

Heirs of Tefolaha:  
Tradition and Social Organization in Nanumea,  
a Polynesian Atoll Community

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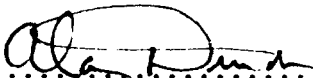
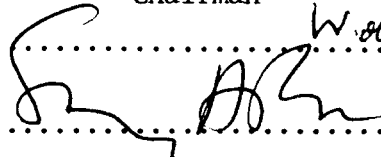
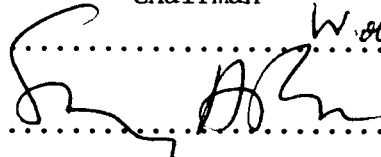
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by

Keith Stanley Chambers

## ABSTRACT

This ethnographic account of the small Polynesian society of Nanumea (one of the islands of the independent nation of Tuvalu, formerly known as the Ellice Islands) is a study of the interrelationship of historical tradition, local level politics and social organization. Based on twenty-seven months of participant observation fieldwork carried out in the thousand-person community in two periods (21 months in 1973-75, and six months of follow-up research in 1983-84) it presents a contemporary portrait of the island society, while drawing on documentary and archival material, and informants' testimony, to establish a diachronic framework for considering change. Among major findings:

-- Historical tradition in Nanumea is dynamic and of fundamental significance in social process. Leading elders contend for influence based on their knowledge of historical charter "myths." Two of these competing narrative constitutions are considered in detail, and their ramifications for the proper order of society explored.

-- Traditional social organization centered around two types of corporate groups, chiefly patrilineages (aliki) and non-chiefly patrilineages (kopiti). The decline of both groups is traced, and their complementary roles in political and religious life considered. The continuing importance of chiefly groups, which trace descent from the island's founder, is notable.

-- The island's community hall (the ahiga) is a pivotal institution in Nanumean society. A major forum for contemporary social

life, the hall is a center for oratory and feasting. Its spatial organization, with seating places for traditional descent groups, maps out Nanumean social space, embodying key metaphors in Nanumean thought about the order of society and the relationship of the sexes.

-- Despite an ethic of competition and the ongoing quest by male elders for position and prestige in society, Nanumeans are united by the importance they place on the traditional founder of this society, a warrior-hero named Tefolaha. Case materials show that although this former pagan god has been secularized, his presence endures and the founder serves as a focal point for contemporary Nanumean identity.

### Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the people of Nanumea, and to three elders in particular: Takitua and Tepou, with their strong views of the truth, and Taulialia, older than both but less caught up in it all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A study that has been over ten years in the making leaves in its wake a host of people who have assisted, supported, encouraged, or otherwise been part of the long process of research and writing. How can I properly thank them all, without adding yet another chapter to the book? This problem is compounded here because those to whom I owe profound thanks and the most significant acknowledgements are the people of Nanumea. There are nearly one thousand residents on that lovely atoll, and a good proportion of them assisted me in one way or another, from elders and community leaders, down to small children. Clearly, I cannot thank them all here. Nor would a partial list of those who worked closest with me serve, in my view, for it would omit too many others who had a hand in shaping my views of Nanumea. The only way out of this dilemma is the choice often made in acknowledgements in works of ethnography: to thank everyone. Unsatisfactory as it is, I would like to do this.

To the community of Nanumeans, in and outside of Nanumea:  
Tenei taku tuhi. Atulaa e aogaa. Ka ko te mea e fia fai atu au kia koutou katoa, fakafetai lahi kkii ailoa i te otou fesoasoani mai i te faiga o te tuhi nei, ka ke manuia koutou i te alofa o ttou Tamana.  
And to others in Tuvalu who assisted and made this work possible:  
Fakafetai lahi kkii.

Many others also assisted in a variety of ways. Without their support and good will the study would never have gotten written.

From teachers and advisors, to those who cheerfully administered finances while I was in the field, to government officials and others who removed bureaucratic hurdles, to colleagues who shared ideas, read and critiqued preliminary drafts. To these, and to friends, neighbors and relatives who provided support, offered office space and even their homes during the writing--all have assisted with a task that was essentially mine alone. I cannot include all of your names here, but I offer my sincere thanks for your help.

My two young daughters, Lorien and Claire, were encouraging and ultimately enthusiastic as a project that had begun long before they were born drew close to being finished. They came along on the second fieldtrip and each helped in her own ways. And, finally, my deep thanks to my wife and co-worker Anne, whose support and encouragement throughout this long endeavor have been unfailing, constant and an inspiration to me.

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## Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"According to their tradition they are sprung from a man called Folasa ... who was drifted away from his home and reached Nanumea ... They say the present generation is the 31st from Folasa."

G.A. Turner, at Nanumea, 1874

"At about 9:30 this a.m. the old man Takitua came to us saying he had some questions for us and could we get Sunema. He related the following history, which Sunema translated on the spot: 'Tefolaha was the first man to come to Nanumea....' "

Fieldnotes at Nanumea, 1973

Nanumeans conceive of themselves and their atoll society as having originated through the memorable actions of a single individual, the warrior-hero named Tefolaha. God-like in some respects, but human too, Tefolaha discovered Nanumea, used cunning to wrest it from the creatures who made it, and populated the island. From Tefolaha have come today's chiefly lineages, and virtually all Nanumeans consider themselves among the founder's descendants, though the emphasis they place on that descent and the use they make of it varies considerably.

This ethnographic account develops as one of its central themes the continuing importance of Tefolaha to Nanumeans. It presents a portrait of contemporary Nanumean society which takes as its starting point the interest Nanumeans themselves have in their origins and in the development of their social and political system. From this base

I have explored a series of topics which seem to me to be linked to this theme, and which relate contemporary society to its traditional roots. Although I have been selective in my interests, focusing in areas I have found most productive and significant, I believe that many of these areas are also of considerable interest to Nanumeans.

#### Origins of this Study

This work has been a long time in the making, and it differs markedly from my original conceptions. I went to Nanumea initially with a strong interest in narrative and traditional history, and followed this up in the course of my research by discussing these matters with many people and ultimately tape recording or writing down nearly two hundred narratives, many of which were "historical" in nature. These tales range from fragmentary accounts of the old pagan gods through narratives of battles with fleets of invaders, to the coming of missionaries and other representatives of the western world. Also included among them is a sizable collection of folktales.

As I worked with the ethnographic data it became clear that the story of Tefolaha and the founding of Nanumea occupied a critical place in Nanumean thinking. Tefolaha and his legacy were central to the essence of what it was to be Nanumean. The story of the founder, I came to realize, cannot be easily grouped with other traditional lore, as one narrative in a collection or sequence. Of course, it has qualities which make such treatment possible: it is often told in a dramatic fashion, with skilled raconteurs giving the various characters voices and adding touches of humor or suspense; there are multiple versions of the story which sometimes contradict each other; and so on. In

these characteristics it is much like other oral narratives, wherever found. But in Nanumea the story of Tefolaha, or rather, the stories of Tefolaha, have a quality of compelling importance which sets them apart from any of the other traditional historical accounts that people know and tell. Tefolaha's existence, his voyages to this isolated sandbank, his wives and his children and their children down to the present--all of these elements in the "story" are salient themes which Nanumeans continually draw on in presenting to each other and to outsiders their image of this society.

However evident this now appears to me, it actually took several years for the significance of what I had encountered to impress itself upon me. Between my two periods of fieldwork (the first in 1973-75, the second in 1983-84) I continued translation and analysis of my collection of ethnohistorical narratives, laboring to fashion them into an ethnographic account that included the views of Nanumeans (narratives and ethnographic context) and of outsiders (analysis of outside sources where available, depiction of world view and other themes in the material). One day, in going back over some entries in a field notebook, I came across the second incident highlighted at the head of this chapter. The encounter with the old man Takitua and his account of Tefolaha had taken place only about ten days after my arrival on Nanumea. Thinking back about the way the founder of Nanumea had been introduced to me made me see the incident as a clear example of the priority of this story over all the other Nanumean narratives I had recorded. And I realized that it was more than a story.

## Tefolaha in the Cookhouse

The incident which first brought Tefolaha to my attention happened in the early morning of July 3, 1973. My wife, Anne, and I were sitting sipping coffee in our thatched cookhouse under the shading branches of a large breadfruit tree. Chickens crowed in the distance, and nearer, the sound of brooms scratching the ground could be heard as women swept the leaves from around their houses. While we discussed our plans for the day, an elderly man approached. Takitua<sup>1</sup> was about 70 and was, we later learned, the leader of a group of male family heads who made up the "Chiefs Council" (Kau Alik) of Nanumea. At this time, after less than two weeks on the island, our competence in the Nanumean language was still rudimentary, and Takitua asked us to send for the young woman who worked with us as interpreter and research assistant. Through Sunema, Takitua inquired whether we knew the story of the founding of Nanumea. If not, he wanted to tell us this first episode in Nanumea's past. With Sunema translating on the spot we noted down details of the long story Takitua told us.

When he finished, Takitua asked questions of us. Could we supply additional information or corroboration based upon our "European" knowledge of history? Had we ever heard of Tefolaha, and what sort of person did we believe him to be? Could we supply dates for these events, which Takitua said had taken place some twenty-two generations before his birth? Takitua explained that he had previously talked with two British colonial officials, Lands Commissioner A.G. Lake (in about 1948) and Ellice Islands District Commissioner P.B. Laxton (in 1954) about this topic, and both had noted down portions of his genealogy.

But the old man had never heard from these two again,<sup>2</sup> nor did he feel he had received satisfactory answers to his questions.

But what sort of answers did he want, I found myself thinking? Taken literally, his questions were difficult ones, impossible perhaps. This would not do, however. After discussion among ourselves, Anne and I replied that there was little evidence to go on for such a distant period in the history of Nanumea or of Oceania, that we had never heard of Tefolaha or of his deeds, but that we would try to find out anything we could. I did a mental calculation and came up with a hypothetical date of about 1450 A.D. for the founding of Nanumea, which was based on Takitua's count of twenty-two generations, and used a span of twenty years per generation. Essentially, though, we had little to tell Takitua that was of much use to him. I felt that his expectations had been deflated. The old man chatted for a while longer and then left. He had, he said, more details of the story and the complete genealogies recorded in a ledger book if we wanted to come discuss it with him at a later date.

At the time it happened, this encounter early in my initial fieldwork was interesting and memorable and it opened an avenue to further information and to recording some narratives about Nanumea's past from a well-recognized expert. I also found myself a bit puzzled at Takitua's persistence, since he had now come to his third palagi (European) visitor with this story, and probably for the third time gone away confounded. Now, with ten years and a second period of fieldwork providing perspective on it, this event takes on new dimensions. Takitua had come with a sure sense of the proper order of things, I believe, and was offering a starting place for our work in Nanumea.

To understand Nanumea, to know about this island and its people, he was telling us, one must begin with the unique incidents which set Nanumea apart from all other places and set its people apart from all other peoples. The historical tale, the charter "myth" of Nanumean society was being offered as a given, as a unique reference point. Like any complex tale of beginnings the Tefolaha story is rich in meaning. It explains the ultimate origins of the sandbank which was to become Nanumea, provides a first approximation of legitimate land transfer and tenure practices, demarcates the purely human world from one where human and spirit forms are intertwined, and explains and justifies the political and social position of important lineages. These themes are among those considered in later chapters.

But as important as the content of the narrative was, this meeting with Takitua himself was also significant in other ways. He had come unannounced, expressing concern that we know the true history of Nanumea. It is clear that the old man's concern was not totally disinterested since he was an active participant in contemporary Nanumean society and politics and had been involved in local government for several decades. In the late 1950's he served as the high chief of Nanumea. The story that Takitua had come to tell us came, I later learned, in several hotly disputed versions, and Takitua's recital of the "true" version was that which he wished to promote. The genealogy that he recited was, likewise, one that featured not just the founder, but the lineage which led to Takitua.

Later, when I had talked to scores of other elders, listened to several other versions of the story of Tefolaha, and taken down many genealogies extending from the founder to the present, it became



apparent that a good portion of Takitua's concern was to convey to us early in our work his own version of things. He had assumed, I later learned, the role of self-appointed guardian of portions of the traditional history of Nanumea and his lineage claimed a unique overseer position among the chiefly families of the island. And yet this was a contentious issue. The leaders of some other chiefly families felt that Takitua had assumed too much and was promoting his own lineage to their detriment in his claim to stand as a spokesman for the other chiefly lines.

But, more of this in the chapters that follow. Certainly it only became clear to me later. Here, at the beginning of fieldwork I had become involved, even if primarily as a more-or-less passive recorder of information, in what was a complex and continuing process of political action. I cannot be completely sure now what Takitua had in mind by coming to us that morning. But it is clear that the pragmatic concerns of politics and reputation, of prestige and position, are linked with the esoteric lore bound up in the historical narrative of Tefolaha and the origins of Nanumea. In the years since Takitua first visited us in the cookhouse, I have had many occasions to appreciate the ways in which the ancient charter embodied in this story is called on in justification of current action, or brought up to substantiate, or to dispute, entrenched political positions.

In 1984, Takitua still lives in his house at Nanumea. He is no longer the agile seventy year-old of 1973, but rather a fragile octogenarian who has receded into his own thoughts, inaccessible.<sup>3</sup> Some of the Nanumean elders who discussed their views of Tefolaha and

the founding and development of their society with me in 1973 and 1974 have since died, though many are still hale and active. Their questions and their concerns that this study be as complete as possible have contributed as well. It has taken longer than I had hoped to be able to write my "story" of Tefolaha and of the society he founded, but I humbly offer it back to the people of Nanumea as a first attempt to reply to queries first raised by Takitua's visit to our cookhouse.

I would like to emphasize the significance of the word first here, for while the encounter with Takitua was my introduction to the importance Nanumeans attach to the founder and his actions, I later discussed these issues at length with a great many other people. They shared with me their views of the "truth" and often, in doing so, made clear their displeasure at the versions of things offered to me by others. My understanding of Nanumea, and particularly of the significance of Tefolaha in this community, is as broadly based as I am capable of making it.

The sorts of initial questions that Takitua posed, direct and concrete, were a stimulus to pursue these matters further. They became a starting point for a more extensive enquiry into Nanumean society, an enquiry that has taken me in directions not initially foreseen but which I believe are centrally connected to the spirit (and probably much of the substance) of the questions and concerns raised not only by Takitua but by all Nanumeans with whom I talked about Nanumean society.

## Fieldwork

Fieldwork and associated research for this study have taken place over the course of a decade, from early 1973 until mid-1984. Fieldwork itself was done in two periods. The initial visit consisted of 17 months of residence on Nanumea between mid-1973 and early 1975, and an additional 4 months of liaison and archival research during that time within and outside of Tuvalu. The second fieldtrip lasted from December 1983 to June 1984, and included 5 months of residence on Nanumea and a month of liaison and archival research in the Tuvalu capital, Funafuti.

### The First Fieldtrip

My wife, Anne, and I arrived in Tarawa, capital of the then British colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, in May 1973 to begin field research for our respective doctorates in anthropology. Although bound for Nanumea, the northernmost of the Tuvalu (then Ellice) Islands, we had come to the administrative center of the colony in order to meet with government officials and as many people from Nanumea as we could, read government files as background for our work, and wait for a sea shipment of research materials to arrive. After advertising in the local newspaper and on the radio, we hired a young Nanumean woman, Sunema Rongorongo, to accompany us to the island as research assistant and interpreter during our initial months of language learning. After six weeks all was finally ready, and on June 17th we boarded the colony merchant vessel M.V. Nivanga for the voyage southward.

The weather was splendid during the three-day sea journey and our excitement mounted as we crossed the equator and the day of

arrival drew closer. The sign that the Nivanga had reached its destination came as the constant deep throb of the ship's engines stopped about 4 a.m. on the third day. The ship and its complement of deck and cabin passengers and crew were all awake. It was too dark yet to see our island home-to-be, but we could hear the breakers on the reef as the ship drifted a few hundred yards off the lee coast. Even before first light the cargo holds were opened and the winches put into operation since Nivanga would stay at the island just a few hours. Our crates and boxes of household goods and research supplies were loaded into the waiting launches with the other general cargo. Finally dawn came and the boats, now heavily loaded with passengers, set out through the breakers and into the narrow channel which entered the lagoon. Green coconut palms covered the long, low sweep of the island and a few thatched houses could be seen along the ocean shore. There was little sign of people, however, until the launch rounded the turn into the lagoon and came alongside the main part of the village. Now there were milling people and lots of children in the early morning twilight, down to watch the excitement of the monthly boat and see what newcomers and cargo might be brought.

Having written and cabled the island's leaders, we were met and welcomed by the vice-president and president of the island council and shown to a vacant house on the "government station," the area where the island government offices and housing for some government workers are located. Our boxes and crates were carried up to the house by young men, and we sat amongst them with Sunema at our side, and a few curious onlookers nearby.

Although our letters and telegrams to Nanumea requesting permission to reside and carry out research had explained our aims, we found that our purposes and the nature of our work were not clear to people. Our first weeks were thus a period of orientation both for us and for Nanumeans. People were generally welcoming and encouraging about our desires to learn their language and about the Nanumean way of life. But they were also perplexed, and there was considerable speculation about whether we had come to "work for the island" or to "work for the government." Initially this dualistic division made little sense to us, though we noted that people seemed to feel it was better to be there for the sake of the island.<sup>4</sup> We assured people that we definitely were not there to work for the government, which was the truth. We met several times with representatives of the Council, the governing body on the island, and arranged for them to call a general meeting at which all were welcome and to which elders (taumatua) were specifically invited. Here, in the island's community hall, we explained in detail our interests and the aims of our research and asked for people's assistance and guidance. We answered questions at length about our work and were grateful for the positive response we received. Planning was soon begun on a local-style house to be built for us on a site centrally located in the village instead of on the government station. These early dealings were all conducted in English, with our interpreter Sunema translating into Nanumean and back again.

From the beginning, we made a concerted effort to learn Nanumean, for we wished to be able to work without interpreters and wholly in the Nanumean language as quickly as possible. We approached this

goal in a variety of formal and informal ways. At first we taped conversations and listened to them repeatedly with Sunema's assistance. Sunema herself drilled us and brought new words and sample sentences with her when she came to our house each morning. We noted down the new words, sentence forms, odds and ends of language which we felt were useful. Ultimately, though, we learned Nanumean through sheer exposure, for this was a Nanumean-speaking world with only a few individuals who spoke English fluently. After four to five months on Nanumea we were able to work productively alone with informants and no longer used an interpreter; after a year we felt confident in the language. At this point we still missed some of what was said in quick, idiomatic speech between others (that is, not directed to us) but we could grasp the gist of what was missed and ask for an explanation. By the time we left Nanumea in early 1975, over nineteen months after we had landed and after more than seventeen months of actual residence on the island, we were functionally fluent in the language.

The first organized work we did on Nanumea (other than study language, our constant endeavor) was to carry out a household survey and census. We began this slowly, visiting several households a day, sitting with our interpreter and recording the names and ages of household members, their kinship links to one another, school and work experience, marriages, number of children born, and so on. Since this was the basis of a village economic survey too, there were questions dealing with land holdings, sources of income, and related matters. Working with only several households a day became a practical necessity, for as we went on with the census it developed into an introduction to each family on Nanumea and, in keeping with the true

hospitality of the community, usually included an elaborate meal. Since the survey questions were time-consuming, especially when using an interpreter, and since we could only eat so many large meals in any given day, the census took nearly three months to complete. Before it was finished, we moved from the government station into a fine two-story thatched house that the people had built for us,<sup>5</sup> and had begun to achieve a degree of competence in the Nanumean language. The time we had spent getting to know almost all adults in Nanumea, and the large amount of data we gathered in our leisurely census, proved to be an invaluable basis for our other work.

Until our census was completed, in November of 1973, Anne and I had worked closely together. We now began to pursue our separate specialized interests more regularly. Nonetheless, it is difficult for me to consider this first fieldtrip to Nanumea without using the term "we" because Anne and I tended to cooperate as a team, even when working separately. We discussed our work frequently, shared notes, and often attended village events or family activities together. In cases where we were at the same event, we focused our attention on different aspects of it in order to achieve as wide a coverage and as great an understanding as possible.

We continued our work and experienced the boisterous extended Christmas and New Year celebrations before leaving Nanumea in mid-January, 1974, for Suva, Fiji. We had planned this break in our research to allow us to take stock and to work with the rich Tuvalu resources of the Western Pacific High Commission Archives in Suva, Fiji. We spent a month working at the archives and then returned to Funafuti to catch the ship back to Nanumea. A delay in the shipping schedule

kept us at Funafuti for three weeks, but this proved productive in giving us a glimpse of life in Tuvalu's capital and also allowed us to read relevant materials held in government files there. We arrived in Nanumea in early April, having been able to stop briefly at the other Tuvalu islands on the voyage north from Funafuti. An opportunity to visit all of the islands in Tuvalu presented itself in August and September when the M.V. Nivanga was chartered to take a touring party from the United Nations around the group to oversee a referendum on the question of separating Tuvalu from the Gilbert Islands prior to considerations of independence. Anne and I received permission from the Colony government to accompany this tour, and were thus able to enjoy the rare opportunity of visiting each of the nine islands of Tuvalu for two days each.<sup>6</sup>

Arriving back in Nanumea in mid-September, we faced an increasingly hectic pace of work, as we worked more intensively on the genealogies we had been compiling, and much of the month of December was devoted to completing this task. Our goal, largely achieved, was to compile the known genealogy of each family on the island. Finally, in January of 1975 we bade goodbye to our adopted home. We caught the ship to Tarawa, where we again made the rounds of government offices saying our goodbyes and thank yous, and meeting with the sizable Nanumean community there. We left Tarawa on January 15th, 1975. During the next six months we lived in Wellington, New Zealand, where I carried out archival research in the Turnbull Library and the National Archives of New Zealand.



### The Second Fieldtrip

Nearly nine years elapsed before my wife and I were able to make a return visit to Nanumea. By the time we did arrange a second trip our numbers had swelled to four, with the addition of two daughters, Lorien and Claire, to our family. We left Auckland for Tuvalu early in December, 1983, on my first sabbatical leave from the University of Auckland. Although Tuvalu was now an independent Pacific nation, it proved more difficult to get there than it had in colonial days. We were unable to secure bookings on the small plane which flew twice weekly from Suva to Funafuti, and instead caught the M.V. Nivanga at Suva for the four day journey to Tuvalu's capital. After a wait of about one week we again boarded the ship, arriving at Nanumea on December 29th.

A decade had passed, but our arrival was remarkably like that of ten years previously. The Nivanga reached Nanumea before dawn and drifted off the coast, waiting for the first light. Passengers and cargo were loaded together into the launch and entered the calm lagoon in the morning twilight. The boat came ashore at the same small sand beach beside the government station where we had landed originally. This time the island leaders knew us personally and the Island Council was lined up on the beach to shake our hands. We were escorted to the Council office for a meal and then shown to a house nearby. Word had leaked to us during our stay in Funafuti that the island had built us a new house and we were extremely moved by this gesture of good will and concern. While not so centrally located as our previous one, this

new house was closer to neighbors, and was near a white sand beach by the lagoon shore. The location was ideal.

