titles—viz., *Tui* (lord or king) of the division, as *Tui-Atua*, and *Tui-Aana*. They are supreme in the land, and have power to make war or declare for peace. All the towns and villages of the district render allegiance to them.

There is no royal line in Samoa. A chief possessing all the high titles of the ruling districts became king or *Tupu-o-Samoa*. The titles may be conferred on him at the disposition of the respective districts, or be secured by conquest in war. These titles are the *Tui-Atua*, *Tui-Aana*, *Le Tama-soāli'i*, and *Ngatoa'itele*, of Le Tuamāsanga, and *Le Pule-o-Salafai*, representing the whole of Savai'i. The present difficulty and conflicts in Samoa arise from the fact that Malietoa-laupepa, whom the three powers have recognised as king, has not yet received the titles of "Tui-Aana" and "Tui-Atua," and he is therefore viewed as a usurper by the districts of Aana and Atua. Tutuila and Manu'a are politically united to Atua. There is not likely to be any peaceful settlement or permanent submission to Malietoa until this rule is complied with. The mistake made by the representatives of the tripartite Government is that, instead of using a peaceful influence to obtain these titles for Malietoa,

they have treated the Tui-Atua and Tui-Aana as rebels, and in the case of England and Germany have met the claims of Aana and Atua by armed resistance.

The dignity of chiefs was recognised by a court language; that is, certain words applied to them and differing from the ordinary terms used to commoners. Their rank was also distinguished by distinct words regarding their presence, speech, &c. These are *afio*, *susū*, *maliu*, and their derivatives, instead of the common words *sau*, *o mai*, and *upu*, employed in common usage. A chief never used the court language in speaking of himself, although it would be a serious offence and insulting to address him in the ordinary words. The Samoans are a polite and, in some degree, a polished people. They are very observant of delicacy in address and politeness in general intercourse, not only towards their superiors but also in communication with one another or with strangers. A commoner or a female always assumes a stooping or sitting posture in the presence of chiefs.

In their seats at councils and ordinary ceremonies and festivals their rank is distinguished by occupying the seat of honour. At native feasts they received choice portions, and the first cup of *kava* according to their rank, after the usual libation had been offered to the gods. Certain fishes, &c., were given to chiefs as their right, and were tabued to the common people.

The authority of chiefs in most cases was little more than nominal. They acted as magistrates and judges, as well as councillors and law-makers, but it was a difficult matter to maintain their laws or impose punishment for offences. A spirit of democracy has always characterised the Samoan people, yet the chiefs received a respectful deference from their clans, and they could exercise a moral influence upon their people. The *tulafonos* (laws of the council) were generally respected. In olden times, it appears, the authority of the chief was more arbitrary, occasionally tyrannical, and the *tulafonos* were more rigidly observed, and severe punishments followed any infringement.

Communities were distinct, and maintained their individual rights and privileges in what some would term enviable independence. They could combine for mutual protection, or for any object to promote the ends of the common weal. Such combination might assume the form of a state. They held their legislative assemblies, or *fono*, either in a council chamber, the *fale tele*, or *marae*, an open space in the centre of the village. At the *fonos* the chief highest in rank was expected to be the first speaker, either in person or through his orator, unless he chose to cede that prerogative to another, generally the next in rank.

The possession of land was not in the entire control of chiefs, but it was owned alike by the chiefs and *tulafales*, and neither party could alienate any portion without the concurrence of every member of the family interested. A violation of this rule would occasion difficulties that would involve the chief in trouble, sometimes occasion his deposition. This is a subject for consideration to foreigners in seeking to acquire land in Samoa. In some cases where the rule has been disregarded by them, the purchasers of land have found themselves placed in trouble with the natives, and their land-title disputed.

Genealogy of Chiefs.—In Samoa the genealogy of chiefs, especially of high chiefs, was preserved with great care, and the custody was committed to a select class, who were very careful and jealous of the honourable and responsible function they held. Of course, having no knowledge of writing, the chronicles were retained in their memories alone, and thus handed down from one generation to another. They were entrusted with the duty of instructing young chiefs in their genealogical history and chronicles. As aids to memory certain fine mats (*ie tonga*) were woven to commemorate important family events, and handed down as heirlooms in the family. In native genealogies of the kings of Eastern Polynesia it was a common custom to trace their origin to the gods or heavenly powers—like the Greeks and Romans and other ancient nations.

The common Samoan myth regarding the creation and peopling of their world assigns the first act to the god "Tangaloa," who, while fishing, hauled up a rock from the ocean deep, which afforded a resting-place for his daughter on a visit to the lower world. On a subsequent visit she found the rock covered by an ocean creeping-plant. The creeper afterwards perished and produced worms, and in the course of rapid evolution the worms became men and women. This myth varies on different islands. In the eastern islands there is an account of a succession of rocks which are personified, and the first man, *Le Tangata*, was the offspring of these rocks; he was also named "Tupu-fua" (arising spontaneously). He married a daughter of the supreme deity *Tangaloa-langi*. Their son, named Lu, became king of heaven. He descended to the earth, and a son was born to him who was called "Tui-Atua" (lord of Atua). He married his sister, "Langi-tuvalu" (eight heavens), and their son became a Tui-Atua. This is the mythical genealogy of the Tui-Atua; thence the table proceeds on a plain historical record.

The Tui-Aana sprang from the family of a high chief named Le Samoa-na-ngalo, who married the daughter of the King of Tonga. Their second son was Le Sanga-alala. In the genealogy of Samoa-na-ngalo it is recorded that, after several generations of chiefs who retained their separate chieftainships, a son was born to Tui-Aana-tama-a-le-langi, who was named Salamāsina, and in this son the several high titles (*ao*) of Atua, Aana, and Le Tuamāsanga were united, and Salamāsina thereupon became King (*Tupu-o-Samoa*). Then the title descended through the female line, and the genealogical chain passes on to Sina, a grand-daughter of Salamāsina. Her son was Faumuina, who retained the royal titles. The second wife of Faumuina was Ata-mu-lau, a Tongan lady. A third wife was Fala-leomalie, a daughter of Mata'utia, a high chief of Aleipata, a superior town of Atua. Quarrels arose among the children of these different wives, and the sons of Faumuina fought several battles. These quarrels caused a dispersion of the royal titles, which were redistributed to the respective districts from which they had been obtained, and for a time the kingship was loosely held, as none now possessed the united titles, and therefore were not recognised by the respective divisions of Samoa. In this state of things wars were frequent in the struggle for supremacy; and Fonoti, the son of Faumuina and Fala-leomalie, became King by conquest. Fonoti married Fuatino, a chief lady of Fasito'otai, in Aana, and their son was Muangututi'a, who became a

high chief of Aana, and by marriage a high chief of Atua also. Their son was Tupua, who became Tui-Atua. Mataafa is a scion of this house. Afoa, the eldest son of Tupua, became King, but Ngalu-ma-le-mana, another son of Tupua by a second wife, won the regard of the *tulafales*. Afoa sought to raise troops against his brother, but was defeated. Ngalu-ma-le-mana then became King, and held all the Royal titles—"Tui-Atua," "Tui-Aana," "Tama-soāli'i," and "Ngatoa'i-tele." Family discord broke out anew, and a succession of sanguinary conflicts ensued. Mataafa was deserted by large numbers of his followers; but Nofoa-saefa, the son of Ngalu-ma-le-mana, was supported by Aana, Le Tuamāsanga, and Savai'i, and conquered Mataafa. He, like his father, received all the Royal titles. On the death of Nofoa-saefa, Atua was divided in the choice of a successor. At a general council (*fono tele*) I'a-māfana was selected, and proclaimed King, and had all the titles, being sustained by Aana, Le Tuamāsanga, and Savai'i. On the death of I'a-māfana, other wars broke out; and during the disturbances a high chief and priest of Manono, Tamafainga, was proclaimed King, although he did not possess the titles to constitute his authority. He was superstitiously regarded as a god, and was viewed with great awe. He became an intolerable tyrant, and his cruelties and oppression provoked Aana to rise against him and kill him. Manono and Savai'i united to avenge the murder of Tamafainga, and were joined by Atua and Le Tuamāsanga. Malietoa, a high chief of Savai'i, was then proclaimed King, the first of his family who made any claim to this dignity. At his death his brother took his name, and assumed his authority, contrary to the expressed desire of the elder Malietoa; a part of Le Tuamāsanga was the only division of Upolu which recognised his claim. Repeated and long-continued conflicts have prevailed ever since this event. Foreign influence was brought to bear upon the people to establish peace and a settled government. Germany deposed Malietoa-laupepa when he was likely to receive the requisite concession of titles, and set up another claimant, Tamasese, a son of Moengangongo, of Atua. He was supported by part of Aana also; but Mataafa, a descendant of Mua-ngututi'a, and the recognised Tui-Atua, opposed the appointment of Tamasese. The Berlin Council of the three powers—England, Germany, and America—reinstated Malietoa-laupepa, and required the whole of Samoa to submit to him. This would probably have been done but for their interference. Native jealousies were aroused and intensified by the imposition of objectionable taxes for the support of foreign officials, and this opposition was accentuated through the severe measures used to enforce the taxation.*