Without the need for concerted language learning or interpreters,<sup>7</sup> we were able to begin productive work immediately. Where our initial trip was of a more general ethnographic nature, we now had more narrowly focused concerns and a more limited time schedule. Anne was to work on a study of fertility and birth practices, while I wanted to probe more deeply into the relationship between current day politics and the traditional chiefly system, as well as the ways in which people were using genealogy and traditional history in their claims to status.

We had arrived in the midst of the Christmas and New Year celebrations, our third time to experience this carnival-like extended period of holiday and release. Because all normal domestic and work routines were in a suspended state, we decided to focus our energy on documenting this annual ritual, which involved playing a traditional ball game (ano), communal fishing, and much feasting and speechmaking. The festivities came to a halt on February 4th, and soon afterward we began a household survey and census. This was designed to be similar to our initial baseline survey of a decade earlier in order to allow us to gauge change and make comparisons. We were able to speed the process up considerably by asking the households not to feed us, but the survey still took almost seven weeks to complete.

Anne and I tended to work separately on this trip, largely as a result of the specialized focus of our individual projects. Where Anne was working almost exclusively with women now and discussing the women's realm, I, conversely was concentrating on issues to do with

politics and the traditional chiefly system, which were topics of greatest concern to men.

Our domestic arrangements were similar to those in our first visit in that we did our own cooking, washing and other tasks in our own independent household.<sup>8</sup> The greatest difference was in our need for childcare if we were to be able to accomplish any work. We hired a young woman, Lisa Billy, to help look after the children during the days. Lorien, nearly seven, attended the primary school, but Claire, just three, did not. Both girls thrived in Nanumea, and by the time our five months were up they were competent speakers of Nanumean.

We left Nanumea on May 28th. The Nivanga took us to Funafuti where we spent an additional three weeks talking with people in the Nanumean community there, working in the Tuvalu National Archives, and discussing our work with government officials. On June 18th, 1984, we left Funafuti, our second research visit over and with plans for a third beginning to take shape.

### Methods

I approached fieldwork in the traditional anthropological stance of participant observer, attempting to fit as unobtrusively into village life as was possible, and to take part in as wide a range of activities as I could. During both trips this meant attending virtually every wedding and funeral that took place, going fishing, working in people's gardens on occasion and going with them to the bush to harvest the produce of the land. It meant attending church regularly as most Nanumeans do, visiting and frequently being visited, interviewing people, chatting, gossiping, receiving gifts and giving them,

and always talking. The talk was about how things are done, and why, and about meanings, speculation, the past, the present, and sometimes, the future. Honigmann (1976) has referred to this eclectic mix as the "personal approach" to fieldwork.

I worked with a wide variety of informants, male and female. For specialized topics such as the chiefly system, canoe making or genealogy, I tended to work with a few key informants, people who were acknowledged experts in the field. During the first visit to Nanumea, I employed up to four Nanumean research assistants to record detailed information on various topics. During the second trip I hired two transcribers, both of whom worked four hours a day at transcribing the voluminous interview material I was recording.

Technical adjuncts to my research included two 35 mm still cameras (one single lens reflex with both wide angle and telephoto lenses, one rangefinder camera), two monaural cassette recorders, and a compass for use in mapping the village. During the first trip I shot a total of forty 36-exposure rolls of black and white film and thirty 36-exposure rolls of color slides. I also filled about forty cassette tapes (60 hours) with spoken and sung material. During the second trip I took sixteen 36-exposure rolls of black and white film and fifteen 36-exposure rolls of color slides. I also filled up 25 cassette tapes, a total of about 37 hours of spoken material of which about 90% is interview and the remainder speeches.

### Funding

Funding in my initial period of field research was provided by the U.S. National Institutes of Health Graduate Traineeship (Grant

GM 1224), administered through the University of California, Berkeley. During the second period of fieldwork I was on sabbatical leave from my position at the University of Auckland and had the additional support of a grant from the University of Auckland Grants Committee.

#### Organization of this Study

Chapter 2 provides a setting for the rest of the study, beginning with a summary of a Nanumean account of the origins of this island which initially bore the archaic name "Namea." The location and physical characteristics of the atoll are described, and basic features of the Nanumean economy outlined. A major section then discusses the history of Nanumean contact with the west, starting with the island's first sighting in 1781. I then present an overview of Nanumean social organization, beginning with demographic facts and moving to consider residence patterns, the role of the church and major social groupings. Basic features of kinship organization are outlined here and the section concludes with a discussion of local government organization. The final section in this chapter looks at Nanumea's relationship to the other communities in Tuvalu, considering questions of intra-cultural variation and similarity.

In Chapter 3 the theme of the founder's importance is introduced by looking at two versions of the charter history of Nanumea. These represent the opposing views of two influential elders in the community, individuals who are central figures in the contemporary political arena. The two accounts, each claiming to provide a constitution for Nanumean society, are examined in detail and their similarities and differences discussed.

The two versions of the "constitution" presented in Chapter 3 each seek to define aspects of Nanumea's chieftainship. Chapter 4 takes up this topic, exploring the nature of this key institution. It begins with a puzzling incident which happened soon after I arrived in Nanumea in 1973, the dissolution of the Council of Chiefs. Seeking to understand this abrupt act, I trace the decline of Nanumea's chieftainship and discuss forces which have been at play since mission and colonial powers began to intrude upon the scene a century ago. Returning again to the topic of the Council of Chiefs, I consider its disbanding and later reestablishment as the most recent in a long series of events affecting the institution. From this base the chapter moves to consider the nature of the Nanumean chieftainship by examining traditional investiture ceremonies and the importance attached to chiefly behavior. It concludes with a discussion of the role of Nanumea's high chief as an intermediary between this community and the powers of the universe.

Chapter 5 complements the discussion of the chiefly descent groups by focusing on the other major corporate group in traditional society, non-chiefly descent groups known as kopiti. I begin by outlining my efforts in trying to understand the nature of these groups in traditional society, and discuss the views of one Nanumean elder whose exceptional memory makes him a resource all of Nanumea draws on. The chapter goes on to consider how these groups change in time, and their association with land tenure and the community's traditional gods. It concludes with a discussion of the flexibility of these patrilineal groups, which allows people to maintain membership in more than one of them, and with a consideration of the complementary nature of the non-chiefly and chiefly descent groups.

Nanumea's community hall proves to be the public forum where virtually all island-wide events of significance take place, and where spokesmen from chiefly and non-chiefly families contend for positions of authority. In Chapter 6 I explore the importance of this "House of Words" in Nanumean society, beginning with a description and a brief discussion of its history. A typical gathering in the hall provides a basis from which to consider its major spatial divisions, and links between customary behavior and basic values. Turning to its prime use as a place of speechmaking, I next explore people's comments on the use of the hall and the importance placed on it as a forum for competition in words. This leads to a consideration of key metaphors in Nanumean society which associate males with the core of the household and with the physical structure of the house. I extend this to demonstrate what I see as an important association which makes the community hall pre-eminently the "house of men." Harking back to Chapters 4 and 5, I next consider traditional seating places in the hall, mapping out patterns of seating of both the chiefly and non-chiefly groups. From this I move to the final section of this chapter, which draws together from the preceding discussion a wealth of associations entailed in Nanumea's community hall, to demonstrate that it serves as a social map, charting out and exemplifying key elements in Nanumean thinking about the order of society.

Chapter 7 builds upon the discussion of the importance of the community hall begun in Chapter 6, by considering two issues which are at stake in many public uses of the hall: legitimacy--the establishment of a secure foundation in public opinion from which to speak in the community hall--and knowledge, its importance in Nanumea, and

ways in which people conceptualize and use it. Categories of knowledge are considered, and the discussion moves to the importance of narratives and family ledger books as repositories of valued information. This leads to an examination of the significance Nanumeans place on the key concept of being able to supply "proof" for knowledge one claims, and to a look at major types of proofs or "verifications." Though the chapter focuses on the importance of asserting knowledge as a basis for claiming authority, it concludes by considering a case of one man's efforts to bridge contending factions represented by the elders Tepou and Takitua by offering a compromise position.

Although the founder and his importance are featured in many contexts throughout the book, this theme occupies center stage in Chapter 8, the final chapter in the study. The title "Bones of Tefolaha" refers both to the founder's skull, which was once a highly venerated religious relic, and to the remains of Tefolaha, which Nanumeans searched for in the 1970's. I begin by considering the many relics of Tefolaha mentioned by early observers, and move from this to a discussion of the role of the founder as one of Nanumea's chief gods and probable associations between this god and the major plant product of Nanumea, the coconut. While Nanumea's other pagan deities have been essentially banished from positions of any contemporary importance, Tefolaha has endured, made his accommodation with the church, and emerged as a secular patron of the community. A focal point of the chapter is the discussion of a remarkable episode in the mid-1970's in which Nanumeans sought to locate the bones of the founder in an effort to validate their claims to be the descendents of this illustrious man. I end the chapter and the book with a brief account of



an incident in 1984 which crisply highlights the enduring nature of the close association between Tefolaha and his twentieth century heirs.

#### On Orthography

Although Tuvaluan authorities have recently made an effort to standardize the spelling of Tuvaluan, following similar attempts made several times during the past few decades by colonial and mission officials, there is, as yet, no fully accepted and utilized system of spelling either Nanumean or the other Tuvaluan dialects. The alphabet is straightforward and, with the addition of the letter h for Nanumea and the neighboring island of Nanumaga, is the one introduced by London Missionary Society missionaries over a century ago. The segmental phonemes of Nanumean are: vowels [a e i o u]; consonants [p t k f h s v m n g l] (cf. Ranby 1973).<sup>9</sup>

A chief difficulty in standardizing orthography throughout Tuvalu lies in variation in the use of double (or long) consonants. These are common in most Tuvalu dialects, including Nanumea, but absent or rare in others (such as Niutao). Long consonants appear to have originated from a historical process whereby some unstressed vowels between identical consonants have been lost, leaving a "double" consonant (cf. Biggs 1971; also Milner 1958, who refers to them as aspirated consonants). A good example of this process, though not of the phonemic contrast it often produces, is the word fakakai, "village." In Niutao it is pronounced as three syllables, "fa-ka-kai." In Nanumea, and most of the rest of Tuvalu, the word has just two syllables and a double k: fakkai.

In Nanumea there are many cases in which a word with a double consonant stands in phonemic contrast to an otherwise identical form which has a single consonant. Thus, fano ("go," singular), but ffano ("wash hands"); or hoko ("just," "only"), but hhoko ("be connected"; or "viscous"). A further feature of Nanumean is the existence of internal variability. Where some speakers always use the double consonant form (hhoko), others, particularly the elderly, will sometimes substitute the longer reduplicated form (hohoko). Even in this, people do not seem consistent and usage may depend on idiosyncratic factors and to some extent on a feeling for "style." I have noted many examples of this type of variation in taped conversations and speeches, but have not explored it fully with informants. There may well be patterns in operation of which I have not yet become aware.

Throughout the years there have been a variety of directives about how to handle spelling of words with double consonants (e.g., Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony 1962, 1963). They have been spelled with an apostrophe to indicate the deleted vowel (giving fak'kai for our Nanumean example above), in full reduplicated form (fakakai) even though most speakers do not pronounce them this way, or with a doubled letter to indicate the doubled consonant (giving fakkai). This latter convention is not widely accepted, seemingly on aesthetic grounds, and was explicitly rejected by the officially constituted Tuvalu Language Board in Funafuti in a directive issued in 1980 (Tuvalu Language Board 1980). While this circular abolishes "the double use of consonants in the graphic form of the Tuvalu language," it does not specify how double consonants are to be indicated, or if they are to be noted at all.

Like consonants, vowels can be either short or long. Most written Tuvaluan ignores this distinction and readers rely on their knowledge of the context to make clear the meaning of words which might be ambiguous.

My own solution to the problem of orthography in Tuvaluan words and phrases in the book, and in the texts in Appendix I, has been to indicate both double vowels and double consonants by doubling the appropriate letter, believing that for the sake of completeness and accuracy it is best to include this information rather than omit it. In the texts or in quotations I have taken the spoken word as my guide. When full reduplicated forms appear on the tapes or were used by informants these are written out in full. I have used g to represent the velar nasal phoneme (the approximate sound of ng in English "singer"), as preferred by the Tuvalu Language Board.

## NOTES

1. In order to keep the discussion of these very concrete issues as "real" as possible, I have used people's actual names in this study, rather than pseudonyms. I discussed this with a number of Nanumean elders during the course of my work in Nanumea, and all felt it was best to use people's real names. In cases where I have felt that the discussion touches particularly sensitive issues, I have used only initials.
2. Lake's and Laxton's manuscript notes on Nanumean genealogy and a version of the Tefolaha narrative collected by District Officer R.G. Roberts in October 1953 were on file at the Western Pacific Archives (formerly Western Pacific High Commission Archives), Suva, Fiji, during my visit there in 1974. Subsequently the various holdings of the archives were dispersed to the relevant Pacific countries. These materials should now be held in the National Archives of Tuvalu, Funafuti. See bibliography entries for Laxton 1954 and Roberts 1953.
3. On the morning of May 9, 1984, a month after this was written, Takitua died at his home in Nanumea. My wife and I attended the wake, burial service, and funeral feasts held for several evenings thereafter.
4. This distinction between the island (fenua) and the government (maaloo), a fundamental one in Nanumean thinking, figures prominently in people's discussion of the role of the chieftainship (see Chapter 4).
5. The house was built as a communal work project of the village, with Anne and me contributing funds to allow food to be bought from the village store to provide meals to feed the workers. After our departure the house, which was located on communally owned land near the primary school, was used to house the school headmaster.
6. Normally the cargo and passenger vessel remains at each island for just a few hours before moving on. This makes it extremely difficult to obtain any useful comparative information, or even in-depth impressions of intra-cultural differences in Tuvalu, unless one is able to remain for a month and wait for the next ship. Our opportunity was thus especially fortuitous. The referendum tour has been described from the perspective of the U.N. party (United Nations 1974), a historian (Macdonald 1975a), briefly by my wife and myself (Chambers and Chambers 1975), and by the Tuvaluan government representative who acted as official liaison between the United Nations party and the island people at each island (Isala 1983a).
7. During our nine-year absence from Tuvalu, we had managed to remain in touch with the Nanumean language to some extent by

our continuing work with our materials from the first trip, and by occasional contacts with Tuvaluans overseas. I spent a considerable amount of time transcribing and translating tape recordings of conversations and narratives, which helped greatly. On our second trip we were pleasantly surprised to find that it took us only a few weeks to regain our previous level of fluency, and from then on we began to build on that solid foundation. During the second field trip we both worked from the beginning without interpreters or assistants.

8. The only exception to this, on both trips, was the carrying of our drinking and bathing water from the island cisterns or wells. We arranged for someone to help us with this on a daily basis throughout both stays.
9. Ranby omits [s] from his list of Nanumean phonemes, apparently assuming that Nanumean [h] always replaces the [s] of most other Tuvaluan dialects. However, [s] is used in Nanumea not only in many borrowed words, but also in personal names and in a few other words which appear to be purely Nanumean.

## Chapter 2

"NAMEA": AN ISLAND SOCIETY

"This island was formed by two women, Pai and Vau. They came here with their baskets of sand and formed Nanumea and Lakena. They would leave some sand and an islet would grow up. At that time there were no plants on the island."

## Nanumean Traditional Narrative

"At 3:30 we saw from aloft an island, low and tree covered, not very large, which bore to the SSW... distant 5 to 6 leagues...I judge it to be at Lat. 5°35' [south]...and about 3 leagues in circumference."

J.A. Vasquez, first known westerner  
to sight Nanumea, 6 May 1781

Nanumea atoll lies at the northern end of the chain of atolls and reef islands which make up the nation of Tuvalu in western Polynesia. Its nearly one thousand inhabitants live for the most part in a single village only a few yards from the blue Pacific or from the island's placid lagoon. Gazing out to sea from the village shores one sees only a thin line of the blue ocean. The austere horizon offers little to look at except sea and clouds. The nearest island neighbor is over forty miles away, while further southward lie the other islands and atolls of Tuvalu, days away by ship and probably weeks away when the voyaging canoe was the means of inter-island travel. This chapter provides a general introduction to Nanumea, beginning with the Nanumean view of the origins of the atoll and then moving to discuss the location

and physical features of the island, contact history and relationships with the other islands of Tuvalu, and some basic features of social organization.

### Origins

How Nanumea came to be, particularly how its traditional social and political groups originated and have developed, is a theme which is discussed in later chapters. There are competing and sometimes contradictory views of some of these issues, which makes it impossible to summarize succinctly the Nanumean view. Traditional historical accounts begin, however, with a series of events about which there is little, if any, disagreement, and these will be recounted here. From a Nanumean perspective, the earliest figures in myth-history are two women, Pai and Vau.<sup>1</sup> These two women came to the area where Nanumea lies and emptied into the sea baskets of sand they had brought with them. Out of the sea was thus formed the reef base and the substantial islet of Nanumea, and on this barren sandbank the two women set up residence. It is not stated how long they lived in Nanumea, but it was long enough to have built themselves a house by some means, and, since houses require timber and materials for thatch, long enough for vegetation to have been established and grow.

Nanumeans do not usually ask questions of the "how" and "why" variety in reference to the story of Pai and Vau. Why they came, for instance, and what they had in mind in establishing a new island home, is not discussed. Similarly, how they came is seldom mentioned, though some people say they came by canoe and others that they had the ability to fly, as was common in ancient times. Most narrators add that the

two women came from a land called Hauai, a name that is usually equated today with the state of Hawaii.<sup>2</sup>

Pai and Vau enjoyed their solitude for some time but one day their isolation was ended when a man ventured onto the island. Tefolaha, an adventurer and warrior from the islands of Samoa and Tonga to the south, discovered the island while out sailing single-handed in search of new places and new adventures. He came ashore, walking around and inspecting what he took to be an uninhabited place. Before long he came to the house where Pai and Vau lived. They were inside. Tefolaha, bold and assertive, asked what they were doing on his island. Incredulous, Pai and Vau replied that it was their island, that they had formed it and that he should leave. Tefolaha proposed a deal. If the two knew his name, he would leave. If he knew theirs, they would go and the island would be his. The two agreed and returned to their house. While they sat there weaving a mat or skirt, Tefolaha carried out his plans for acquiring this little island. Thus far he had appeared to them in his ordinary human nature. He now shifted to his aitu, spirit, nature which rendered him invisible. He went up to the attic part of the women's house above where they were sitting and proceeded to lower a small spider-like creature on a web.<sup>3</sup> As this came down above the head of one of the women the other saw it dangling and cried out, "Pai, Pai, watch out for that thing there above your head!" Tefolaha pulled the little animal back up, moved to where the second woman was sitting and lowered it again. Again it was seen, and the first woman now cried, "Vau, Vau, look out for that thing there above your head!" Satisfied, Tefolaha pulled it back up again, came down from the attic and changed himself back into his human nature. He walked up to the



two women and said, "Well, what is my name?" "We don't know," they replied. "All right," he said, "You are Pai and you are Vau." The two women were crestfallen and in tears, but proceeded to leave the island to Tefolaha as had been agreed.

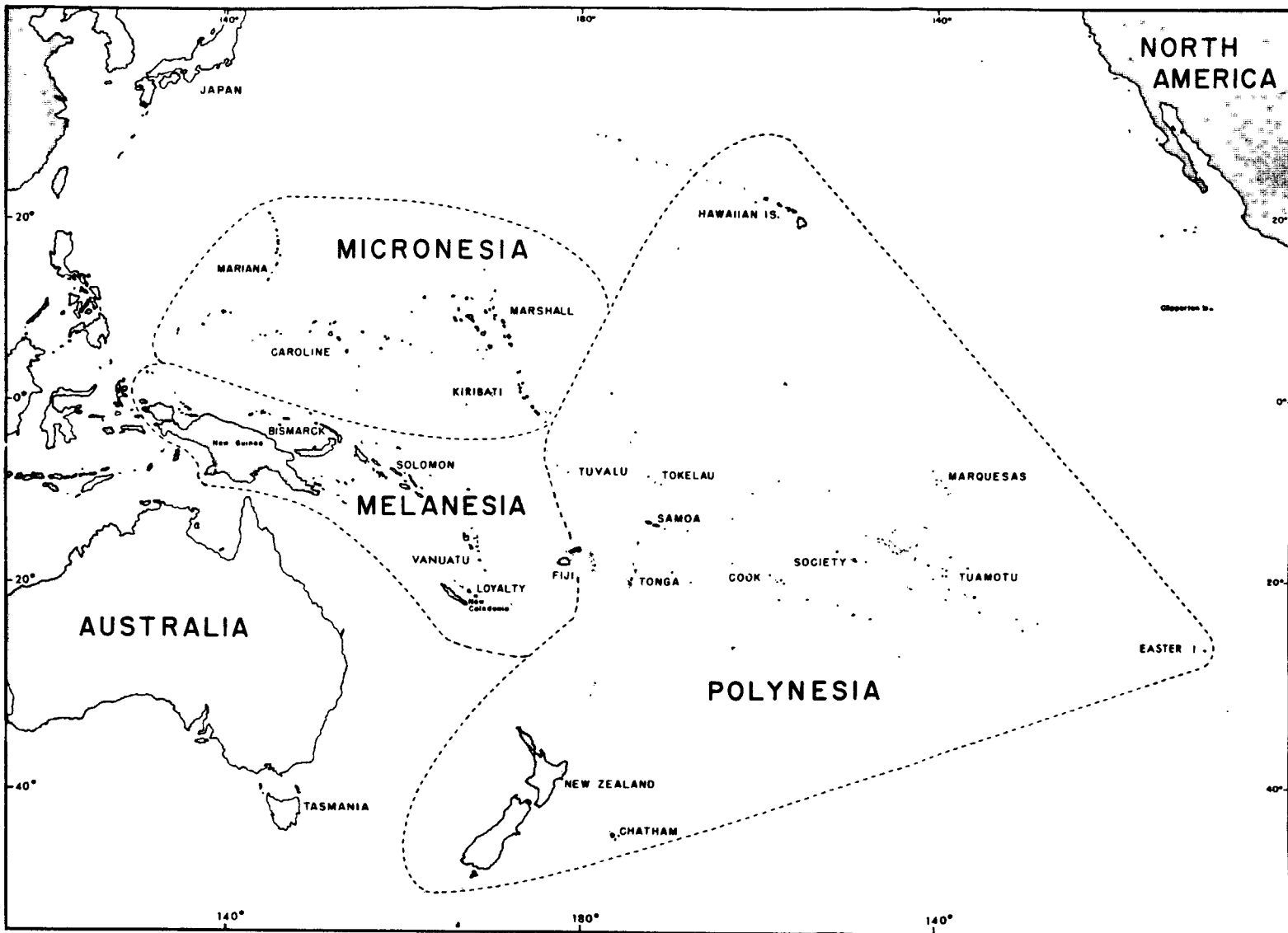
They picked up the things they had originally brought with them, their baskets of sand and a long stick (loulou) used for picking breadfruit and other produce from tall trees. As the two left the island they had called "Namea,"<sup>4</sup> sand continued to spill from their baskets, creating two more islets in addition to the one they had originally made. The first of these was the tiny islet of Lafogaki toward the center of the lagoon. The second was the more substantial islet of Lakena at the northwest end of the atoll. As they went, their picking stick dragged along the windward ocean reef flat, making a long indentation on the reef that can be seen today. Some people say that the two women went on north to the Gilbert Islands (some adding that they formed these islands much as they had Nanumea), while others say it is not known where they went. In any event, they did not return to the island they had made and named, and henceforth it belong to Tefolaha<sup>5</sup> and his descendants.

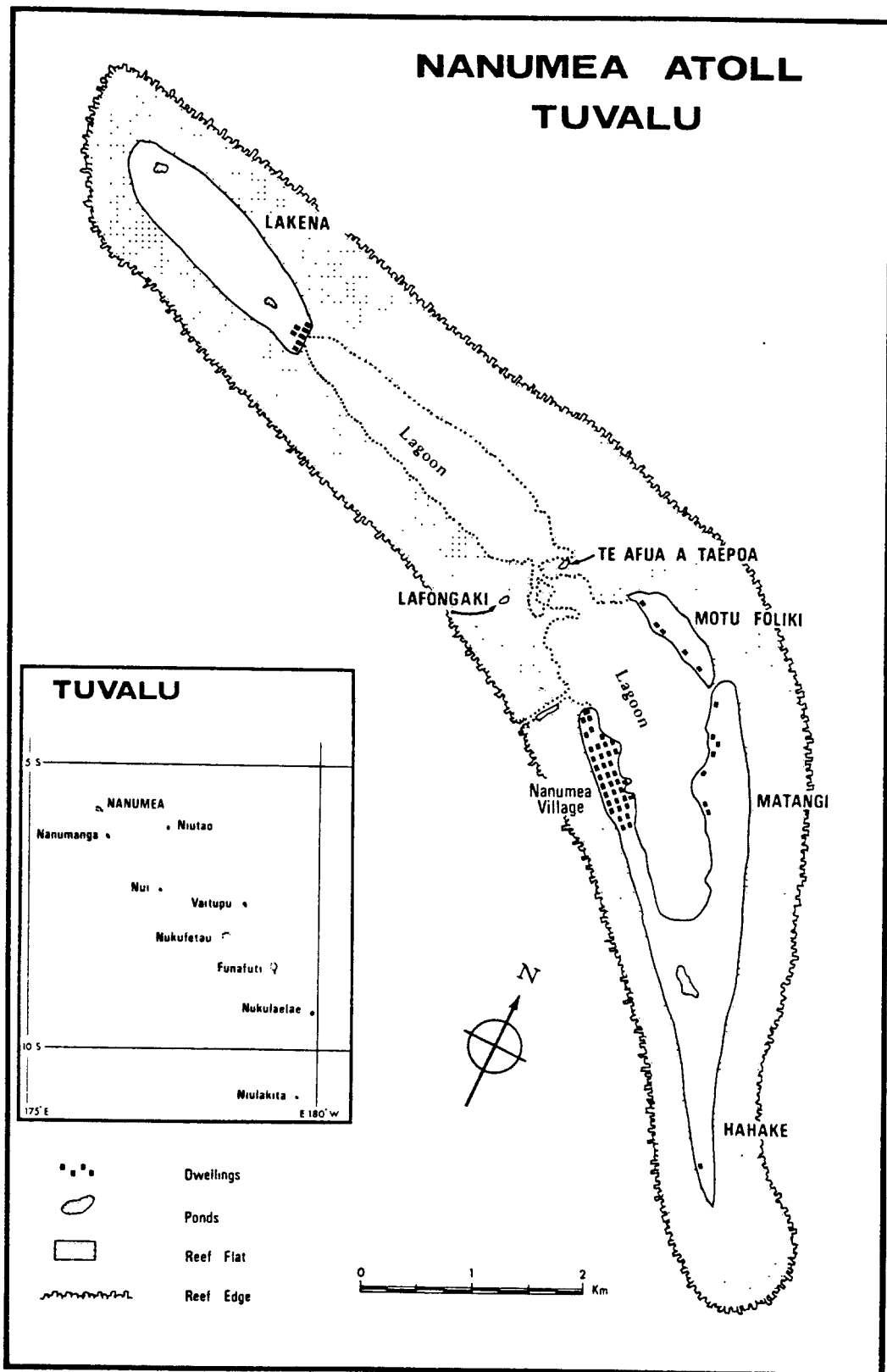
The story of the later comings and goings of Tefolaha, and of his population of the island and the formation of social and political groupings, is taken up in Chapter 3. Here we will continue to focus on background material and this requires that we consider the location and some of the other characteristics of the island that Pai and Vau made.

## Setting and Environment

Nanumea lies in the southwestern Pacific near the intersection of the equator and the International Date Line at 5°39' south latitude, and 176°08' east longitude (see Map 2-1 and Map 2-2). The island is an atoll, and is perhaps somewhat atypical in its small overall size and narrow configuration. It is just over 13 kilometers in length (8.2 miles) and about 2.7 kilometers wide at its widest point (1.7 miles). These overall dimensions include the fairly wide reef flat and of course the extensive central lagoon, so that the actual land area of Nanumea is just 3.8 km<sup>2</sup> (1.46 mi<sup>2</sup>). This is distributed in three main islets including Nanumea proper, Te Motu Foliki, and Lakena plus two minor islets, Lafogaki and Te Afua a Taepoa (Map 2-2).

Except for its unusual shape, Nanumea is fairly representative of the Pacific atoll environment, about which there is a considerable literature (e.g., Wiens 1962, Thomas 1965, Catala 1957, Alkire 1978). Like other atolls Nanumea is low, not more than a few meters above the mean high tide level (excluding vegetation), and is formed entirely of coralline rock. Its base consists of a reef of coral and other similar material extending down hundreds of meters into the ocean depths and resting, ultimately, on a volcanic bedrock foundation. At sea level a barrier reef, widest on the windward (north and northeast) side of the island, breaks the force of the ocean waves. The reef flat is generally submerged at high tide, but in many places is dry at low tide. Nanumea's lagoon is shallow (20 to 30 meters deep) and generally has a sandy bottom, though there are coral rock outcrops





Mapped by Keith and Anne Chambers. Drawing by Robin Mita.

which rise to the surface in some places. The lagoon provides a usually calm waterway for canoe travel between all parts of the atoll, but has no deep passage to the sea to admit ships. A small boat channel off the northwest end of the main village was blasted through the reef by United States forces during World War II, and today is used by motorboats when ferrying cargo or passengers to and from the island and the small Tuvalu cargo vessel which calls approximately monthly. The passage is also used by Nanumean canoes going to or coming in from ocean fishing.

The island's climate is oceanic, humid and tropical. The average daily high temperature is 31°C (88°F), and the low about 25°C (77°F). Relative humidity is usually in the range of 80-85%. Over the 29-year period from 1946 to 1974, rainfall averaged 272 cm. (107 in.) annually, with a high during this period of 420 cm. (165 in.) in 1953 and a low of 95 cm. (37 in.) in 1971. In 1983 rainfall was considerably higher than the 1953 high, with 455 cm. (179 in.) falling (New Zealand Meteorological Service records for 1947-1970; Tuvalu Weather Service; personal observation; and rainfall records reproduced in A. Chambers 1975).

The Nanumean year can be divided into two seasons, the "normal" period from about March through November and the "storm" (or wet) season from December through February. Trade winds usually blow gently from the northeast (and sometimes the north or the east) during the normal season and make the Nanumean climate a comfortable one. During the southern winter storm period, however, the winds become more variable, with occasional storms from the west or southwest. This can be a time of heavy rain and of potentially destructive storms.

Although Nanumea lies out of the hurricane zone, the westerly storms are often severe enough to disrupt life for several days at a time and to fell trees and sometimes older and less substantial buildings. Though these storms effectively demonstrate to the island's inhabitants the powers of nature and the tiny size of their atoll, they are seldom of catastrophic proportions.

A more serious threat to human life (particularly in the pre-contact past) are the periodic droughts which strike the atoll. Although Nanumea is a relatively "wet" atoll, receiving more rainfall and supporting a larger variety of plant life than the very dry atolls of southern Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert Islands) or the northern Marshall Islands, it is nevertheless an environment restricted by its rainfall. In 1974, for instance, during the period of time my wife and I were resident on the island, there was a drought for the first five months of the year. By May there was virtually no water left in the island cisterns and bathing, cooking and drinking water all had to come from the least brackish of the wells. That drought broke suddenly, and it was not long before the cisterns were replenished. Had it gone on for a few more months, however, the ground water would have turned increasingly saline and things would have begun to reach serious (not merely uncomfortable) proportions once the coconut crop, and particularly green drinking nut production, was affected.

The atoll soil is composed primarily of calcium carbonate and the detrium of plant humus, and is low in trace elements and organic material. The combination of poor soil, scarce and somewhat saline ground water, and the prevalence of wind-borne salt spray all limit the number of plant species which can survive. In 1974 there were just

87 species growing on Nanumea and of these 55 were relatively insignificant grasses and small herbs (A. Chambers 1975:170-3). Aside from a few recently introduced ornamentals, Nanumea's vegetation consists of the same plants that are predominant on most Pacific atolls (cf. Wiens 1961). A bush vegetation composed of coconut, pandanus and such salt-tolerant shrubs and trees as Scaevola taccada, Meserschmidia argentea, and Morinda citrifolia covers most of the island, while in the most sheltered areas large trees such as Calophyllum inophyllum, Pisonia grandis, Hernandia peltata and Cordia subcordata can be found. Breadfruit (Artocarpus atilis) seems to thrive only in the village areas.

The most important food plants include the coconut, breadfruit, banana, and both taro (Colocasia esculenta) and what has sometimes been called "atoll taro" or "swamp taro" (Cyrtosperma chamissonis). Although Colocasia taro (Tuvaluan talo) may have existed in pre-contact times, it never has been as important a dietary staple as the more hardy Cyrtosperma (pulaka). Both plants are grown in rectangular pits dug down to the water table and laboriously composted with leaves to produce, over a period of years, a pale brown soil capable of growing crops. Coconuts are often planted, but they also spring up from fallen mature nuts. At least seven varieties of pandanus are propagated from cuttings to yield edible fruits. The vegetable portion of people's diet is occasionally varied by the addition of a few types of wild berries and leaves gathered from the bushlands.

Protein comes mostly from fish. Fishing skills, mainly the domain of men, are well developed both for the exploitation of smaller lagoon fish and of the larger species caught off the ocean coast.

Shellfish are gathered from the shallow reef areas, mostly by women and children. Domesticated chickens and pigs are eaten mainly at family and island feasts. Noddy birds netted in the bush constitute another local delicacy.

As in many Pacific societies, imported foods play an increasingly important part in the Nanumean diet today. Yet despite a growing reliance on such imports as rice, flour, sugar and tea, locally produced foods continue to constitute the bulk of the Nanumean diet. An intensive survey (A. Chambers 1974, 1983) showed that in 1974, locally produced fish and meat were eaten at 94% of all meals that contained animal proteins, while imported equivalents were eaten at only 6% of all meals. Local starch foods were found to be eaten about twice as often as imported starches such as rice and flour. Traditional obligations to share foodstuffs as needed with kinsmen continue to be important today and extensive inter-household reciprocity results in fairly similar consumption patterns for all segments of the community, in spite of differences in household productive abilities.

Other aspects of the contemporary economic system show a similar fusion of traditional practices and the cash-oriented opportunities brought by western contact. There is a subsistence bias to production activities, with traditional methods of food production, house and canoe building and a variety of crafts dominating the productive activities of both men and women. Nonetheless, money has become vital, both for the purchase of imported goods from the cooperative store and to finance community projects. The most important source of cash is the money that overseas workers remit back to their families. These work opportunities, mostly for men, include jobs on



the phosphate mining island of Nauru, on overseas merchant ships, and in the Tuvalu capital of Funafuti. Local employment opportunities are extremely limited and copra production provides one of the few sources of income for Nanumeans at home. Copra production is adversely affected by droughts and by declines in world demand for copra and, even under the most favorable conditions, it provides a low rate of return for labor. Though Nanumeans have clearly acquired a taste for imported goods, many are wary of becoming overly dependent on them. People are also aware that their traditional exchange practices based on sharing conflict with and are threatened by the spread of introduced market exchange practices. Though some buying and selling between community members does occur, social pressure continues to limit the type and amount of items sold as well as the real "profitability" of this exchange style (see A. Chambers 1983).

In sum, Nanumeans enjoy a way of life in which a variety of "traditional" elements have been amalgamated with others derived from contact with predominantly western outsiders. Sometimes this synthesis has originated from the desires and choices made by local residents. Perhaps more often, it has occurred because of the changes imposed by outsiders. Let us now consider briefly the contact history of Nanumea, focusing on the persons and influences that seem to have had a major effect in shaping the society Tefolaha founded.

Explorers, Whalers, Missionaries, and Colonial  
Administrators

The earliest known European contact with Tuvalu took place in 1568 when Mendaña sighted the island of Nui, found it to be well-populated, and tried to make contact with the islanders who paddled out in their canoes toward his ships (Maude 1968:53-59). But the first substantial interaction between Europeans and Tuvalu islanders appears not to have taken place until 1781, when the Spaniard Francisco Maurelle tried to land at Niutao. The islanders, painted strikingly in black, gave him a friendly reception, came aboard his ship and, since the water was too deep for him to anchor, tried without success to tow it toward shore. Unable to land, Maurelle sailed on and the next day sighted but did not contact Nanumea (Maurelle 1799, Maude 1968:93-4). (The brief entry made by his chief pilot, Jose Antonio Vasquez, serves as epigraph for this chapter). The narrative of Maurelle's voyage,<sup>6</sup> with detailed accounts of his reception in Tonga but only meager notice of the existence of San Augustine (as he had named Nanumea), was published in a widely read and translated volume of the voyages of La Perouse.

It was not long, then, before his discovery was known to mariners by being included in the most authoritative set of navigational charts then available for the South Seas, Aaron Arrowsmith's "Chart of the Pacific Ocean" (Arrowsmith 1798). Here, the name anglicized to St. Augustine, it appears along with the only other island shown in the Tuvalu region, it too named by Maurelle, "El Gran Cocal" i.e., Niutao). To navigators, and to those in Europe who read tales

of voyages in the great South Seas, Nanumea had become an entity, known, if just barely, to be tree-covered, low and perhaps three leagues in circumference. If Europeans had no reason yet to suspect that people lived on this island nor, probably, did Nanumeans have any reason to know that Europeans existed or that a Spaniard had named their land after a Catholic saint.

Twenty-eight years after Maurelle and Vasquez had left the island receding in the distance, Nanumea was discovered and named again, this time by an Englishman. This brief encounter, in the trading brig Elizabeth under Captain Patterson in 1809, was a fleeting event similar in nature to the earlier sighting. The Elizabeth was on a voyage from Australia to China when the island was seen (Purdy 1814:53). The vessel sailed close enough for Patterson to confirm that there were two main islets (each of which was to receive a separate name) though not, apparently, near enough to see what must have been the well-populated village.

Notice of the "discovery" was published in the Naval Chronicle (vol. 24, 1810:313), and almost echoes the entry in the Vasquez logbook:

Taswell's Isle, west side, lat. 5°37'S. long by Sun and Moon and chronometer 176°9'34"E. Sherson's Isle, about S.S.E. of the above...more extensive. These islands appear well wooded, very low, and cannot be seen above six or seven leagues in the clearest weather from the mast-head; they lie in a N.W. and S.E. direction.

The primary purpose of this publication was to assist mariners, yet it actually resulted in some confusion. Whether Patterson recognized that Taswell's and Sherson's isles were in fact two islets of a single atoll, or simply felt they were two independent islands separated by

a few miles, is not clear. The two names, however, and an apparent misprint in the notice giving the distance between them as "four or five leagues" instead of four or five miles soon led to the interpretation that two islands were involved. For several decades Nanumea was as often called Taswell's Island on the charts as it was St. Augustine, and Nanumaga, nearly forty miles to the southeast, became Sherson's Island.<sup>7</sup> Nanumea had yet another name, but little more had been added to European knowledge of the island.

Fifteen years were to pass before the next known sighting. If previous records were essentially one-dimensional, charting a spot with some trees, this one marked a quantum jump in what was known, at least by those who read French journals of exploration. On the morning of May 10, 1824, the corvette Coquille, which was on a French government exploring expedition under the command of Captain Duperrey, coasted along the leeward side of Nanumea with the express purpose of examining Maurelle's San Augustine Island. The vessel came to within about a mile of the south-western part of the island and an officer aboard produced a map (Duperrey 1827:15, and plate 21) which shows both major islets, with a village indicated on the south-eastern tip of the western islet (Lakena) but none shown on the main islet (Nanumea). If the Coquille slackened sail for the artist to complete his drawing it was not for long, for a canoe with several people from the island attempting to reach the ship was unable to catch up with it (Lesson 1839:446).

At least three other naval exploring expeditions visited portions of Tuvalu in the period between 1820 and 1845. While none saw Nanumea, all had significant contact with some of the other islands

in Tuvalu and contributed to growing outside awareness of this collection of atolls. Inasmuch as there was inter-island contact by sailing canoe between the atolls, one can surmise that some word of the visits of these expeditions began to reach even relatively isolated spots like Nanumea in the north. In 1820, a Russian expedition consisting of the sloops Otkrytie (Discovery) and Blagonamerenny (Good Intent) led jointly by Captain M.N. Vassiliev and Captain G.S. Shismarev visited Nukufetau. Its detailed report (Lazarev 1950:163-68) describes what was apparently the first contact between the people of Nukufetau and Europeans (see Chambers and Munro 1980:182-84 for an English translation). In 1825, two Dutch vessels, the sloop of war Pollux, and the Maria Reyersberger called briefly at Nui in the northern part of Tuvalu, sent a boat ashore and met with less than a cordial welcome (cf. Moll 1826; Broeze 1975). And in 1841 the United States Exploring Expedition, under the overall command of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes (Wilkes 1845) called at Funafuti and Nukufetau and sighted Vaitupu, Niutao, and Nanumaga. The report of the expedition's ethnologist and linguist, Horatio Hale (1846), describes the peaceful reception that the two vessels (the Peacock and the Flying Fish) met at the first two islands, as well as some aspects of people's appearance and the items acquired for the ethnographic collections, as well as a vocabulary list.<sup>8</sup> The northern islands of Tuvalu were not contacted, though both Niutao and Nanumaga were sighted, and Captain Hudson of the Peacock spent considerable time taking position fixes at the latter island, thinking it was a "discovery."<sup>9</sup>

The vessels that most frequently were to ply Tuvalu waters in the half century following Duperrey's visit were, however, the

Yankee whalers. Whale oil, particularly that from sperm whales, was increasingly sought after for use in heating, lubrication and lighting, and whaling ships, some from Britain but most from the New England coast of North America, began cruising through Tuvalu beginning about 1821. A chief factor in this development was the discovery of the "On-the-Line Ground," a zone where whales were plentiful, extending from the Line Islands in the east to Kiribati and Tuvalu in the west (see Map 2-1). A typical pattern which many whalers working this region followed was to circulate in a counter-clockwise direction. The grounds to the north of New Zealand and the Tasman Sea were worked during the southern summer months and then the ships would move back north, either eastward to the "Off-Shore Grounds" along the South American coast or keeping more to the west and heading toward the equator. In both cases it was then common to move along the equator to the vicinity of the atolls of Kiribati and Tuvalu (i.e., "on-the-line ground"), before heading south to New Zealand again (cf. Munro 1982:30 ff.).

It is estimated that "some 300 American whalers must have been at sea at any one time from 1820-1835 and some 600 from 1835-60" (Wace and Lovett 1973:14). While a great percentage of these made their way to the various Pacific whaling grounds, it seems that Tuvalu waters were not a rich source of whales and that comparatively few whaling vessels visited the region. This is particularly interesting in light of the characterization of Tuvalu in some sources as a favored area for whalers (see Maude 1968:121 and Sanderson 1958:xxvi-xxvii, 238). In a painstaking survey of the surviving whaling log-books<sup>10</sup> and of secondary source material, Doug Munro has recently

shown that despite this "reputation" as a significant whaling area, Tuvalu may in fact have received as few as 200 whaling vessels on cruises during the heyday of whaling from about 1821 to 1865 (Munro 1982:36-45). If this figure is accepted, then of the many hundreds of vessels at sea at a given time, something like three were in Tuvalu waters each year and close enough to sight one or another of the Tuvalu islands.

Yet even this low figure gives no real indication of whaling "contact" with Tuvalu, or at least with Tuvaluans, for most of these ships made no effort to land. As Munro (1982) describes, they avoided these small islands for several reasons. Not only did atolls have no source of fresh water, but landing at most of them was hazardous since there was no protected anchorage. To get ashore, the whalers had to row through treacherous breakers and then to pull their boats over the reef to shore. There was also little produce to be had except for coconuts. Finally, potential problems with people loomed large as well. One of these problems was that a whaling captain chanced losing crew members through desertion by making landfall. And finally, at least in the northern and least visited portion of Tuvalu, the intentions of the islanders were not known and this induced some hesitation in landing.

It is not surprising, then, that in only a small portion of whaling cruises that passed through Tuvalu waters was there contact with shore. Munro (1982) located logbooks for 53 cruises in which a sighting of Tuvalu Island was mentioned. Of these, in only eight cases did a party from the ship go ashore. In a further eleven cases there was contact between the ship and islanders who came out to it in

canoes. My own search through records has turned up three additional logs of whalers which had contact with Tuvalu. Table 2-1 presents information on those whaling ships from the above total which are known at least to have sighted Nanumea.

Of the 23 sightings tabulated here, almost half were made before 1850. In not one of these logs is there any mention of contact with Nanumeans. The island, sometimes identified as St. Augustine and sometimes as either Taswell's or Sherson's Isle, is merely recorded in the log as being in sight. People are not mentioned, nor was any effort apparently expended in attempting to land. In a few cases, for instance the Olympia in October of 1850 and the Ganges a few days later, the vessels would come a bit closer and report that they "stood along the leeward side of it" (i.e., the southwestern coast when the usual tradewinds were blowing). But even in these cases the vessels may have been miles from shore. One can presume, I think, that if the low-lying island were visible from the ship, then the ship would likewise have been visible from the island. Sails on the horizon, beginning perhaps with Duperrey's 1824 visit, would have become familiar sights to Nanumeans--there may have been from one to three vessels visible in the distance in the course of a normal year during the next fifty years. Yet it was not until 1853 that there was any communication between these transient and unknown visitors, and Nanumeans.