I will conclude this paper with some valuable MS. notes on the Samoan Government supplied me by the Rev. J. B. Stair, of St. Arnaud, Victoria, who was a missionary in Samoa more than fifty years ago. He says:—

"Until a comparatively recent period the government of Samoa appears to have approached more nearly to that of Tahiti and the Sandwich Islands—viz., monarchical—than might be supposed from the confusion that has prevailed there of late years. Possibly it may be

* In the second volume of this Society's Proceedings will be found very full genealogical tables of the Kings of Samoa and Rarotonga. I would recommend a reference to these for further information on this subject.

described as having been a combination of the monarchical and patriarchal form of government, since, although for many generations past the whole group was governed by one head, *O le tupu* (king), in whom the supreme authority was vested, the different districts were governed, to a great extent, by their own local authorities, chiefs, and heads of tribes, these being in many respects independent of each other; yet, at the same time, they acknowledged the supreme authority of the *tupu*. This regal or highest title of all, *O le tupu* (king), was acquired by the possession of the following titles (*ao*) in the gift of four districts, comprising the whole of the two principal islands, Upolu and Savai'i, viz.:—1, *O le Tui-Aana*, in the gift of Aana; 2, *O le Tui-Atua*, in the gift of Atua; 3, *O le Ngatoa'itele* and *O le Tama-soāli'i*, in the gift of Le Tuamāsanga; and 4, *O le Pule-o-Salafai*, in the gift of Savai'i.

“When these *ao* (or titles) were centred in one chief, his power was great, and extended over the whole group, since, although Tutuila and Manu'a gave no direct title to the king, they were represented by Lufi-lufi, the *laumua*, or leading settlement of Atua. Manono also, though apparently not having any direct title to give on this occasion, was always consulted as to the bestowment of them.

“The *ao* (title) of Aana was usually bestowed first, and, upon this being acquired, the other districts followed suit, and sent deputies to confer their title and assist in proclaiming the king; and, when this was accomplished, it was said, *Ua tafa'i fa ua o'o i le Tupu* (four centre in one, he has attained to the crown). Upon this the chief thus honoured assumed the title of *Le Tupu o Samoa* (the King of Samoa), and shortly afterwards made a circuit of the islands that he might receive the homage and congratulations of the different districts. The announcement, *Ua afio mai le tupu* (the king is approaching), caused much excitement and stir in the several districts and settlements in the way of preparation for the visit.

“Following the title of Tupu comes that of *O le Tui* (or lord), which is always prefixed to the name of the district conferring it; as, *O le Tui-Aana*, *O le Tui-Atua*, &c. This is a much-valued title, but inferior to that of *O le Tupu*, or king.

“*Ali'i paia*, or *Sacred Chiefs*.—Some chiefs of high rank were termed *ali'i paia*, or sacred chiefs, to whom much deference was shown. There were twelve of these:—1, *O le Tui-Aana*; 2, *O le Tui-Atua*; 3, Tonumaie'a; 4, Fonoti; 5, Mua-ngututi'a; 6, Tupua; 7, Ngalu-ma-le-mua; 8, I'a-māfana; 9, Tamafaingā; 10, Malietoa; 11, Tama-soāli'i; 12, Ngatoa'i-tele. These were all entitled to be addressed with the highest phrase—*afio*. Six other *ali'i paia* were addressed with the next highest title or style of address—‘*Sūsū*.’ These were:—1, Riomaiāva; 2, Mataafa; 3, Le Manu'a; 4, Fiamē; 5, Salima; and 6, Lavasii. To four other chiefs the highest style of address—*afio*—is appropriate, although they are not of the class termed sacred chiefs. These are:—1, Taimalie-utu; 2, To'aleāfoa; 3, Liutele; and 4, Afamāsanga. The *ao* (titles) of these chiefs were in the gift of various places, two of the districts sometimes having the same, whilst Manono managed to monopolise three.