In a visit most uncharacteristic of other whalers, Captain Henry Pease of the Nantucket whaler Planter spent three days ashore in Nanumea in 1853. The detailed account of his stay is, in fact, the only pre-missionary description of a stay ashore in Tuvalu (Pease 1854, 1962, and n.d.). Pease patiently underwent a day-long



Table 2-1

Whaling Vessels at Nanumea<sup>a</sup>

| Year | Ship & Captain                                 | Tonnage | Logbook              | Homeport; Details of Contact   |
|------|--|---------|----------------------|--|
| 1835 | <u>L.C. Richmond</u><br>(Joseph Sherman)       | 341     | PMB 206              | New Bedford, Mass. Sighted island 12 & 13 Aug., no contact.  |
| 1842 | <u>Mars</u> <sup>b</sup><br>(Allen Brownell)   | 270     | PMB 876              | New Bedford. Sighted on 24 June, no contact.   |
| 1843 | <u>Howard</u><br>(Alexander Bunker)            | 364     | PMB 831              | Nantucket. Sighted on 30 Nov., no contact.   |
| 1845 | <u>Warwick</u> <sup>c</sup><br>(G.N. Cheevers) | --      | PMB 210              | ? Sighted on 19 July, no contact.  |
| 1846 | <u>Potomac</u><br>(Oliver C. Swain)            | 356     | PMB 384i             | Nantucket. Sighted on 17 Sept., no contact.  |
| 1847 | <u>Martha</u><br>(Henry B. Folger)             | 273     | PMB 399d             | Nantucket. Sighted on 30 Oct., no contact.   |
| 1849 | <u>Abigail</u><br>(George E. Young)            | 310     | PMB 571              | New Bedford. Sighted on 25 Jan., no contact.   |
| 1849 | <u>Alpha</u><br>(Joseph W. Folger)             | 345     | PMB 373f             | Nantucket. Sighted in late Jan., no contact.   |
| 1850 | <u>Swift</u> <sup>d</sup><br>(Capt. Vincent)   | 321     | PMB 367b<br>PMB 842d | New Bedford. Sighted on 14 & 15 Oct., no contact.  |
| 1850 | <u>Ganges</u><br>(Thomas Coffin, 2nd)          | 315     | PMB 727              | Nantucket. On 15 Oct. "lay off under the lee of /the island/. Capt. Coffin went to the shore but for /few/ fish and did not succeed in getting any." 17-19th Oct., still in sight of the island. |
| 1850 | <u>Olympia</u>                                 | --      | PMB 274              | New Bedford. Sighted on 9 Oct., "stood along to leeward of it," no contact.  |
| 1851 | <u>Potomac</u><br>(Charles Grant)              | 356     | PMB 384h             | Nantucket. Sighted on 11 Nov., no contact.   |
| 1851 | <u>Phoenix</u><br>(Perry Winslow)              | 323     | PMB 383a<br>PMB 389  | Nantucket. Sighted on 11 Nov., no contact.   |
| 1852 | <u>Potomac</u><br>(Charles Grant)              | 356     | PMB 384h             | Nantucket. Sighted on 14 Nov., no contact.   |

- a. Listed here are vessels known to have sighted Nanumea; for most of these this has been confirmed by the relevant logbook. I am indebted to Doug Munro for supplying much of this information based on his search through the P.M.B. microfilms of records of whaling cruises through Tuvalu.
- b. The Mars logbook says the ship sighted Sherson's Island (i.e., Nanumea), but the latitude is slightly high, making it possible that the island was Nanumaga.
- c. This vessel is actually a "beche-de-mer" trading schooner; as with the Mars the latitude given makes it possible that the vessel sighted Nanumaga, not Nanumea.
- d. The Swift was apparently in the company of the Ganges while in sight of Nanumea.

Table 2-1 (con't.)      Whaling Vessels at Nanumea

| Year | Ship & Captain                            | Tonnage | Logbook              | Homeport; Details of Contact   |
|------|---|---------|----------------------|--|
| 1853 | <u>Planter</u><br>(Henry Pease, 2nd)      | 340     | e                    | Nantucket. Sighted on 16 Aug., extensive contact during Aug. & Sept.   |
| 1854 | <u>Sophia Thornton</u><br>(John M. Young) | 425     | PMB 893              | New Bedford. Sighted on 16 March, no contact.  |
| 1854 | <u>Planter</u><br>(Henry Pease, 2nd)      | 340     | e                    | Nantucket. Sighted on 14 Aug., significant contact during Aug. & Sept.   |
| 1855 | <u>Isaac Howland</u><br>(Reuben R. Hobbs) | 399     | PMB 3771             | New Bedford. Sighted on 1 December, no contact.  |
| 1856 | <u>Martha</u><br>(Samuel B. Meader)       | --      | PMB 264              | Fairhaven, Mass. Sighted on 2 Feb. "Saw Taswell's Island. Land in sight 12 miles SE by E. Lowered a boat and found current setting ESE." No contact. |
| 1857 | <u>Edward Cary</u><br>(Perry Winslow)     | 353     | PMB 383b             | Nantucket. Sighted on 1 Nov., no contact.  |
| 1859 | <u>Louisa</u>                             | 316     | PMB 875              | New Bedford. Sighted on 27 March. A canoe came off, but ship did not stop. No contact.   |
| 1864 | <u>Alpha</u><br>(William H. Caswell)      | 345     | PMB 372b<br>PMB 372c | Nantucket. Sighted on 19 Nov. Lowered boats to go in for nuts, but returned when saw islanders on beach. No contact.                                 |
| 1878 | <u>Horatio</u><br>(Charles Grant)         | 349     | PMB 256<br>PMB 820j  | New Bedford. Sighted on 8 Sept. A canoe with islanders aboard came alongside.  |

- e. Logbook source is "Journal of the Ship Planter of Nantucket," whaling voyage of 19 May 1852 to 6 August 1856 under Captain Henry Pease 2nd. This log was kept by Stephen Easton, Jr., the ship's carpenter (Easton n.d.). A microfilm of the original was kindly lent by Mr. Douglas Fonda, Director of the International Marine Manuscript Archives, Inc., Nantucket, which holds the journal.

purification ritual for newcomers, was feted and entertained, and engaged in serious discussions with Nanumean leaders about the nature of the outside world. He was a sensitive guest and his report describes both the complex welcome ritual he and later visitors were to undergo and his impressions of village life and political organization. Pease was told that his visit to Nanumea was only the second by Europeans. The unnamed first visitors, people said, had landed many years previously and had shot and killed several Nanumeans approaching them on the shore before they fled to their ship and departed.

In the 1860's a new era began when missionary efforts, which had hitherto bypassed the group, were extended to Tuvalu. The Congregationalist London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) based in Samoa was successful in establishing native Samoan pastors on some of the southern Tuvalu islands by 1865. It was only in 1873, after repeated missionary visits, that Nanumeans allowed a teacher to live ashore among them. Conversion to Christianity followed rapidly and island life underwent many changes. The Samoan pastors quickly were able to assume a considerable degree of power at the expense of the traditional island chiefs. As the old religious beliefs gave way, so did many aspects of social structure that were linked to religion. There was great local interest in the new skill of reading by adults as well as by children and the mission-run schools were well attended. By the turn of the century, at least limited literacy was almost universal.

Once Samoan missionary "teachers" were landed on each island and their teachings became accepted, wide-ranging effects began to occur in island life (cf. Macdonald 1971a and 1982; Brady 1975; Kofe 1976 and 1983; Munro 1978 and 1982). Over the years each island had

a succession of pastors, usually Samoans. As God's own spokesmen, self-proclaimed members of the "superior" Samoan culture, harbingers of new ideas and a new religion, these men were assertive and demanding. They tended to see traditional leadership, as well as traditional Tuvalu culture, as a threat. In addition, they appeared to the islanders to have the full support of the European powers. Under such conditions, it was only a few years before the Samoans had established virtual theocratic states on each Tuvalu island. The following remarks by a European judicial official, after a visit to some of the southern Tuvalu islands in 1883, probably apply also to Nanumea at that time:

"In all the Ellice Islands there is a so-called "king" and a governing body of Kau-Puli, (who have all the power, the chief being practically a nonentity), but the real king and sovereign is the teacher: nothing can be done without his permission" (LeHunte n.d.:16).

The excessive secular power assumed by the Samoan missionaries was a cause for complaint by European traders and by some Tuvaluans too, and some L.M.S. officials attempted to curb it. After the British Protectorate was established in 1892, one of the first tasks the Resident Commissioner set himself was to limit the pastor's interference in island politics (cf. Macdonald 1971a and 1982; Munro 1982; Brady 1975). To some extent this was accomplished but, even as late as the 1950's, British administrators felt compelled to take action against pastors for unduly taking part in political affairs.

Another important development in the process by which Tuvalu was brought into increasing contact with the western world occurred in 1892 when Britain extended the protectorate it had already declared in the Gilbert Islands to Tuvalu (then the Ellice Islands). Captain E.H.M. Davis in the H.M.S. Royalist had briefly visited Tuvalu to

ascertain the willingness of Tuvalu's leaders and late in 1892 Captain H.W.S. Gibson of H.M.S. Curacoa paid calls at each island, read the declaration of "protection," and raised the flag (Gibson 1892; cf. also Macdonald 1982; Munro 1982). British officials again travelled through the islands the following year to secure the signatures of the chief, or "king," and councillors at each island on documents recognizing Britain's Protectorate and its rights to levy taxes. Nanumea's chief, Vaetolo, Magistrate Tupau, and nine councillors signed these documents in English and Samoan versions on 15 November 1893 (Tuvalu National Archives 1893). Political linkage with Britain was further formalized in 1916 when Tuvalu was joined with the Gilbert Islands (and temporarily with the Tokelau Islands) to form the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. In the early years of the colony there were few British citizens in the islands and, with the administrative center located at Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands and outer island visits by the Resident Commissioner rare, the pace of island life was little disturbed by the change in political status (Macdonald 1971a, 1971b, 1982; Munro 1982).

Employment opportunities were a major force for the socio-economic changes that did occur, however. Some Tuvaluans had been signing on as crew on passing ships since the middle of the 19th century but at the turn of the 20th, a new and much more important source of employment appeared with the discovery and eventual mining of phosphate on Banaba and Nauru islands to the west of the Gilberts. Island men were recruited in increasing numbers to work at these islands, usually with short term contracts that rotated employment opportunities among the population.

Meanwhile, in Tuvalu itself, there was a small but growing government and commercial infrastructure. By 1916 a resident District Administrator and doctor were stationed in Funafuti to serve Tuvalu, though education remained in the hands of the Samoan L.M.S. pastors on each island. The 19th century phenomenon of resident European or Chinese traders on each island had gradually given way before the turn of the century to a system in which trading ships from the dominant firms (based in Samoa or Fiji) visited Tuvalu at intervals and traded directly with the islanders from well-stocked shipboard trade rooms. In 1926 a cooperative store was started on Vaitupu and during the 1930's local-run cooperatives were established throughout the Colony (Maude 1949). Traditional chiefs, who had been recognized in the 1894 Native Laws as the highest authority on each island, were increasingly regulated to figurehead status within each island government (see Chapter 4 for more on this). A series of ever-more-complex local law codes were introduced (see Macdonald 1971a, 1982) and increasing attention was given to drafting a lands code for the islands. The intent was to merge local customary rules with British legal ideals and to register all land holdings so that disputes could be adjudicated by land courts. (cf. Kennedy 1953, Macdonald 1971a and Brady 1974 for a discussion of the British efforts and the problems encountered.)

For Nanumea and two other Tuvalu islands contact with outsiders increased dramatically during World War II. American troops occupied and built airstrips at Funafuti, Nukufetau and Nanumea beginning in mid-1943 in their campaign to drive the Japanese from the Gilbert Islands. On Nanumea itself, two to five thousand soldiers lived on the main islet from August 1943 to February 1944, while the

islanders were moved to Lakena islet for the duration of the occupation. Similar disruptions occurred at the other two occupied islands. Nanumeans received unprecedented exposure to a new culture and all its riches but, since little real involvement in the fighting occurred, the occupation period is generally recalled fondly as a time of excitement and plenty.

In the immediate post-war period life resumed its former placid aspect and contact with outsiders again dropped to a minimum. By the late 1960's communication with the outside world again began to increase. More frequent shipping contacts to the outer islands were scheduled, two-way radio stations were established on each island, and students began to have an opportunity to obtain university educations overseas. In 1971 each Tuvalu island sent an elected representative to the Colony's House of Representatives in an unicameral system based on the British parliamentary model, as part of Britain's policy to gradually return their Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony to political independence (cf. Macdonald 1970, 1971b).

Tuvaluans, however, had become increasingly worried that with independence they would become culturally, politically and economically dominated by the more numerous Gilbertese. In 1974, Tuvaluans voted overwhelmingly to dissolve their political linkage with the Gilberts and, as a symbol of their new autonomy, to resume the name Tuvalu (Macdonald 1975a, 1975b; Chambers and Chambers 1975; Isala 1983a). In 1975 a legislature and administrative structure made up primarily of Tuvaluans was established in Funafuti, the Tuvaluan capital. Tuvalu was granted full independence and became a member of the Commonwealth in October 1978 (Isala 1983a, 1983b).

In the six years since independence, Tuvalu has established a profitable philatelic bureau to finance its national government. Though still markedly dependent on overseas aid, particularly for major development projects, Tuvalu life remains based in the outer island villages where the majority of the population still lives.

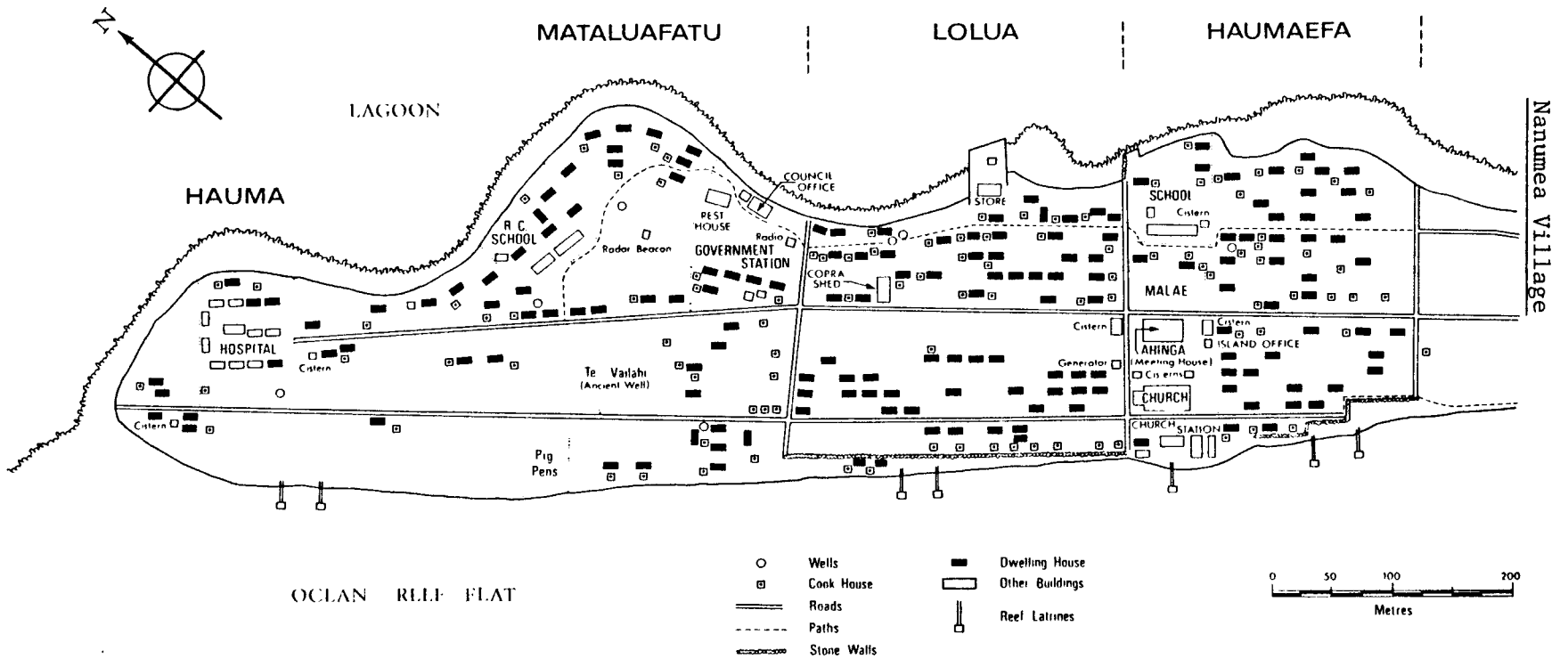
#### Basic Features of Social Organization

In 1973, Nanumea's resident population was 977, about half of whom were aged 15 or under. In addition, an estimated 400 other Nanumeans lived overseas on a temporary basis, mainly in the phosphate islands of Nauru and Banaba, in the then Colony capital Tarawa and in Tuvalu's administrative center at Funafuti (cf. A. Chambers 1975 for other details of 1973-74 population figures). By the time of our return in 1984, the island's population had decreased to 929, even though many Tuvaluans (and Nanumeans) had returned to live in Tuvalu following separation from the Gilbert Islands in 1975, and then following the closure of the phosphate works in Banaba in the late 1970's. The increasing attraction of the capital Funafuti has drawn Nanumeans there to work, accounting for the small decline in resident population. Despite the decline, the number of inhabited households in Nanumea remained stable at 145 in 1973-74, and 146 in 1984.

On Nanumea, most people live today in the same general area that was inhabited in traditional times, in a village on the narrow northwest arm of Nanumea itself (Map 2-3). Houses there are aligned in parallel rows and few are out of sight or hearing of neighbors. They are built in traditional style, with a framework of local timber and pandanus-thatched roofs. Most have no walls other than open



# NANUMEA VILLAGE



Mapped by Keith and Anne Chambers. Drawing by Robin Mita.

latticeworks of sticks or perhaps a low fence at ground level. This design maximizes ventilation but affords a minimum of privacy. Plaited coconut front shutters can be lowered for protection from wind or rain. Most houses consist of a single undivided room. Cement floors have largely replaced those of coral gravel in all but the oldest houses, and over these are spread coconut frond and pandanus mats when desired for sitting or sleeping. Furniture is minimal, usually consisting of several wooden trunks in which personal belongings are stored, a screened food cabinet and, less commonly, a table with benches, a chair or a bed. Houses are used for sleeping, eating, working, visiting and relaxing. Cooking is done in separate small cook houses (fale umu, "oven houses") usually located nearby.

The largest grouping on Nanumea is the village (fakkai). Though there are actually two villages on the island, the main one and a small subsidiary village located four or five kilometers down the lagoon on the islet of Lakena, Nanumeans invariably mean the main village when they use the term fakkai. It is here that most people live and that all important social events take place. People tend to think of the small village at Lakena as impermanent, a place where one can move temporarily. Its population fluctuates markedly. In 1973 there were 13 households with a population of 50 people living in Lakena. In 1984 only three households, with a total of eight members, lived there regularly. The dependent position of Lakena village is partly due to its lack of a school or a resident pastor. School-aged children live at Nanumea and attend school there and church services are held in Lakena only occasionally. However, Lakena receives formal

recognition as a part of Nanumea, since it is accorded one representative on the Island Council.

At the center of Nanumea village is a complex made up of the community meeting hall, church, water cisterns and village square. It is here that major island activities take place. In the meeting house are held community meetings, feasts, entertainments, and receptions for visiting dignitaries. The church and related buildings are the religious center of the island, where church services are held and deacons and other church groups meet. Yet both the community hall and the church complex are spiritual centers, each in a different sense. Chapter 6 describes the role and characteristics of the community hall, so it is necessary here only to discuss those of the church.

The Church of Tuvalu developed from the original missionary efforts of the Samoan branch of the Protestant London Missionary Society, and is one of the most influential forces in Nanumea today. Since a year or two after Samoan missionaries landed on the island in 1873 Nanumea has been firmly Protestant and, as in the rest of Tuvalu, the church has come to fill a central position not only in moral and sacred matters, but also in social and political affairs. Membership in the Tuvalu church is taken as natural and is a socially mandatory choice. At the time of the 1973 government census, 96% of Nanumeans belonged to it and this had not changed substantially in 1984. The remaining four percent of the population was Roman Catholic (2%), Bahai (1%) or Seventh Day Adventist (1%) (Bailey 1975). Individuals who have chosen these "new" religions do so at great cost in social acceptance and they usually forfeit their chance to play a leadership role in community affairs. Since rejection of the community's religion is

seen as a rejection of values basic to the society, such people are scorned. For any individual wanting to disassociate him or herself from the somewhat arduous social demands of Nanumean life, adherence to a new religion is an effective way out.

The organization of the Nanumean church is pyramidal. The congregation is headed by the island pastor (who has been a Tuvaluan, though usually from another island, since the 1960's), supported by a group of Deacons and the influential Women's Committee. These two groups include among their members most of the important people in the community. Association with the church is a lifetime affair, beginning when infants are baptized and continuing on with Sunday School attendance, membership in the church-sponsored youth groups and finally membership in the church body, the Ekalesia.

The pastor's position is unique on the island. As a spokesman for a somewhat stern moral point of view, he comments on current events and issues under a veil of Biblical allusion. The pastor is not a Nanumean and his house is set apart from the others, isolated on the church grounds. He may mix socially with the community on some occasions, but unless he uses his personal charm to overcome the effects of his high status and assumed moral rectitude, there is often a strained air to these. At island meetings and feasts, the pastor attends by invitation and he sometimes expresses his views in speeches. In general, however, there is an increasing tendency today for the pastor to remain apart from island political affairs.

While the influence of both the church and the pastor continue to be pervasive, there are signs of change. The pressures to religious conformity still result in at least nominal church membership

by most Nanumeans but some reservations can be heard about the large donations of money made each year to the pastor and church and against the occasionally overbearing manner of the pastor. It is clear that at least some Nanumeans would prefer a less dominant role for the church.

Though most village activities involve the majority of community members, they are structured by a diverse set of groups, each with limited memberships. Perhaps the most important are competitive geographical divisions (feitu, literally "side") named Lolua and Haumeafa (Map 2-3.). All households, except those of the pastor and some non-Nanumean government employees, are members of one or the other village sides. Each side has a formal organization of elected officials. Village organization into two competing moieties may have also been part of the traditional social organization but the present form probably stems from the efforts of the early Samoan pastors to reorganize the community into units flanking the central church. The original geographical basis of side membership has given way somewhat today as households have shifted outwards from the two densely settled, named areas to more distant parts of the village or to scattered sites outside the village area. Nonetheless, all households, including those on Lakena, are members of one of the two sides regardless of where they are located. Membership today in a side is normally patrilineally inherited.

Feitu organization provides a framework of (usually) friendly competition which adds interest to daily affairs on Nanumea. The binary division into competing entities seems to be a structural feature of Nanumean and Tuvalu life which allows the expression of controlled

aggression, artificially creating an adversary situation made up of "we-them" opposition, while still retaining the larger framework of island unity. Nearly all island affairs take account of or are structured by this division of the island into two parts. The duality of feitu competition structures island feasts, traditional ball games (ano), dances (faatele) and communal work projects. The competitive spirit extends to church fund-raising affairs, and even to costuming for festive occasions, where each side chooses a distinctive costume and color, emphasizing its unity and its separateness from the other side.