“The following are in the gift of the undermentioned places:—

Ao, or Title.	By whom Bestowed.
Pe'a, or Tonumaipe'a, and Manupunafanua	Satupaitea and Manono
Riromaiava	Safotu, Sasava, Palauli, and Nofoa
Tui-Aana	Leulumoenga, or Aana generally
Tama-soāli'i	Le Tuamāsanga and Safata
Ngatoa'i-tele	Sangana, Tuisamau, Lea-auimatangi, and
	Laumua
Mataafa	Faleata
Tui-Atua	Lufi-lufi and Atua generally
Le Manu'a	Sanapu and Safata
Fiamē	Samatau
Salima	Vailele
Lavasioi	Le Fagā

“The power of the *tupu* (king) was despotic, and was at times exercised in a most oppressive manner; but the *tulafale*, or land-owners, with whom the gift of the *ao* (title) lay, were a great check upon any despotic proceedings, and they did not fail to exercise it, even at times deposing the king.

“*Principal Families.*—There are three great families which comprise the aristocracy of Samoa, whose ramifications spread over the whole group, and to one of which every chief is referable, whatever his rank or title may be. These are Sa Mataafā, Sa Malietoā, and Sa Muangututi'ā. I am not certain if this statement holds good as regards Manu'a, but I rather think it does. For a long series of years the possession of the much-coveted title *O le Tupu* was confined to members of the last-mentioned family, Sa Muangututi'ā; the last six kings who bore the title, inclusive of the first Malietoā, being Muangututi'ā, I'a-māfana, Nofoa-sāifa, Safeofafine, Tamafainga, and Malietoa-Tavita. Safeofafine was the last of his line, the family of Muangututi'ā; and after his death the office remained vacant for a time, until it was obtained by a *taulaaitu* (priest) of Manono, called 'O le Tamafainga,' who not only assumed the office of a king but also the attributes of a god. He was a terrible tyrant, and, from his being worshipped as a god, he possessed immense power and influence; but his tyrannies were so intolerable that the people of Aana, who had at the first conferred their *ao* (title) upon him, rose against him and killed him in the year 1829, just before the introduction of Christianity to the islands. A fierce and bloody war broke out soon after the death of Tamafainga, in which Aana was defeated and for a time crushed; but the group was rid of a tyranny that was unbearable. Tamafainga was succeeded some time after by Malietoā, the first of his family who had ever been raised to the dignity of *tupu*; but his power and influence, although considerable, were inferior to that exercised during the reigns which preceded the usurpation of Tamafainga. He had laboured hard to get possession of the much-coveted dignity; but he did not long enjoy it, and at his death he adopted the somewhat unusual course of apportioning out the various titles (or *ao*) which had been conferred on him, thus trenching upon the jealously guarded privileges of the *tulafale* of the different districts. They refused to ratify the expressed wish of the old king and left the office in abeyance. The first Malietoā made no secret of

his wish that, as he was the first of his family who had obtained the dignity of *tupu* or king of Samoa, no other *tupu* should be chosen after him, but that his name might descend to posterity as the last king of Samoa.

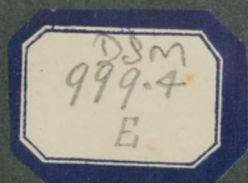
“Malietoa’s wish seemed at one time in a fair way of being granted ; at all events he was the last king unfettered and unhampered by outside influence. At the time of his death there were many candidates for the vacant honour, and so many difficulties presented themselves that the parties having the power to bestow the various titles so as to confer the dignity refrained from doing so, or even from acceding to the old chief’s wish that his several *ao* might be divided among the three relatives he nominated. His brother, Tai-ma-le-langi (Sea and Sky), succeeded to the family name of Malietoa, and was acknowledged as Le Tupu-o-Salafai (King of Savai’i), but Aana and Atua refused to acknowledge the claims of the aspirant to their *ao* (titles) further than as a matter of courtesy. Later on they seem to have united and conferred their *ao* upon a succeeding Malietoa, and thus rallied for mutual defence in the face of outward pressure ; and when their king was forcibly deposed, and an outsider and tool exalted to the dignity, the spirit of the people was stirred, and Mataafa, one of the three great families of the group, was either forced or allowed to go to the front and form a rallying point against their oppressors.”



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