There are two other village-wide groupings to which virtually all Nanumeans belong. Potopotoga groups were originally work groups, formed in the early part of this century when communal labor was organized to build the village church. The four original named potopotoga still exist today, though they no longer function as work groups (as noted above, feitu groups are the basic units along which communal work is organized today). Potopotoga seem to function actively now only in regard to annual fund-raising for the Tuvalu church.

Fakaua are feast-specific family units which probably date from pre-contact Nanumean society. They operate as units of the two village sides, in conjunction with island-wide feasts. When a feast is to be held the leaders of each side inform their members about which of the various feast foods they will need to provide. Normally each independent household is considered to be a fakaua unit, but occasionally two smaller households which have inadequate personnel or land resources act as a single fakaua. After the feast, if there are gifts to distribute, each fakaua unit is due an equal share.

The most important and active voluntary organizations on Nanumea are the women's groups. The group of longest standing is the Komiti Faafine or "Women's Committee," sponsored by the Tuvalu church (and the L.M.S. before it), which is paralleled by similar church-sponsored women's organizations in Western Samoa. Two other women's groups, the Tineiafi and the Sulu Elise, are not specifically religious in nature but cooperate with the Women's Committee in many projects benefiting the community and the church. In 1974, these and two additional groups (which were newly formed for the purpose) were caught up in a variety of activities to raise money for a new church hall and pastor's residence. In 1984, only the three main groups continued to exist and the energies of both Tineiafi and Sulu Elise members centered on assisting with a village rebuilding project. There is a degree of prestige accorded to the leaders of the women's groups, particularly the Women's Committee, and the elaboration of women's groups in Nanumea can probably be seen as complementary to male dominance in most other political areas.

There are a number of other voluntary groups on the island, though none are of great significance for this study. Included among them are boy scouts and girl guide troops, church choir groups, and oversight groups (known as komiti) which plan and direct various island activities (see A. Chambers 1975:22-31).

Although the various voluntary groups to which Nanumeans belong are more visible to outside observers than are kin groups, relationships based on kinship are the most socially significant. The widest and most inclusive grouping is simply glossed "relatives" (kano or oku kano, "my relatives"). This group, centering around each

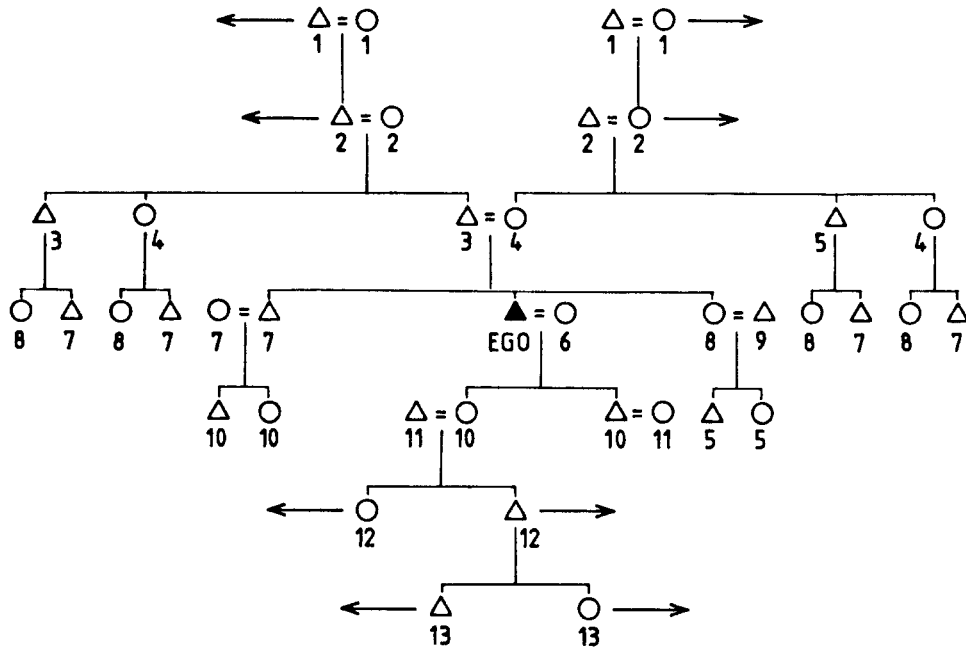
individual and thus varying from person to person (except for full siblings), is a bilateral kindred or, to use Firth's (1957) term, a ramage. Such a group is neither unilinear nor strictly corporate in nature. It is limited to consanguineal or adopted relations; affines are excluded and are not usually considered to be kano. Collectively, all the persons to whom a Nanumean can trace a blood tie through either parent form a diffuse extended group which he calls kaaiga (extended bilateral kindred). In most day-to-day affairs no distinction is made between maternal and paternal kinsmen but in some contexts (such as membership in the chiefly groups) agnatic links are stressed. This is in keeping with the common Oceanic pattern of bilateral kinship with a patrilineal bias (Keesing 1975:92). Figure 2-1 diagrams the primary kin relationships and Nanumean kinship reference terminology.

A basic distinction is made by each Nanumean between those community members who are members of his kaaiga and those who are excluded. To be related, even if this link is as distant as fourth or fifth cousin, is to have a recognized common heritage and to share responsibilities for economic support, particularly in respect to the main life crisis events. On a daily basis, most personal relationships are with kin. There are, however, no intermediate-level corporate kin groups functioning on Nanumea today. The amorphous maximal groups of kin recognized by each individual are conceptually subdivisible only into household units. The kopiti patrilineages (described in Chapter 5) functioned as intermediate corporate kin groups in traditional times but no longer exist today.

Households (fale "house" or matakaaiga "core family") are the basic discrete living units as well as the important units of



Figure 2-1

Nanumean Kinship Reference Terminology

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 <u>tupuu</u>   | 8 <u>tuagane</u>   |
| 2 <u>tupuna</u>  | 9 <u>maa</u>   |
| 3 <u>tamana</u> , or <u>maatua tagata</u><br>'male parent'   | 10 <u>tama</u>   |
| 4 <u>maatua</u> , or <u>maatua fafine</u><br>'female parent' | 11 <u>fugao</u> , some informants re-<br>serve this term for daughters-<br>in-law, using <u>tama tagata</u> for<br>sons-in-law |
| 5 <u>tuatina</u>   | 12 <u>mokopuna</u>   |
| 6 <u>aavaga</u>  | 13 <u>mokopuu</u>  |
| 7 <u>taina</u>   |  |

economic production. Households are usually formed around a patrilineal base, insofar as a young married couple usually lives with the groom's parents at least initially. Most Nanumean households are of the extended type and include parents as well as married children or classificatory children. They normally consist of a single living and sleeping house, plus such smaller structures as a cooking house and a bath enclosure. Massive breadfruit trees provide shade throughout the residential areas, and papayas and bananas are also planted around the houses.

Household members cooperate in the labor required for subsistence under the direction of the recognized household head (pule), who is usually the eldest active male resident. Each household has access to a number of named land parcels scattered throughout the atoll. Land rights can be vested in either individuals or in kin groups. Group tenure (kaitahi, literally "eat as one") is most common. In this situation control over one or more parcels is inherited jointly by a group, usually a sibling set, which usually receives the combined land rights of both parents. Often lands formerly belonging to one of the parents are considered to form a unit (this may be specified in a verbal or written will) and are not legally divided among the sibling inheritors. In such a case, the estate remains in joint tenure, registered in Nanumea's land register as belonging to the deceased former owner, though the adult heirs informally divide use rights to the taro pits and bush lands among themselves. The collective land use rights of a given household thus depend on the rights brought in by each individual resident.

Individual or "divided" land tenure (vaevae) is also known. An individual or family can bequeath a land parcel to a person who then has sole control over it. Examples of this include a gift of land to an adopted child, the mandatory assignment of land rights to a man's illegitimate child, or land gifts for special services. Land held in individual tenure is normally a temporary situation since, with the passing of each successive generation, parents' land resources are pooled into an estate that is subsequently divided among their heirs. Land tenure practices are generally similar throughout Tuvalu although some specific legal rules and local terminology vary (cf. Kennedy 1953, Brady 1974).

Nanumeans divide local politics into two conceptual spheres, what we might term "affairs of the island" (faifaiga o te fenua) and "affairs of the government" (faifaiga o te maaloo). These two spheres are partly bridged, however, by the activities of the Island Council. Six members are elected at large to overlapping three-year terms, with two members being elected annually. In addition, each village side sends an ex-officio member to the Council, and the combined women's groups send one member. The councillors are part-time administrators and are paid a nominal wage for their efforts. They are viewed as filling a community service role. Decisions regarding island rules and regulations, conduct of communal work projects, the island's annual budget (dealing with funds derived from local taxes and from the central administration), arrangements for visiting official delegations--all these and more devolve to the Council. Monthly Council meetings are followed a few days later by island wide meetings in the community hall at which the Council's decisions are announced and

explained and community ratification is indirectly sought. Normally only older men attend these island meetings though women and younger men may come to listen for a while, sitting unobtrusively at the outer perimeter of the hall. Nanumean ideals demand an unassertive form of leadership. At these meetings suggestions and counter-suggestions follow questions in a give-and-take discussion until informal consensus is reached. The presiding Council President often formalizes this consensus with a hand vote.

The Council's wishes are usually followed after the reasons for its decisions are aired in public debate. The Council also has enforcement powers in the form of the two orderlies who can assist in the few cases requiring physical force, most commonly the occasional drunken brawlers who are put in the island's lock-up cell to sober up overnight. For the most part, though, the orderlies are merely symbolic of the power of island government and their main duties consist of delivering Council messages and announcing impending meetings through the village.

The affairs of the national government are attended to by Nanumea's two island representatives to the Tuvalu Parliament, which meets in the capital, Funafuti. Both representatives are elected at large to four year terms and are expected to consult with constituents and to serve as the island's spokesmen and representatives in all national government affairs. The influence a representative can wield is increased if he<sup>11</sup> is chosen to be Prime Minister or given a cabinet post.

Other manifestations of central government influence in Nanumea include the Clerk to the Island Council, who also serves as the

chief administrative liaison between the government and the Island Council. He informs the Council of new Tuvalu rules and regulations, assembles an agenda for each Council meeting, and keeps records of Council proceedings. A police constable, the single representative of the Tuvalu Police Force, is also stationed in Nanumea. He acts as a general policeman in enforcing Tuvalu regulations and as the prosecutor in island court proceedings.

If disputes and criminal charges are brought to court at all, they are heard either in a general court or a land court, depending on the nature of the case. A chief magistrate and two assistants, all Nanumeans, act jointly as the general court, assisted by the police constable as prosecutor and the Council clerk as court recorder. This court has jurisdiction over all minor civil and criminal offenses. Justice is normally swiftly dispensed, with sentences including both fines and jail terms of up to several months. "Jail" time for minor offenses is served locally during daytime hours only and consists of public benefit work supervised by the Council orderlies. Jailed offenders spend their nights at home and also take all their meals there. The longer prison terms given for serious crimes are served at the main jail in Funafuti under stricter conditions.

The land court consists of a panel of five older men noted for their experience with island land customs, their good memories, their broad knowledge of local land holdings and their respected status as elders. This court meets as needed to hear disputes of land boundaries or paternity. This seemingly incongruous latter duty stems from the link between descent and land rights, since all children are deemed to have an inalienable right to share in the land rights of

both parents. In cases of illegitimacy, where the male named as the child's father denies his role, the land court hears the evidence and makes a binding decision. The man deemed the child's father must either claim the child as his own (which accords it land rights equal to those of his other children) or bequeath to it one land parcel and one taro pit. All land court decisions can be appealed to the national land court judge, who makes periodic tours to the outer islands.

#### Intra-Cultural Variation and Links with Other Polynesian Cultures

Nanumea and the other islands of Tuvalu are isolated on all sides by the great expanses of the Pacific Ocean. Together with the fact that they are small and low, it would seem likely that there has probably been little regular contact between Tuvalu and the rest of Oceania in traditional times. There is some evidence to affirm this expectation. Traditional Tuvalu accounts mention post-settlement visits (mainly raids) to the group from Tonga and the Gilbert Islands (cf. Roberts 1958). In traditional accounts Tuvaluans claim to have sailed to Fiji and Tonga, Samoa, Rotuma and the Tokelaus. Still, these accounts are few in number and, even if taken at face value, the overall impression is that Tuvaluans were isolated from frequent or regular contact with the other island groups.

Even within Tuvalu there seems to have been little contact between the northern and southern parts of the archipelago. When the United States Exploring Expedition visited Vaitupu in 1841, the inhabitants named the southern islands of Nukufetau and Funafuti (as well as the far distant Tokelaus) as islands they knew about, but omitted

mention of Nanumea and the other northern Tuvalu islands (Hale 1846). While perhaps an oversight, this omission may also reflect a very low frequency of communication within Tuvalu between the north and south. Support for this interpretation comes from linguistic work, which has tentatively divided the Tuvaluan language into a southern cluster (Vaitupu, Funafuti, Nukufetau, Nukulaelae) and a more diffuse northern group in which Nanumea and Nanumaga constitute a tight dyad (Ranby 1973; Besnier 1981 and n.d.; Noricks 1981a and 1981b).

From both linguistic and cultural data it seems safe to assume that intra-cultural variation in Tuvalu in traditional times was focused in clusters composed of the four northern and the four southern islands. In the south Funafuti apparently dominated the atolls of Nukufetau and Nukulaelae, and Vaitupu may also have been loosely allied to this group (Hedley 1896:8). Although many features of archaic social organization, including political alliances, changed rapidly upon European contact in the 1860's, these four southern islands appear to have shared not only political links but also the veneration of common deities and a distinctive canoe design (Hedley 1896:8; Kennedy 1931:71, 147; Hornell 1936:290ff.).

The four northern islands had as many differences as they had common features, though they are clearly distinguishable from those in the south. All four used the northern or "Nanumea" style of canoe with minor local differences (Hornell 1936:290ff.; Kennedy 1931:71ff.; Koch 1961:131-7). Nanumea and Nanumaga were the most closely similar of the four, sharing many of the same gods, a unique form of quarantine ritual for all visitors, and ancestral skull veneration (Hedley 1896:8; Gill 1885; G. Turner 1884:291-2). Linguistic similarities were also

strongest between these two islands and they shared the use of the phoneme [h] in place of [s] of the southern islands. Nanumea and Nanumaga were also probably political allies under at least the nominal rule of the chiefs of Nanumea until western contact (Pease 1854, 1962).

The relationship of Tuvalu as a whole to its most nearly related Polynesian cultures is a focus of current research. Using a variety of comparative indices including language, kinship terms, technology and traditional narrative accounts, Bayard (1976:150) sees Tuvalu as the primary source culture for the settlement of the northern Polynesian outliers. This view is supported by computer-simulated drift voyaging probabilities, which indicate that Tuvalu would have been the most likely source of successful drift voyages to the outliers (Ward et al., 1973), and probably by comparative linguistic studies linking the Tuvalu language(s) in a subgroup with some of the Polynesian outlier languages (Pawley 1967; Howard 1981). A number of the outliers have traditional accounts of voyages from Tuvalu in the past (Firth 1954:123; Bayard 1976). Others knew the names of some Tuvalu islands as early as 1606 (Parsonson 1966:377-8; Codrington 1891:6). Significantly, Tuvaluans do not seem to have known of the existence of the outlier cultures until modern times. This apparent one-way contact probably resulted from wind and current patterns that make the voyage (whether an accidental or purposeful one) from Tuvalu to the outliers a fairly uncomplicated downwind drift. To travel from the west to Tuvalu, however, would mean sailing against prevailing wind and current patterns during most of the year. A similar situation may also account for the Vaitupuan's' early acquaintance with the names of the Tokelau islands as recorded by the U.S. Exploring Expedition



in 1841 (Hale 1846:165), since drift voyages from Tokelau to Tuvalu would have been quite possible (Levison, Ward and Webb 1973). The Tokelauans did not reciprocally mention Tuvalu when the same expedition asked about islands they knew.

Though Nanumean culture can be appreciated as influenced by and as similar to other Polynesian cultures in many of its basic features, this comparative perspective does not accurately reflect that of most Nanumeans themselves. Nanumeans conceive of their society as a distinct cultural and political entity. This uniqueness is something they stress and value, and their traditional histories and carefully preserved genealogies play an important role in affirming it. The next chapter delves further into the distinctive political system developed in Nanumea, by comparing the often-contradictory traditions of two important Nanumean lineages.

## NOTES

1. This story of Pai and Vau and their formation of Nanumea is a paraphrase of the numerous versions of the story I tape recorded in Nanumea. The excerpt paraphrased at the head of the chapter is from a version of the story told to me by Tepou Hoa and given in full in Appendix I. Elsewhere (Chambers, Chambers and Munro 1978) I have published another version of the Pai and Vau story.
2. One gets the feeling that there was once more to the Pai and Vau story than is currently recalled. A case in point is the place the two are said to have come from, Hauai. While most Nanumeans equate this with Hawaii, they have no explanation for why far-distant Hawaii is linked in traditional history with Nanumea. There are no other Nanumean traditional tales which mention Hawaii or the Hawaiians. Furthermore, given phoneme correspondences between Nanumean and its distantly related Polynesian language cousin Hawaiian, one would expect the Nanumean rendering of Hawaii to be Havaiki.

One suggestion which might clear up this enigma comes from my colleague Judith Huntsman, who notes that in the Tokelau islands, which are linguistically and culturally quite similar to Nanumea, there are narratives about somewhat stupid cannibal ogre figures known as hauai. Thus, the phrase in the Nanumean story which refers to the two women as Hawaiians, faafine hauai (literally, "women of Hawaii") could conceivably have once meant instead "stupid female ogre figures." This speculation is not, however, borne out by any lexical evidence in Nanumea today. There is no such word (hauai) referring to ogres.

On the other hand, there is a recent link between Nanumea and Hawaii which might have influenced the meaning of the Nanumean word hauai. In the early 1850's a Hawaiian sailor was left on Nanumea and settled down to found a large family. His descendants today number in the hundreds and make up a significant proportion of the population of Nanumea. Perhaps with the coming of this immigrant to Nanumea the term hauai took on a new meaning, and if it once meant ogre or spirit, it ceased to do so at this time. While this is speculative too, clearly the story of Pai and Vau and their contest with Tefolaha would not suffer if the women were regarded as ogres or spirits, and somewhat stupid at that.

3. The creature is called a loko in the tales, and is described as tiny, spider-like and as being white or yellow in color. Despite repeated efforts in both 1973-75 and in 1984, I have never met anyone who could identify as a loko any of the insects and other small animals found on Nanumea.
4. "Namea" is said to be the original name Pai and Vau gave to Nanumea. It is used in some traditional narratives and also today in

poetic contexts such as songs. Some Nanumean narratives of a historical nature imply that other Pacific peoples knew the island by this name as well. The ancient name is incorporated in the name of the island's community hall (cf. Chapter 6).

5. This narrative is widely accepted in Nanumea as an account of ancient events. From a comparative perspective there are themes in the story which appear in narratives in other parts of the Pacific. The creation of islands from sand and dirt dropped into the sea, for instance, is a part of tradition in Samoa and Rotuma (Kirtley 1971:64), and in Funafuti (Turner 1884:281). Tefolaha's clever ruse to learn the identity of the two women, and the power over them this gives him, is also a motif known in other traditions. The trickster-god Nareau uses this strategy to gain power over mortals in narratives in Kiribati (Grimble 1951:624-25; S. Koch 1966:20), as does Naleau the trickster in narratives from islands in the southern part of Tuvalu (David 1899:105; Kennedy 1931:192).

There is some evidence that there existed in the past a variant version of this story which named the two women who formed Nanumea not as Pai and Vau but as Ila and Noko. One young woman briefly summarized this story for me in 1984, and used these names for the women. Though she could not recall who she had learned it from, she was certain that the two were called Ila and Noko. Grimble (n.d.) recorded a version of this story from a Nanumean early in the century, and it too names the women as Ila and Noko. Today, virtually all Nanumeans know and tell the story as given here.

6. An extended discussion of the European discovery of these two islands and the Maurelle and Vasquez manuscripts appears in Chambers and Munro (1980), along with a reproduction of Maurelle's manuscript chart.
7. It was nearly seventy years before an authoritative sailing directory (Findlay 1877:755) clarified the fact that Patterson's Sherson's and Taswell's "Isles" were actually Nanumea and Lakena islets, of Nanumea atoll. This and other confusions in the early charting of the northern islands of Tuvalu are discussed in Chambers and Munro (1980).
8. The expedition's collection of ethnographic items from Funafuti and Nukufetau, including some coils of sennit cord and large wooden fishhooks (Hale 1846:162) and probably specimens of mats, clothing and personal ornaments, was lost when the Peacock sank trying to enter the mouth of the Columbia River on July 17, 1841 (see Stanton 1975:247ff.). A catalogue of the 2516 surviving items in the collection (Smithsonian Institution, n.d.) lists but a single entry from Tuvalu, item no. 664, "waist mats worn by the natives of De Peysters Island [i.e., Nukufetau]."

9. Wilkes (1845, vol. 5:44) must have been unaware that the island had been seen by Maurelle and Duperrey because he named it after Hudson; this name was in general use by chart-makers and mariners for several decades.
10. The logbooks, many now preserved in whaling and maritime museums in New England, and others in private possession, have been copied by the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, Canberra, Australia, in its New England Microfilm Project. Libraries cooperating with the Bureau (including the Turnbull Library, Wellington, where I consulted many whaling logs) receive microfilms in the P.M.B. numbered series. Langdon (1979) provides an index to the material in the series on whalers and traders.
11. At the time of this writing, no Tuvalu island has elected a woman to Parliament. However, women have served as both court Magistrates and Island Council members in Nanumea in recent decades.

## Chapter 3

SONS OF TEFOLAHA: FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHIEFTAINSHIP

"You know, don't you, that there are really two stories of Tefolaha here in Nanumea," asked my friend Sosemea as he and I sat in my cookhouse one evening. "One is Tepou's and the other is that of Takitua. The main difference is in the wives of Tefolaha."

"Yes," I said, and then added, "Do you think more people believe Tepou's version or Takitua's version?"

"Well, I don't know," he replied, "some go along with Tepou's and some with Takitua's."

Fieldnotes, Nanumea, January 1984

In 1973, when I first recorded Takitua's story of the origins of Nanumean society it did not occur to me that I was taking down anything other than the "orthodox" account of this charter history. A few months later it became apparent that there were some differences in versions of the story told by other elders, but it was still not clear to me just how far-reaching the ramifications of these differences were. My ethnographic interests had not yet focused squarely on the issue, and so I failed to see it as anything but an example of yet another minor discrepancy in oral narratives. As time went on, however, and I returned again and again to the various tales and thought about the ways in which I had learned about them and how they were used, the differences seemed increasingly important. By the time I returned to Nanumea in 1984, I knew that there were two "factions" which took

differing positions with regard to the story and that these two groups were arguing quite forcefully for different conceptions of the Nanumean constitution. Despite my friend's assertion in the extract at the head of this chapter, the differences concerned more than the identity of the wife of the founder. This chapter describes the ways in which the charter histories of Nanumea differ, and closely examines the variants used by two influential elders in the community.

#### Takitua's Account

Before exploring Takitua's account of Nanumea's beginnings and his explanations for the current organization of Nanumea's chiefly groups, it would be well to outline briefly a few facts about his position in Nanumea. In 1973 Takitua was seventy years old, an alert and sprightly man with a deep interest in Nanumean traditional history. He was the leading member of one lineage of traditional chiefs and the leader (takitaki) of the twelve member Council of Chiefs, Kau Aliki. Takitua had spent virtually his entire life on Nanumea, with the exception of a brief span of some three years as a young man when he worked as a seaman and several short visits off the island to neighboring Pacific countries such as Fiji and Nauru.

Takitua had served Nanumea and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony in several official capacities during a career that spanned, by his count, 36 years. This included six years as a policeman (leoleo) on Nanumea, followed by twenty years as chief of the island police. In 1958, he was appointed to serve as reigning island chief of Nanumea, a post he held until 1960. He had also served Nanumea

as elected head of the Haumaefa village side and as a long-standing member of the Council of Chiefs.

In addition to his widely recognized knowledge of local history and other traditional lore, Takitua was respected for his expertise in several forms of traditional healing and for his knowledge of local plants and their uses. He had inherited quite a body of magical lore as well but had declined to pass on most of this, saying that it was best left to disappear as a thing of the ancient past. Takitua's knowledge of the Nanumean chieftainship was derived from his experience during a lifetime. He also had in his possession a thick, folio-sized ledger book in which was written down voluminous material about his own chiefly descent group and which also contained genealogies and related material about some of the other chiefly lineages. Takitua was immensely proud of this book which had come down to him from his father's brother. This man, long since passed away, had been one of the first Nanumeans to receive a good education, Takitua said. He had been, he added, the secretary to the Council of Chiefs late in the 19th century and early in this century.

Takitua was married to Susana, his second wife. They had no children together but Takitua had two daughters through his first wife, Vaepa, and Susana had one adopted daughter. All of these children are grown now and have families of their own. Takitua had many grandchildren and a few great-grandchildren.

Takitua begins his account<sup>1</sup> with the adventures of the island's founder before he came to Nanumea. Tefolaha was a Tongan warrior of renown in the days when Tonga, Fiji, and Samoa were continually at war. With a group of other Tongan warriors, Tefolaha

sailed first to Fiji, where he defeated the Fijians in battle. The group continued on to Samoa and defeated the Samoans too. When his fellow warriors returned home to Tonga, Tefolaha remained in Samoa to marry Teati, a woman he had met there. Later when Tongan warriors again returned to fight against Samoa, Tefolaha fought for the Samoans. The Tongan raiders were defeated this time with Tefolaha's help. After this battle Tefolaha left his wife, who had borne him no children, and sailed off alone in a canoe looking for islands. He came at last to Nanumea, which at that time had no name and was just a barren spit of sand. He encountered the two women, Pai and Vau, and succeeded in chasing them from the island after challenging them to a guessing contest and winning through a trick, as recounted in Chapter 2.

After the two women had departed, leaving the island to Tefolaha, he returned to Tonga in his canoe. There he married again, this time to a Tongan woman named Puleala. With her, and her brother Tetea, he returned to Samoa looking for crew members. Having picked up a large crew of Samoans, Tefolaha and his wife, with her mother and at least two other Samoan women, set out again for Nanumea. On the voyage northward they stopped at all of the islands in Tuvalu with the exception of tiny southernmost Niulakita (Map 2-2). Like Nanumea, each island was a bare sand bank. At each landfall several men from the crew went ashore and planted coconuts. By the time they arrived at Nanumea, there were just five people left: Tefolaha, Puleala, Tetea, and the two unnamed women from Samoa.

Tefolaha and Puleala had three children born in Nanumea, all sons. The oldest was Tutaki, next was Fiaola, and the youngest

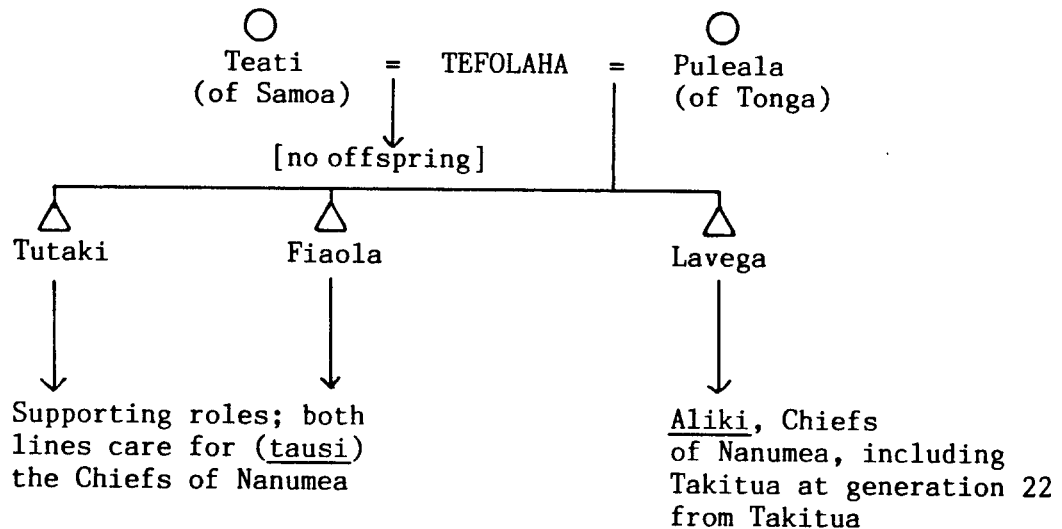


was Lavega. These three eventually married and all founded lines which have continued on to the present. Before his death the founder made a will. His youngest son, Lavega, was to succeed him as chief (aliki) of Nanumea while his brothers were to have supporting duties. Tutaki, the eldest, received Tefolaha's war spear, named "Kaumaile," with which he was to protect Lavega in time of need. Just as Lavega's role as reigning chief has passed to his descendants until the present day, so too has the Kaumaile been passed down to the descendants of Tutaki. The two eldest sons also received from their father the prerogative of supervising the division and distribution of food contributed by the island as a whole for island feasts. Fiaola (and later his descendants) was responsible for dividing the food, especially fish, into the proper portions, while Tutaki (and his descendants) was in charge of the distribution of these portions in the community hall and ensuring that proper etiquette was observed.

Takitua maintained that he was descended from the youngest son, the one who carried on the founder's role as leader of the island society. Takitua's genealogy had been preserved and according to it he is the twenty-second lineal descendant of Tefolaha. The descent lines indicated in this narrative are diagrammed in Figure 3-1.

Lavega's line continued with a series of father-son successions and a number of branchings which are important in the development of the chieftainship in Takitua's account. Two generations after Lavega, his grandson Tematua fathered two sons, one to a woman from Nanumea and one to a woman from the island of Niutao. From these sons (Tepaa from the Nanumean woman and Teilo from the Niutao woman) stem the two most significant sub-branches of chiefs, known respectively

Figure 3-1

Sons of Tefolaha, Takitua's Narrative

as Te Alikis a Muli (the rear chiefs) and Te Alikis a Mua (the front chiefs). The narrative<sup>2</sup> recounting how this division occurred is relevant here.

Tefolaha's youngest son Lavega, to whom the chieftainship passed, had a son named Likilua who married the woman Lofale. These two had three sons, Tematua, Teuhie and Temahafu. Likilua learned that his father was having an affair with his wife Lofale so he fled Nanumea. His canoe reached Nanumaga but he was driven away from that island and not heard of again. Meanwhile, his three sons met in Nanumea and decided they would leave Nanumea and abandon their claim to

chieftainship. As their canoe sailed away one brother, Teuhie, slept. The other two talked, Tematua expressing the opinion that he really did not want to abandon the chieftainship. Temahafu advised his brother that if he wished to return to Nanumea he should do so while the third brother slept. If Teuhie should come to try to catch Tematua, he was to run to the female spirits<sup>3</sup> who had cared for their ancestor Tefolaha and they would protect him.

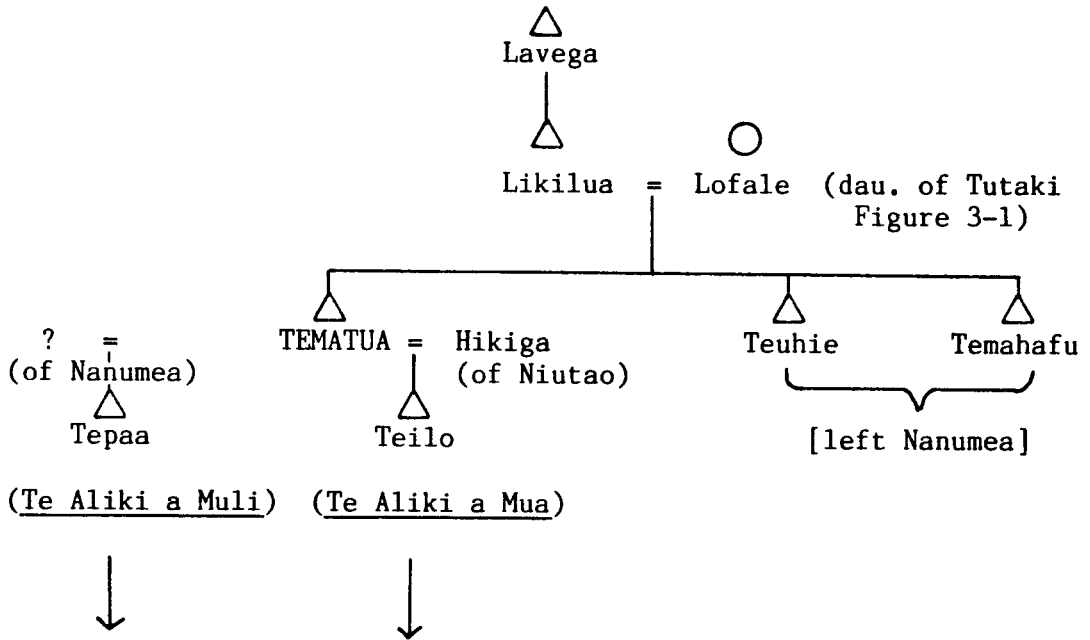
The sleeping brother, Teuhie, woke and enquired after the now missing Tematua. Learning that he had returned to Nanumea, Teuhie went after him. When he got to Nanumea, though, he saw that his way was blocked by the woman spirits. He returned to the canoe and he and his brother Temahafu continued on their way. It is not known where they went.

Tematua remained in Nanumea as aliki. He was saddened at the loss of his brothers, though, and one day went looking for them. His canoe reached the island of Niutao and he remained there. He married a Niutao woman named Hikiga and they had a son named Teilo. One day Tematua dreamed. His ancestor Tefolaha came to him in the dream and told him to return to Nanumea to his chieftainship. Tematua (and presumably his wife and son Teilo) returned to Nanumea. He found that the family of his Nanumean wife had assumed the chiefly prerogatives but he was able to gain these back.

From Tematua's two wives, and the two sons of those unions, came two lines of aliki. From the Nanumean wife came Tepaa whose line was known as Te Aliko a Muli because, the account says, Nanumea lies "behind" (muli) in relation to the island of Niutao. The line of the other son, Teilo, was known as Te Aliko a Mua because of its Niutao

descent: from the perspective of Nanumea the island of Niutao is to the "front," mua. The story adds, somewhat cryptically, that Tepaa was made the Aliki a Muli because of the strength of his kinsmen, particularly his mother's brothers.<sup>4</sup> The relationship and descent lines are diagrammed in Figure 3-2.

Figure 3-2 Origin of the Lines of Tepaa and Teilo  
(Takitua's Account)



While recognizing the existence of both of these lines of chiefs, Takitua's account focuses on the further development of his own line, which ultimately stems from Te Alikī a Muli, the line of Tepaa. Again there was a string of father-son successions and it was not until the tenth generation following Tepaa that the next event of major significance took place. In the time of Togia, fourteenth lineal descendant of the founder, Nanumea was overrun by invaders from the islands of Kiribati to the north. The account of this invasion, which is said to have taken place about eight generations ago, is one of the most dramatic and widely told stories in Nanumea. The summary given here omits many details, featuring the events central to Takitua's narrative.

A renowned warrior from the island of Beru in Kiribati arrived in Nanumea with his fleet. Taitai, as he was known, was accompanied by a fellow warrior named Temotu and by Taitai's sister Teeputi. Taitai and his associates subdued Nanumea and banished from the island all members of the chiefly families. These chiefs fled to neighboring islands, some to Nanumaga, some to Niutao. Others were lost at sea and may have drifted downwind to places like the Solomons. In Nanumea only the ordinary people of the island remained and all lived in fear of the Kiribati warriors, who settled down to marry in Nanumea and dominate island affairs.

Although the invaders believed that all the aliki of Nanumea had been driven out, in fact one remained on the island. Logotau was still a young unmarried man at the time. His father, Togia, had died but his mother, Paua, was alive. Her brother Maatio helped Logotau hide from the warrior Taitai (who, incidentally, was married to another

sister of Maatio). Maatio sent Logotau to his land in the bush and instructed him to sleep in the coconut trees by day and to return to the village only at night, lest Taitai find and kill him.

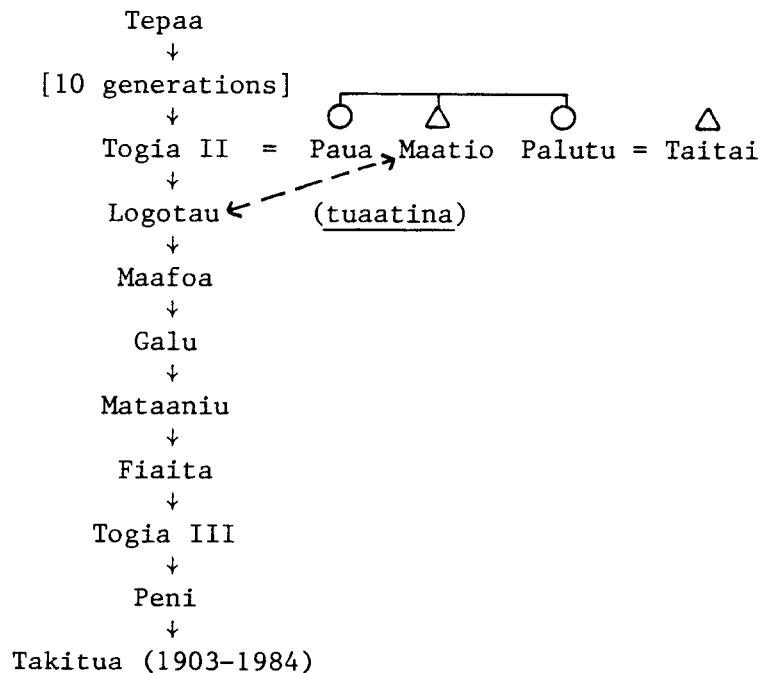
Taitai's sister was skilled in magic and was able to tell that one chief remained on Nanumea. Maatio soon realized that Taitai was plotting to kill Logotau, his tuaatina, and prepared a plan. He told the men of the island to go cut posts and bring them to the village, where they would renew the island's meeting hall. This was to be the day they killed Taitai and all the women were to dress festively. Taitai joined in the digging of the post holes for the new building, encouraged by the admiring women wearing garlands and dancing on the sidelines. At the proper moment the men took from their hiding places the spears they had brought for this purpose and stabbed Taitai repeatedly as he was digging. Though he had magical powers, Taitai was finally overcome before he could reach the house of his sister and renew his magical strength. His fellow warrior, Temotu, was killed at the same time and in this way Nanumea became free of the rule of the invaders.

During the time of their banishment, the chiefs of Nanumea had used magical seeing devices from time to time to check on the situation at home. Now they looked and saw that all was clear on Nanumea. They agreed among themselves that they would race their canoes to Nanumea and the first to arrive would be the ruling chief. The chiefs raced back from Nanumaga and Niutao, only to be met on the beach by the young chief who had remained there all along, Logotau.

Logotau asked, "Where did you all go? The real men remained here to drink blood, and where did you go?" The aliki were greatly

ashamed and said, "All right, you stay and make the island your island."<sup>5</sup> They offered to Logotau the chieftainship. Logotau, however, said to the group of chiefs, "No, you, all of you come and accept the position of the ruling chief. I will sit behind and oversee your work. If there is someone whose work is not good, I will tell that person to step down and let someone else who is good take over." Thus, Takitua explained, his lineage, the descendants of Logotau, became the leaders (pule) of the aliki (see Figure 3-3). The chieftainship was theirs alone but because of Logotau's decision, the duty of his lineage was, from this time on, to watch over the chieftainship. If the ruling

Figure 3-3      Logotau's Descent Line to Takitua



chief behaved improperly, Logotau's lineage had the power to ask him to step down and to appoint the next ruling chief from among the various chiefly branches (maga). Since assuming the role of the "leader" of the chiefly groups, Takitua's lineage has, he asserts, also carefully maintained the genealogies of its many sub-branches, as well as those of many of the other chiefly groups.

One other special prerogative of Takitua's lineage is reflected in the lineage name Te Aliko o te Tai, "The Chiefs of the Sea." From the time of Logotau onward, the various branches of the aliko from whom the reigning chief was selected were to have jurisdiction over the land (fenua). Whenever the reigning chief made a sea voyage or even a trip by canoe to Lakena, however, his chieftainship passed to the descendants of Logotau for the duration of the voyage. As the "Chiefs of the Sea," this lineage has many powers over the sea (tai, also moana), the sea winds and the fish of the sea. In the event of emergencies such as shipwreck, members of this lineage are able magically to support and repair damaged vessels and to ward off attacks by dangerous fish and sharks. Takitua explained that powers such as these would commonly be used on voyages between Nanumea and such nearby islands as Nanumaga and Niutao. Once on land, however, the chieftainship passed back to the reigning chief.

In Takitua's explanation of the foundations of Nanumean chieftainship, there are seven chiefly descent groups (maga), all of which trace descent to the youngest son of Tefolaha, Lavega. Because in Tefolaha's will (mavaega, "parting") the chieftainship was given to the youngest son, it remains with his descendants today. In the traumatic upheaval which came with the invasion of Nanumea by warriors



from Kiribati, there also came a reorganization of the chieftainship in which the lineage of Lavega came to have an overseer relationship to the remaining six branches of chiefs. While retaining for himself and his lineage the power to select and dismiss the individual holding the office of reigning chief, Logotau foreswore the chieftainship himself. Thus, of the seven chiefly groups, six became able to accede (hopo) to the chieftainship, while Logotau's lineage assumed a supervisory responsibility.<sup>6</sup> The chiefly lineage of Takitua's account and the special functions of some lineages are listed below (Table 3-1).

Table 3-1                    Chiefly Lineages, Takitua's Account

| <u>Ancient Lineage Name</u> | <u>Recent Lineage Name,<br/>if different</u> | <u>Special Function</u>             |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Te Aliko o te Tai           | Tuumau                                       | Leadership of <u>aliki</u>          |
| Te Aliko a Muli             | ---  | "Blessing"                          |
| Te Aliko a Mua              | Pihelea                                      | "Blessing"                          |
| Tuinanumea                  | ---  | ---                                 |
| Pologa                      | ---  | " <u>fai fekau</u> ,"<br>do errands |
| Te Paaheiloa                | ---  | ---                                 |
| Taualepuku                  | ---  | "leoleo," police<br>functions       |

The special functions of two of these chiefly groups include the characteristic I have translated here as "blessing." The word that Takitua used is manuia, which has several possible glosses including "blessing" or "blessed" and "luck" or "lucky." The two lineages which resulted from the dual marriages of Tematua (cf. Figure 3-2), Te Alikia a Muli and Te Alikia a Mua, each have the special characteristic that when one of their members serves as the reigning aliki of Nanumea, the island is blessed. This blessing is manifested in plentiful fish in the ocean and on the ocean reefs and in the lagoon, and in a bountiful harvest of coconuts. No other maga has this characteristic and Takitua explained that Nanumea preferred to select its chiefs from one of these two groups for this reason. He also noted that despite this preference, any of the chiefly groups with the exception of his own could provide the reigning chief. The other two special functions are more limited in scope and reflect specializations about which little is recalled today. The lineage Polonga had the special duty of fai fekau, "to carry out errands," for the Council of Chiefs, while the lineage Taualepuku was to leoleo, "guard" or "act as police," for the reigning chief.

Takitua's explanation of the founding of Nanumea provides a forcefully argued "constitution" for the island society. But this constitution is not universally accepted in Nanumea. In some of its most salient points it is countered by another narrative which lays a strikingly different foundation for today's social and political structure. This is the other "tale" referred to in the excerpt which begins this chapter.

## Tepou's Version

This alternate view of the development of the Nanumean social order has as its elder spokesman Tepou, a man who is only a few years younger than Takitua. In 1973, when I first met him, Tepou was 64 years old. At that time, he still regularly climbed tall coconut trees, undaunted by his poor eyesight, and often paddled his single-person canoe to the far end of the atoll to work in his taro pits. Tepou was renowned as a taro grower and was invariably among the winners in the yearly competition to present the largest taro to the island pastor. His esoteric knowledge of taro cultivation was respected and much sought after. An energetic and forceful speaker in island affairs and gatherings of his village side, Tepou was also renowned as one of the most knowledgeable of Nanumea's elders in areas of island custom and traditional history. Tepou's knowledge, particularly in the areas of traditional history and the affairs of his own lineage, had come down in his family from ancient times, he said. His father's brother had kept some of this material in a ledger book which Tepou had inherited.

Tepou grew up on Nanumea and attended the local primary school. Like most Nanumean men he worked overseas for a time, but for Tepou this was a relatively short span of just two years as a phosphate works laborer in Banaba when he was a young man. Tepou has been married to Tepula for many decades and they had four sons who survived infancy. His sons all married and Tepou has many grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. During both visits to Nanumea I had many long discussions with Tepou, sometimes together

with his wife, Tepula. In 1984, at 75 years of age, Tepou is still energetic and active in island affairs, though he has given up work in his taro pits. He told me, with a gleam in his eye, that he can still climb coconut trees but that an old arm injury makes it inadvisable to do so now.

Like Takitua, Tepou traces his descent from the founder of Nanumea, Tefolaha. And like Takitua, Tepou argues strongly that his version of the coming of Tefolaha and the subsequent establishment of the Nanumean social order is accurate and time-honored, that it represents the "true" version of how things began in Nanumea. In his several narrations of this tale to me and in our subsequent discussions of it, Tepou never talked about Tefolaha's adventures or his background before he came to Nanumea except for noting that, as handed down to him, the tale says that Tefolaha came from Samoa, not Tonga. In Tepou's version, Tefolaha's encounter in Nanumea with the two women, Pai and Vau, and his wresting the island from them is the generally accepted account given in Chapter 2.

Once he had Nanumea to himself, Tepou asserts, Tefolaha settled down here and married a spirit (aitu) named Laukite, who lived there. Tefolaha himself had both a spirit nature and a human nature, either of which he could assume at will. Few people in Nanumea know the name of Tefolaha's spirit wife, Tepou adds--it is esoteric lore that has been handed down in his family along with this narrative. Not only was Tefolaha's wife a spirit, she was also a god in those ancient times. Tefolaha and Laukite had children. The first born was a daughter who had a pointed jutting jaw with sharp teeth, much like a paala fish. The daughter proved to be cannibalistic and

Tefolaha killed her. Again Laukite gave birth, and again the daughter had a fish-like mouth and was a cannibal. Again Tefolaha killed her. Altogether, Tefolaha and Laukite had four daughters like this and he killed them all. Their names were Lei, Finehau, Moega, and Nenefu.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the couple had a child who was not cannibalistic, although she still had a jutting mouth and jaw similar to the previous children. This was Koli, Tefolaha's first real child. She grew up and to her Tefolaha entrusted the rule of Nanumea--to her he gave the aliki. Tefolaha was preparing to return to his homeland, Samoa, but before he left two other children were born to him, both sons. The two boys, named Teilo and Tepaa, were not born to Tefolaha's spirit nature, but to his human side, Tepou explained. Tepou was unsure whether their mother was Laukite. His father, who had explained this to him, had said that Teilo and Tepaa were "born of the father" (fanau tamana). Another way of phrasing this is fanau tagata, "born of man." In Tepou's view these phrases refer to the fact that the sons were born not in the darkness (pouliuli) but in the enlightenment (malama-lama), that is, they were not born in association with spirits (aitu) but were fully human. If their mother was Laukite, Tepou adds, she was fully human by then.

Tefolaha returned to Samoa, leaving his grown daughter Koli as aliki of Nanumea and in charge of the two still-small boys, Teilo and Tepaa. Time passed and the boys grew up. When they were grown Koli gave to them the chieftainship of Nanumea. She said, "Come and sit as chiefs, because I am a woman. My position, though, will be to remain and watch over this island."<sup>8</sup> Koli ordered this and so Teilo and Tepaa became chiefs.

Eventually Tefolaha returned from his voyage. Koli said to him, "Tefolaha, I have given the chieftainship to my brothers, to sit as chiefs. But my position will remain just as you told me, it is I alone who am in charge of the island."<sup>9</sup> Tefolaha replied, "Well, that is all right."

Henceforward, Teilo and Tepaa reigned, each in his own turn, while Koli remained to oversee their actions and to tell them when they did something wrong. Teilo, the firstborn son, was to be the first chief. When he or his descendants reigned as chief, the island was blessed in a particular way. When Teilo reigned, his "blessing" was that there were plentiful deep sea fish, abundant rain and a bountiful coconut crop. When Tepaa or his descendants reigned, his "blessing" was that there were plentiful reef fish and huge schools of fish which swarmed close to shore. The coconut crop was also abundant. These were the hallmarks (failoga) of these two chiefs.<sup>10</sup>

When Tefolaha returned, he brought with him a new wife. People say, Tepou notes, that she was from Tonga. With them came their three sons, named Tutaki, Fiaola and Lavega. Now Tefolaha said to these three: "You are to come and serve your two older brothers." These three were to serve the two reigning chiefs. The duty of Tutaki, the eldest, was to distribute things whenever there was something going on in the community hall. The responsibility of the next son, Fiaola, was to be in charge of the division of food in the hall, particularly the proper cutting up of large ocean fish for distribution. All community gatherings in the ahiga were under the aegis of the reigning chief. To the youngest son, Lavega, Tefolaha gave the responsibility to care for (tausi) the reigning chief. Wherever the chief went, whether to

the bush or by canoe to the other side of the atoll, it was Lavega's responsibility to go along. Particularly if there was to be a sea voyage, Lavega's presence was important, for he could prevent any mishaps through powers given to him by Tefolaha. If a canoe were in danger of sinking, Lavega would call te ika a Lavega, "the fish of Lavega," which would come and support Lavega while the canoes were repaired. Then the voyage could resume. Lavega also had powers to control the winds so that canoe voyages made by the reigning chief were assured of a favorable wind. Lavega's group were thus the "Chiefs of the Sea," Aliki o te Tai.

On land, however, Lavega's main responsibility lay in overseeing the process of installing a new chief. Normally, when a chief from the lineage of Tepaa stepped down, it became the turn of a chief from Teilo's line to take over. Here, it was Lavega's job to search for an appropriate person to be installed as chief. Lavega would speak to the people in the chiefly families about this. He was also in charge of arrangements for the installation ceremony (fakahopoga). He would speak to the people of the island, saying "These things we will do for the chief's installation...." He (or his descendants) would assign to each chiefly family the appropriate food contribution to supply for the installation and, in particular, would lead the chiefly lineages in discussions over what was to be done.

Thus, the three younger brothers all had responsibilities to serve the island and the reigning chief of Nanumea. They were counted among the aliki themselves but had specific supportive responsibilities (pologa) given to them by their founder. The chieftainship itself, in this view, was the prerogative of Koli, who in turn had

given it to her two younger brothers. Because of her act, these two had no "job" (haga) to do, other than "sit" (noho) and occupy the position of chief. Teilo, as the eldest son, was known as Te Alik a Mua ("the first chief") while his brother Tepaa was Te Alik a Muli ("the behind chief").<sup>11</sup> The two lineages which stem from them bear these names today.

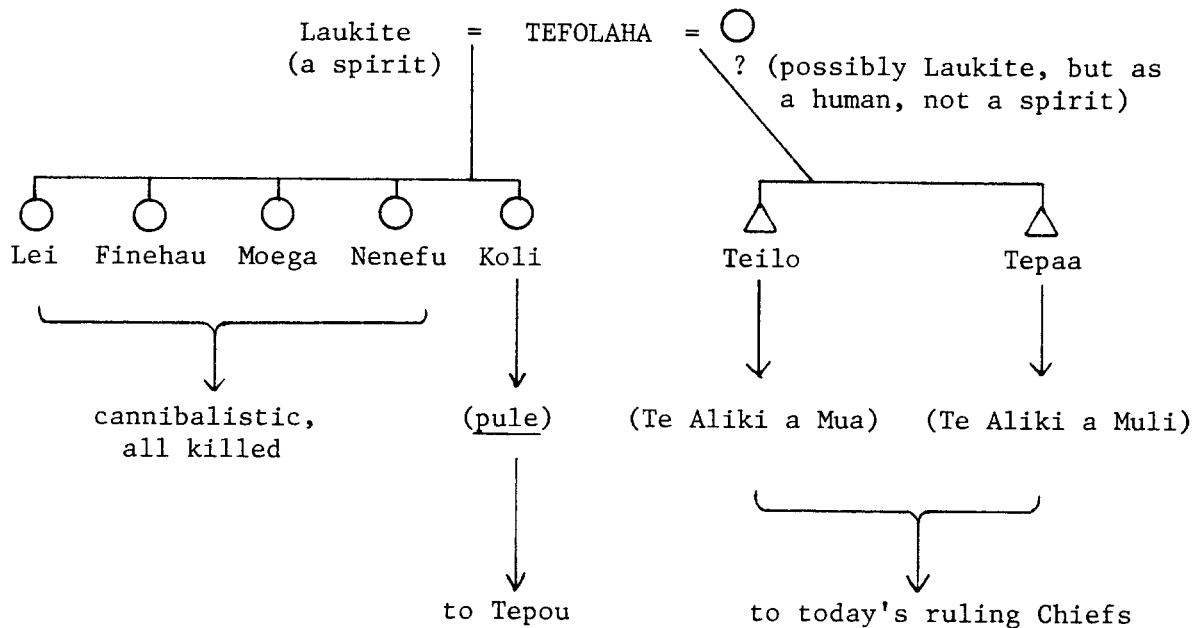
Koli reserved for herself the role of pula "to look," "to watch" which, Tepou explains, meant that she took on herself the ultimate responsibility for the well-being of the island. If all were going well, Koli did nothing. If there were trouble or if the chiefs were not doing their jobs as they should, Koli spoke out. Despite her important role, Tepou points out that Koli (and her descendants, including himself) was not counted among the aliki of Nanumea because she had given over this responsibility to Teilo and Tepaa and their lineages. Figure 3-4 illustrates the relationships in this account. Tepou's descent group, which counts Koli as its founding ancestor, is today called Falemua, literally "first house," in reference to the group's assertion that Koli was the first real child of Tefolaha. The lineage that she established was thus the "first house"<sup>12</sup> in Nanumea.

In his discussion of today's chieftainship, Tepou agrees with the generally accepted idea that there are seven branches (maga) of chiefs, that is, seven chiefly lineages in Nanumea. But, according to Tepou, the existence of the seven groups stems from the fact that there are seven tui o te fenua, that is, seven tips of land. These include the ends of each of the major islets which compose Nanumea and most have individual names. Tepou points out that

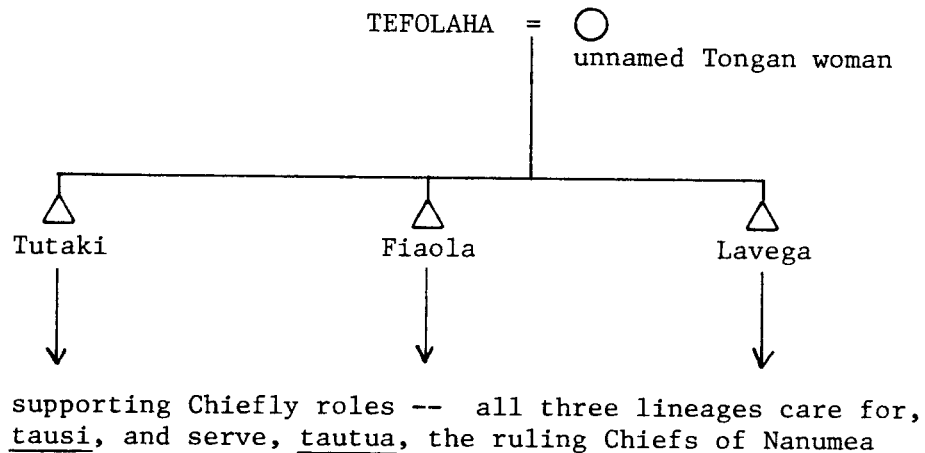


Figure 3-4 Descent from Tefolaha, Tepou's Account

Tefolaha's First Wife



Tefolaha's Second Wife



originally all of the land of Nanumea belonged to Tefolaha and through him it came down to his descendants, primarily the two lineages of Teilo and Tepaa. In time all of the lineages which stem from Tefolaha, all of the aliki, came to be associated with these special parcels of land which made up the islet tips. These were the tui o te aliki, the "tips of the chiefs."<sup>13</sup> Today some of the aliki lineages still control these islet tips but for the most part they have passed out of the control of the chiefs by one means or another.

According to Tepou, the lineages of Teilo and Tepaa, Te Alik  
a Mua and Te Alik  
a Muli, are the true chiefs of Nanumea. In ancient times it was only they who reigned, each providing a ruling chief in turn. In recent times the other supporting lineages of chiefs have begun to provide chiefs from time to time. These supporting lineages are all distinguished from the two ruling lineages, however, both by their descent (none stems from Teilo or Tepaa) and by the fact that in contrast to the ruling lineages, the supporting lineages each had some other duty to carry out. The two lineages of Tefolaha's first sons had no such work to do; their position was simply to "sit" and occupy the "chair" nohoaga of the chief.

#### The Versions Compared

Despite considerable differences in the two accounts of these respected Nanumean elders, there are also significant similarities between them. Both agree that:

- 1) Tefolaha had two wives.
- 2) Descent from the founder is a requirement for membership in the chiefly lineages.

- 3) There are seven chiefly lineages with names given in Table 3-1.
- 4) Some of the lineages which descend from Tefolaha have service roles. Preeminent among these is the lineage of Tutaki, which distributes food during gatherings in the community hall, and of Fiaola, which oversees the division of food for the same purpose.
- 5) One lineage which descends from the founder has an overall responsibility for the chieftainship. Its overseer (pule) position allows it to speak out when affairs of the chiefs are not going as they should.

In sum, the accounts agree in their depiction of Tefolaha's central role as the founder of Nanumean society and in some of the most basic characteristics of the social and political system his descendants perpetuated. They also concur in the number and the names of the chiefly lineages and on the existence of complementary responsibilities specific to each lineage. Each contains a core of essential elements acceptable to Nanumeans.

And yet, these accounts differ in fundamental ways too. Some of the discrepancies involve structurally minor details, such as the name of Tefolaha's homeland. Others, though, have more important implications for the political organization of the community. Table 3-2 summarizes some of these essential differences.

Clearly the lineages of both Takitua and Tepou lay claim to the potentially powerful role of overseer of island affairs. Their legitimizing accounts differ most significantly in their depiction of the genealogical structure through which Tefolaha's leadership

| Features                                     | TAKITUA  | TEPOU   |
|--|--|---|
| Tefolaha's Homeland                          | Tonga  | Samoa   |
| Wives of Tefolaha                            | Teati (Samoa); then Puleala (Tonga)  | Laukite (spirit, of Nanumea); then unnamed woman  |
| <u>Aitu</u> (spirit) of children of Tefolaha | No   | Yes   |
| Chieftainship given by Tefolaha to           | Lavega, Tefolaha's youngest son  | Koli, Tefolaha's daughter; then by her to her brothers Teilo and Tepaa  |
| Origin of Lineages of Teilo and Tepaa        | Teilo's mother a Niutao woman, Tepaa's a Nanumean. Teilo and Tepaa are descendants of Tefolaha but are not his sons.                   | Both Teilo and Tepaa born of same mother; they are sons of Tefolaha   |
| Importance of Lavega                         | All true chiefs descend from him   | His descendants serve the true chiefs, Tepaa and Teilo  |
| The Seven Chiefly Lineages                   | Stem from Lavega, youngest son of Tefolaha. Lineages of Tutaki and Fiaola are not considered <u>aliki</u>                              | Stem from all of Tefolaha's children with exception of Koli. Seven because there are seven islet tips of Nanumea. Tutaki and Fiaola are considered <u>aliki</u> |
| Supporting Roles                             | Distribution and division of foods in community hall by Tutaki ( <u>tufa</u> ) and Fiaola ( <u>nifo</u> )                              | Same as Takitua's account. In addition, Lavega's lineage "serves" the reigning chief  |
| Duties of Takitua's Lineage                  | "Leader," <u>pule</u> , in charge of the <u>aliki</u> . Selects and asks chief to step down. Normally does not reign. In charge at sea | "Cares for," <u>tausi</u> , the chief, including organizing food contributions of chiefly lineages when chief installed. In charge at sea                       |
| Duties of Tepou's Lineage                    | None   | Originally the <u>aliki</u> of Nanumea. Now has overseer role, to "watch," and to step in if things go wrong  |
| Overseer role in community affairs           | Prerogative of Takitua's lineage to be <u>pule</u> , "leader"  | Prerogative of Tepou's lineage to sit and "watch," <u>pula</u>  |

has passed to contemporary Nanumeans and the manner in which important functions were assigned by Tefolaha to his descendants. As contemporaries, Takitua and Tepou emerge as central figures in the on-going drama of village politics, not only because of their senior positions and skill with words, but also because they embody the existence of a set of contradictions in the charter of the community. These contradictions are both a source of community concern, lest the rivalry implicit in these two lineages' claims break into open strife, and also a source of community unity since, though each serves to legitimize opposed claims, they combine to lend support to a yet-more-basic understanding. That is that the sons of Tefolaha have the right and the responsibility to lead the community he founded in Nanumea.

## NOTES

1. The presentation of Takitua's account here and in later chapters is based on discussions with him in 1973, 1974 and 1984, and on two tape-recorded interviews, one made in mid-1974 and the other shortly before Takitua died in early 1984. Takitua also generously allowed genealogical material in his ledger book to be copied in 1974.
2. I only encountered this detailed narrative explaining the background events leading to the splitting of Lavega's descent line on my second fieldtrip in 1984. At that time Takitua was weak and had little strength to discuss it, but an elder of the lineage which traces descent from the Niutao branch made available his family ledger book which contained, among other things, this tale. Some months after I wrote it down, the story was volunteered to me by a kinsman of Takitua who also is a member of this chiefly lineage.
3. For further discussion of this enigmatic mention of female spirits associated with Tefolaha, see note 7 below.
4. The reciprocal relationship mother's brother-sister's son (tuaatina) is one which receives special emphasis in Nanumea. While characterized by a high degree of respect, it is also a relationship of special concern. One grants, ideally, any request that is made by one's tuaatina. In historical narratives tuaatina often go to battle for each other and one is supposed to be willing to give up one's life for a tuaatina.
5. Logotau's taunting question and the chief's reply here are quoted from the version of this story told to me by Sosemea, a relative of Takitua, who had heard the story from Takitua.
6. The kinsman of Takitua mentioned in note 5 above elaborated this point in his telling of the story of Logotau. He said, "Logotau could not become the chief (aliki) of the island since, if he were to do so, who would remain behind him [ready to] dismiss a chief from office if his actions were in error? If there was something the aliki did wrong Logotau could say, 'Rest, let another [aliki] come.' And this is how it remains to this day."
7. The Nanumean phrase used to describe these women is gutu ika, "fish-mouthed." The paala or "kingfish" is a large (up to 4 feet) ocean-going fish with an elongated, jutting jaw. In Tepou's account, these cannibalistic women are Tefolaha's daughters. Takitua told me, though, that while the women had in fact come with the founder, they were not his offspring and none reproduced. The fifth woman, Koli, whom Tepou claims as his ancestor, is included by Takitua with the others as spirits (aitu) killed by Tefolaha.

Takitua's account above about Tematua's being sheltered by "female spirits" as he fled his brother seems to be a reference to these cannibalistic women. In one family ledger book I examined, four women bearing the same names as in Tepou's account here are listed under a heading reading Lua Faafine Faatinaa, which the elder whose book it was glossed for me as "female spirits who care for" Tefolaha. There are several enigmas here. The word lua in this construction means "two," but instead of two women there are four listed. Another enigma is the continued existence of these spirits several generations after Tefolaha is said to have killed them. Finally, why are they evidently protecting Tefolaha and the chieftainship (i.e., Tematua, from whom, in Takitua's account, Nanumea's future chiefs will come) when Tefolaha is said to have killed them?

No one I discussed this with in Nanumea could shed any light on these questions, and in my opinion the problem lies in the fragmentary nature of this account. Like the Pai and Vau tale, something seems to be missing. It seems likely that the story of female helping spirits associated with Tefolaha was part of the archaic religious lore discarded when Nanumea accepted Christianity (cf. Chapter 8).

8. The phrase Tepou used is "ommai o nnoho i te oulua aliki, me i te au laa he fafine. Ka ko toku noho, koa noho ailoa au o pula pelaa ki te fenua nei."
9. The Nanumean here is "E Tefolaha, a te aliki koa oti ni kau tukua ki oku tuagane, ke nnoho i te aliki. Ka ko toku noho e pelaa ailoa mo tau muna ni fai mai, ko au ailoa koa pula i te fenua."
10. Where Takitua, in referring to the blessing of these two chiefly lineages, used the word manuia, Tepou used an esoteric and possibly archaic word kata (literally "smile" or "laugh," but used here in a more figurative sense). Thus, when Teilo reigned, it was said to kata ki te moana ("smile to the sea"); it was also said to kata ki uta i te fenua ("smile to the land").
11. Mua, literally "front" or "first" (among other meanings), is used in expressions referring to birth order, such as the phrase tama too ki mua "the first (or the eldest) child." Muli, "behind," "bottom" or "back," is not normally used in such expressions of birth order. Instead, one hears the phrase tama too ki tua "the last (or the youngest) child." Interestingly, although the accepted name for the "back" lineage of chiefs is Te Aliki a Muli, people will occasionally refer to the lineage as Aliki a Tua or the Maga a Tua, using the word tua as a synonym for muli.
12. Fale "house" can also refer to a patrilineage. For discussion of this usage and related themes, see Chapter 6.
13. The seven tips of land (see Map 2-2) are the two ends of Lakena islet, the two ends of Motu Foliki which lies across the lagoon

and due north of the village, the northern end of Matagi, the northern end of the village area, and Hahake at the southeastern end of Nanumea. At various times in our discussions of this issue, Tepou referred to these tips of land as tui o te aliki ("tips of the chiefs"), tui o te fenua ("tips of the island"), and mata fenua ("faces of the island"). The word tui also has associations with the chieftainship--see note at end of Appendix II.



## Chapter 4

SEVEN RULERS AND TWO CHIEFS: TRADITIONAL POLITICS IN PERSPECTIVE

"From the inhabitants I learned that two chiefs, of whom only one, though, bore the name of Tui Nano-mea, together with the priests, about seven of them, ruled over the people."

Eduard Graeffe, at Nanumea, 1866

"The forms of government differ in the different [Tuvalu] islands. Some have one king exercising despotic authority; in one there is a king and council of chiefs; in another there are two kings upon an equal footing; and in one there is a king and a chief."

S.J. Whitmee in 1870

We have seen how Takitua's and Tepou's explanations for the origin and development of the chieftainship each provide a plausible and strongly argued charter or constitution for Nanumean society. Both men are respected and influential elders, toeaina, and each has his supporters and his detractors within the community. For these and some other people the "tale" which accounts for the proper order of today's society is an important issue, one they discuss often and passionately. But most other Nanumeans are less caught up in these things. Some confess bafflement at the strongly felt rivalry represented by Tepou's and Takitua's differing versions of the origin of "the system," while expressing the view that they would like to know the truth. Others are less charitable, branding the preoccupation with these matters, which they see as things of the past, as much ado

about very little of consequence. Nonetheless, while few people, Takitua and Tepou being notable exceptions, are willing to claim expert knowledge about how the system may once have worked, many are interested in knowing more than they do now. They realize that in the past century the many interventions by colonial and mission powers have altered not only the socio-political face of Nanumean society, but also the underlying structure of knowledge upon which it is built. Today there are few sources for the knowledge many would like to be able to draw on--few truly authoritative sources anyway. But there are many elders, men and women both, who know a considerable amount about traditional social organization, particularly about their own corporate group.

Over the years I have talked to many of these people, sharing their puzzlement and also their concern in understanding a system that has undergone massive change during the lives of their grandparents and parents. I also have had the opportunity to read about some of this change in archival and missionary sources. Here, then, I would like to draw together what people have told me and other available material into a portrait of the chieftainship and its changes through time. I begin by considering the decline of the traditional political order and some of the forces involved in this process. This discussion will provide a base for further exploration, in Chapters 7 and 8, of the importance people place on establishing a firm position within the traditional framework of Nanumean society.

### Abolishing the Council of Chiefs

The island meeting called on the morning of July 17, 1973, had begun at 10 a.m. and lasted about five hours. People leaving the community hall seemed to have vexed expressions on their faces. I had attended the meeting and I am sure my face reflected the puzzlement I felt. For in this meeting called by the Island Council, there had been heated discussion about the future of Nanumea's twelve member Council of Chiefs, Kau Alik, and before we were finished those assembled had voted to abolish this group. The motion to abolish the Kau Alik had apparently been discussed privately for some time and had now come formally from people living on the islet of Lakena, relayed through their member of the Island Council. Those who supported this move argued that the Council of Chiefs had outlived its usefulness and that its continued existence constituted a second "boss" (pule) in addition to the Island Council, and a second set of laws to be obeyed. Those against the motion pointed out that the chiefs had served Nanumea well from the beginning of Nanumean society, had always worked for the good of the island and without pay, and had done no wrong to justify being sacked. The final vote by show of hands had been close but went against the Council of Chiefs.

Walking home through the village afterward, I found myself wondering about what I had just witnessed. Had the seventy or so people present, some thirty of them male elders of the community, actually abolished Nanumea's ancient chiefly system in this sparsely attended gathering? Did Nanumea, as some had said in the meeting, have no more chiefs now, their jobs taken over by the Island Council?

Even though I had been in Nanumea less than a month at this time, I had read all the material I could obtain about Tuvalu and Nanumea and knew that the traditional chiefly system of Nanumea (along with those of most of the other Tuvalu islands) had been in decline almost from the first moment of western intrusion into Nanumean affairs. The gradual weakening of the chieftainship culminated in 1966 when the office of high chief was abolished,<sup>1</sup> replaced by the current Tuvalu-wide system of government by an elected Island Council. Despite this, Nanumeans had continued to regard the chiefly system as "existing," since it remained embodied in the Council of Chiefs which drew its members from all of the seven chiefly descent groups and which still carried out several traditional responsibilities. Now, however, it appeared that this last vestige of the ancient institution was gone.

What I found puzzling was not so much that people could take this last step and eradicate an institution that had apparently served them since the founding of their society. I found that difficult to understand but not puzzling, since many had commented that this was now the era of the "new government" (maaloo fou) in which the Island Council had taken over the prerogatives of the traditional leadership roles. What seemed odd, though, was that no one appeared to regard this move as a momentous one, worthy of some final parting eulogy. It was accepted, I felt, too matter-of-factly.

Two weeks later, at the next scheduled meeting of the Island Council in the Council office, the dissolution of the Council of Chiefs was again the focus of attention. The Island Council president suggested that the Council needed a committee made up of people from outside who could assist in seeing that what the Council decided on

actually got done. Everyone present agreed that this would be useful since the aliki were no longer "working" (that is, helping enforce Council and island rules). There was joking about being sure to select only people who were not members of the chiefly families for the proposed committee and discussion about whether the island would approve of this new arm of the Council. Six people were decided upon to constitute the committee, which was to include two men and the women's leader from each village side.

While the Council considered other business the orderly was sent to ask the six prospective members to come to the meeting. When they arrived, about half expressed pleasure in helping with the work of the Council, while the others were reluctant to do what amounted to "the work of the chiefs" inasmuch as people had voted so recently to divest the group of its functions. At the president's urging, however, all agreed to join the new committee. They were instructed to do "all of the work of the Kau Aliki," which would entail taking care of newcomers to Nanumea (i.e., those without kinsmen or land), supervising the feasts traditionally held to welcome people who had been away for lengthy periods, and enforcing Council rules, especially those governing participation and amounts of food allowed at weddings and other life crisis events. The following day, at an island-wide meeting in the community hall, this new committee received the approval of the majority of people present. The Council's replacement for the Kau Aliki was to be known as "The Committee for Tradition and Custom" (Te Komiti o te Aganuu).<sup>2</sup>

From my perspective on these events in July 1973 this seemed to be a remarkable turn. In the course of a few weeks Nanumea had

seemingly relegated its last remnant of the chiefly system to history, and given the chiefs' remaining responsibilities to a committee. But it seemed that no one, except me and my wife and co-worker Anne, felt that something particularly noteworthy had happened. To be sure, some of the elders representing chiefly lineages had seemed piqued during the original island meeting, and had reacted by offering to withdraw their services and "retire," whatever the outcome of the vote. And following the decision against them, Takitua, leader of the Council of Chiefs, had taken their case to the central government's administrative officer on the island, requesting that the Kau Alik be registered as a club. He had been turned away and told that his organization did not qualify for that status. All of this seemed to be taken very patiently by Takitua and other leaders of the chiefly lineages, while to me these events seemed to be of tragic proportions.

Perhaps the setbacks the chiefs had suffered over the years had taught them forbearance. In any case, time was to show that the new "Committee for Tradition and Custom" would be short-lived and that Nanumea's Council of Chiefs was not to be quite so easily dismissed from existence. When I again returned to Nanumea in 1984, it was there again, working to continue a centuries-long tradition and to ensure compliance with a variety of customary rules. It was still standing, as people like to phrase it, "in the gulf between the community and the government" (i te vaahia i te fenua mo te maaloo).

The only way that I could understand these events and this apparent turnabout was by taking a longer term perspective than that offered by my first visit to Nanumea. In the intervening years, I had read widely in the archive materials and historical documents available

and these, together with events which happened between my two periods of fieldwork, provide the needed time-depth and broadened perspective.

#### Decline of an Institution

Traditional historical accounts provide a depiction of the chieftainship as a dynamic institution. The development of various lineages related in both Tepou's and Takitua's narratives in Chapter 3 each accounts for crucial changes which took place over the generations. There were upheavals, as in Takitua's story of invasion from Kiribati, the flight of the chiefs, and the ultimate reorganization of the chieftainship. But none of these narratives chronicle disruptions as massive as those which resulted when Nanumea's chiefs faced the combined onslaught of the powers of a new set of religious beliefs and a colonizing western nation in the late 19th century. The result was to be the near eradication of the chieftainship in just a century.

The missions had the greatest impact initially. Yet, for a few years after most of the other Tuvalu islands had accepted Christian "teachers," Nanumea strongly rejected all overtures from the missionaries. A.W. Murray was forcibly ejected on the first missionary visit in 1866 (cf. Graeffe 1867:1189-90; Murray 1876:407ff.) and Thomas Powell fared little better in 1871 when "with every mark of their contempt the chief and others positively refused to hold any consultation and in a very determined manner ordered him into the boat and told him to go away immediately" (Vivian 1871:101-102; also Powell 1871:467-51).

Nanumeans made it amply clear that they desired no change. Lie (pronounced "Lee-ay"), the elderly high chief whom Whitmee

described as "a man of great size and noble bearing" in his 1870 visit to Nanumea, told the missionary: "I wish to worship the gods I have always worshipped" (Whitmee 1871:26). In these early contacts there were evidently concerns expressed by the chiefs about their authority, for the missionaries saw fit to assure them that a teacher, if permitted to live on Nanumea, "would not interfere with their political rites or with [the king's] authority" but would "only teach them the truth about the True God" (Powell 1871:49). Gifts were given to the chief on each of these early visits, cynically it seems, and with an eye primarily to the goal of breaking down resistance. After his unsuccessful 1866 visit, for instance, Murray commented that "yet something has been gained." He had given presents "with which they seemed pleased and surprised. It appeared especially to incite their wonder when told that I did not wish anything in return." He concludes his report with the hope that "the favourable impression made upon the chief and principal people...[and] especially the present will, I doubt not turn to account" (Murray 1866).

Ultimately it was another type of persuasion which turned Nanumea "to account." Captain John Moresby, in command of the British naval vessel H.M.S. Basilisk, visited Nanumea briefly in July of 1872 in the course of investigating areas in the Pacific which Britain regarded as troublesome. His official report to the British Government remarked bluntly of the Nanumeans that "they are all Devil worshippers" (Moresby 1872:165). What Moresby omitted to mention in this report is that he vented his impatience that "they have never suffered any missionaries to come amongst them" by resorting to military might. He "persuaded some to come on board, and fired a few shot



to give them an idea of the white man's power" (Moresby 1876:80). Less than six months later, in January 1873, Nanumeans accepted their first missionary (Powell 1878), fearing, as people told us almost exactly a century later, that more warships and further bombardment would follow if they continued to resist the foreign "teacher."<sup>3</sup>

In Nanumea, as in the rest of Tuvalu, the establishment of a mission station brought with it a new set of social relationships which resulted in significant changes in the position of the chiefs. Once the new religion gained a foothold, for instance, it was L.M.S. practice to insist that each local community support its "teacher," i.e., pastor. This required that people not only provide frequent gifts of local produce to this man and his family, but that members of the community assist in the construction and running of his household. Prerogatives such as these, though, had traditionally been reserved only for the reigning chief. Now he must share them, and with them some of the prestige that went with them, with the island's pastor.

Throughout the last portion of the 19th century all evidence points to a gradual erosion in the status of Nanumea's traditional chiefs and a strengthening of the position of the pastors. This process was not sudden, though, and Nanumea's chiefs and elders continued to exercise many of their traditional prerogatives as leaders of the island society. Moreover, the pastors had their share of troubles and had to contend with annual inspection visits from mission headquarters in Samoa which could sometimes result in their being relieved of duty and sent home for breach of L.M.S. policy. Nanumea's first pastor, Tuilouaa, for instance, was removed from his post in 1878 for

"immorality," i.e., adultery (Powell 1879). His successor, pastor Emosi, was criticized in 1882 during the mission's annual inspection visit after the resident trader told missionary Davies that he had bought some \$257 worth of copra from the pastor in the three years since 1879 (Davies 1882). At a special L.M.S. meeting in Samoa in 1884 called to consider problems in the missions in Tuvalu and nearby island groups, many pastors (including Nanumea's Emosi) were censured for concealing contributions such as these to their salary. As one report noted, "Our pastors in these islands as in Samoa get many things from their people which never appear in the annual lists of stipends" (Davies 1882).

In 1885, Nanumea was singled out as an island where things were "still going badly." The pastor was reprimanded for "want of energy" and that year's mission report noted that there seemed to be little interest in the ship's visit, scarcely any contribution, and very little stipend for the pastor (Newell 1885). A few years later, following the establishment of a British protectorate in 1892, new tensions developed between Nanumea's pastor and the high chief. As recounted by L.M.S. representative William Goward (1892):

I had here very grave troubles to enquire into and get right, owing to the high-handedness of the king & his family over the hoisting of the British Flag. The good man had quite misunderstood the meaning of the Flag, and had dismissed the chief, & had assumed a despotic power & authority hitherto unheard of on the island; he being a church member, I was able to use my influence to gather a large meeting & to thrash the whole question out & make all straight again; the king apologized to his chiefs...and the very anxious complication & diversion in the island was settled peacefully.

Nanumea's high chief, however, complained directly to British authorities and his version of this affair casts a different light on events. For Nanumea's leader, Vaetolo, the issue was clearly his authority versus that of the pastor:

On the 16th September, 1892 I went to the house of the Samoan teacher to arrange properly the conduct of the Samoan and myself the King, and inquire into peacefully and in a straightforward manner the work of the King, and the work of the Samoan, so that we could live amicably, in performing our respective duties. The Samoan worked himself into a fearful passion lifted up his hand to smite me, he also spoke haughtily and informed me that he the Samoan was the Ruler of the Land, and rudely drove me the King away to my own house. On Sunday 18th September 1892 The Samoan Teacher preached in the chapel he the Samoan mocks me the King violently and informed me before all the people that he would not obey my government (Vaetolo 1892).<sup>4</sup>

Vaetolo's resistance to the growing power of the pastor appears to be indicative of a general reluctance on the part of Nanumeans in these early years wholeheartedly to embrace the new mission establishment. Thus, in 1881 one hundred people had separated themselves and declared that they were, henceforward, Roman Catholics. Later, they rejoined the L.M.S. (Davies 1881). In 1897, according to a L.M.S. official who visited Nanumea the following year, three hundred people "had returned to the worship of spirits and to other heathen ceremonies" (Marriot 1898). Nanumeans themselves say that it was not until the celebration of the church's 50 year jubilee in 1922 that the last of those who still openly worshipped Nanumea's ancient gods consented to publicly become Christian.

Nonetheless, the power and influence of the island pastor had grown steadily during the latter part of the 19th century, and

with this trend had come a gradual diminution in the powers of the traditional chiefs. Although Nanumea's traditional political leaders seem to have retained more of their prerogatives than their counterparts in parts of southern Tuvalu had, the parallels were obvious. Thus, in Nukufetau in 1870, missionary Whitmee (1871:17; Powell 1871: 21) had to act to restore the powers of the chief which the mission teacher had usurped. Two years later on the same island the annual missionary report noted that the king was

no doubt jealous of the power and influence of the foreign teacher. He, with his large stone houses, and retinue of 23 servants, altogether overtops the king (Pratt 1872).

And in 1897 a European woman resident in Funafuti commented:

I tried hard to see the advantage of being a King in Funafuti, but couldn't. The king's hut was not so good as the native pastor's...and [he] seemed to look up to the Samoan pastor as an authority in things temporal as well as spiritual (David 1899: 118-119).

If the introduction of Christianity brought with it extensive changes, the formalization of Britain's already de facto power in this part of Polynesia in 1892 was to have even greater effects in the long run. For with the new Protectorate came the successive introduction of codes of law which steadily diminished the role the traditional chiefs were to play in local government. Initially, the British sought to curb the power of the pastors and with some success (cf. Macdonald 1982:80ff.; Munro 1982:303ff.). Some analysts have also seen in the first legal code drawn up for Tuvalu an attempt to "revitalize" the office of high chief (Macdonald 1982:81; Munro 1982: 302). To be sure, this codification did recognize the High Chief as

the paramount local authority on each island. But the British administration reserved for itself the right to appoint this person and also the prerogative of promulgating changes in the laws governing Tuvalu. The result, apparent over the next seventy years of British rule, was the devolution of the chieftainship and its eventual removal altogether from local government.

The major outline of these events in Tuvalu has been dealt with at length by others (cf. Macdonald 1982; Munro 1982; Isala 1983b) and need not be treated in detail here. The specific effects of this process in Nanumea are relevant, however, for an understanding of Nanumea's chieftainship. In 1894, the British introduced the "Native Laws of the Ellice Islands (British Protectorate)" which contain eight descriptive sections outlining the administrative structure of the individual island governments and eighteen laws (Ellice Islands 1894). On each island, "the High Chief" was made responsible for the good order of the community. He presided at monthly meetings of a council of elders, the Kaupuli,<sup>5</sup> appointed island policemen and was empowered to levy a land tax (in consultation with the Council). The second key figure in each island government was a Magistrate, "whose duty is to decide according to the law all matters brought before [him]." Magistrates, along with a group of councillors they selected, held courts as needed and imposed fines in accordance with a schedule outlined in the laws. These monies went into an Island Fund, as did tax revenues. From the fund were paid the salaries of the Magistrate, Scribe and Policeman. The High Chief and Kaupuli received no pay.

These laws, drafted into a common code by the first "British Resident" (i.e., administrative officer) after he had collected rules

enforced by both custom and the missions throughout the islands of the group, recognized both the traditional hierarchical and egalitarian principles of Tuvalu social organization. They also provided for an efficient structure based on British ideas of administration which required only a minimal presence of one or two British officials throughout both Tuvalu and the islands of Kiribati to the north.

Probably without intending to, though, this legal code hastened the process of decline of the chieftainship begun under pressure from traders and the missions. There were a number of reasons for this. For one thing, since both High Chiefs and Magistrates had to be approved by the British Resident (interestingly, this is not specified in the 1894 laws, but was the practice), the community lost some of its traditional power to recall leaders when they had lost support, or when natural events seemed to dictate this course. British administrators frequently found themselves caught up in cases where a Tuvalu community sacked the island government without going through proper legal channels or seeking British permission.

But, as Macdonald (1982:78) notes:

Although it was not obvious in [first British Resident] Swayne's time, the appointment of Magistrates was the structural change that was to have the greatest long-term effect....As the Magistrate was the one responsible for administering the law he was soon recognized, by officials and Islanders alike, as the head of the island government.

Furthermore, the High Chief recognized in the laws gradually came to be known as the "Chief of Kaubure" (Nanumean Chief Kaupule, literally, "leader of the council"], a position which "emerged to become the executive agent of the Magistrates" (Macdonald 1982:78).

The growing power of the Magistrates, at the expense of traditional chiefs, was also due to indirect and direct mission involvement. Since, as Isala (1983b:23-24) points out, these first laws were printed in Samoan for their internal distribution in Tuvalu, only those people fluent in reading Samoan could be considered for selection as Magistrate. Thus, younger, mission-educated men generally held this post. One source (Macdonald 1982:81) notes that the Magistrates "were mostly pastor nominees." In Nanumea, the High Chief continued to be selected in the customary manner, however, from among those delegates put forward by the seven chiefly lineages. These were generally older, often elderly, men, some of whom were not well-versed in the mission-taught arts of reading and writing.

When the laws of Tuvalu were revised in 1917 (Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony 1917), they clarified what had already become apparent in practice: that the Magistrate was the highest official in local government:

On each island a Native Magistrate shall be appointed [emphasis added], whose duties will include the administration of the Native Laws and Regulations, and the supervision of the Island Police, prisoners and prisons. The Magistrate shall decide, according to the law, all matters brought before him.

As before, each community was to have a scribe [i.e., secretary and treasurer]. The third appointed official was the "Chief Kaubure," who, in conjunction with the High Chief where there was one, the Magistrate and the members of the Kaubure [council],

shall be responsible for the good order and cleanliness of the island; he shall also assist the Native Magistrate with his advice in the administration of the Natives [sic] Rules, Laws, and Regulations.

Thus, where the 1894 laws had given the High Chief precedence, the new code denied him any official role. All local government positions, it was spelled out, were to be appointed by the British administration, and the office of Chief Kaubure ("leader of the council") no longer need be filled by the high chief. Moreover, the holder of this position would now receive a government salary as did other government officers.

British colonial records shed some light on the thinking behind these changes. In 1912, the Protectorate's Resident Commissioner, John Dickson, wrote to his superiors in Fiji about the need to revise the 1894 laws, noting especially of the Gilbert Islands laws that they "greatly require revision on account of errors in translation and in the text." Where the earlier laws had been drafted in two separate codes for the two parts of the Protectorate, it was now felt that "these Native Laws...are so similar for both groups that I would suggest that the same laws be applied to all the Gilbert and Ellice Islands." This advice was subsequently followed. Regarding the crucial change which relegated the chiefs to a figurehead status, Dickson says:

The position of High Chief is practically extinct and I have therefore omitted [Rule] 1 (old) and instead replaced Rule 1 (proposed) whereby the Chief Kaubure (in conjunction with the High Chief if there be one) is responsible (Dickson 1912).

Nanumean perceptions of these changes differed, as might be expected, from those of the administration. Most importantly, people continued to regard the Chief Kaubure post as equivalent to the traditional office of High Chief of Nanumea. As far as can be determined,



Nanumeans selected the person to fill this post in the way they had always done (discussed later in this chapter), and followed the selection with the ritual installation proceedings for the high chief. Government approval was duly secured, and I have not encountered any cases in government records where the person selected by the island was rejected by the central administration. In any case, government officials dealt more closely with the Magistrate, which they regarded as the head of the island government.

If Nanumeans continued to select a traditional leader from one of the chiefly lineages to fill the post of Chief Kaubure, they were nonetheless cognizant that these latest changes represented further erosion of the authority and dignity of the chiefly office. What many found particularly galling was the blurring of a dichotomy which they had maintained from the start of intensive dealings with foreign institutions: this was the distinction between affairs of the (central) government, maaloo, and those of the island, fenua. If they had been forced to come to terms with the power and regulations promulgated by Colonial authorities, at least the internal affairs of Nanumeans could be handled in customary fashion in a Nanumean way in the discussions in the island's community hall. While the Magistrate was, of course, a Nanumean and often a person who wielded considerable influence, he was not usually selected from one of the chiefly lineages. Furthermore, the Magistrate was

seen as the agent of the central government; as the one who acted in its name, learned to invoke its power, and who was responsible to it rather than to the local community (Macdonald 1982:78).

The Magistrate represented the maaloo, while the Chief Kaubure continued to represent the ancient heritage of Nanumea, the chiefs who had sprung from the founder, Tefolaha. The Chief Kaubure represented the fenua, the island and the community of Nanumea, conceived as it always had been, as an independent polity.

The blurring of this polar distinction came about partly in the diminishing of the role of the chief, but even more clearly in a seemingly simple change made in the 1917 laws: Article 7 of the "Constitution" portion of the laws which provided that, henceforth, the Chief Kaubure should receive a salary just as other island government officials did. As Nanumeans explained this to me in 1974 and 1984, the island's aliki had always worked for the good of the island without thought of payment. Those who were paid were servants of the government, not the island. Once the Chief Kaubure began to receive a salary, it was no longer clear to Nanumeans that his interests were wholly those of the island, or that, indeed, he was still representing the fenua over and against the forces of the maaloo, government. Moreover, to be on the payroll was seen as further demeaning the traditional role of the chief.

The effects of this change are difficult to gauge today, but seem to have been instrumental in leading to a move in the mid-1930's to separate the island's aliki, high chief, from the government salaried post of Chief Kaubure. In about 1936 Nanumean elders established what amounted to a second chieftainship. Selected in traditional fashion from among the chiefly lineages, the new high chief was referred to as the Ulu Aliki, "head chief," a phrase probably borrowed from southern Tuvalu dialects. He was installed with the

customary rites, sat at the chief's central post in the community hall on days when the island met there, and attended meetings of the island government. We have already noted that Nanumeans had continued to treat the government position of Chief Kaubure as though it represented the high chieftainship. With the establishment of this newly revitalized chiefly position there were, in effect, two high chiefs in Nanumea.

I found this difficult to understand and repeatedly questioned informants about this episode. While many people had only hazy recollections of what had led to the establishment of this "unofficial high chief" (as government reports would refer to the post), they pointed out that the older office of Chief Kaubure continued to be treated with some of the ritual reserved for the high chief. Thus, when a Chief Kaubure was appointed (officially, by the colonial government), Nanumeans held a ceremony ritually installing this person as aliki. The same ceremony was held to mark the selection of a new Ulu Aliki. Both men sat at the center, landward, side of the community hall, though some informants recall that the Ulu Aliki sat at the exact center, flanked on one side by the Chief Kaubure and on the other by the Magistrate.

The establishment of an "unofficial" high chief position in the 1930's was one move to inject new life into the chieftainship. Another came, according to informants who took part in it, in the early 1940's during the time U.S. troops were resident on the island. Nanumeans were all living on the islet of Lakena for the duration of the occupation, and the elders of the chiefly lineages met there in what appears to have been an effort to reorganize the aliki groups. A secretary of the revitalized Council of Chiefs was empowered to

oversee donations from each of the "branches" to a central fund that the group could use for the benefit of Nanumea, perhaps as a scholarship fund to send deserving students to school off the island. This became the basis for a fund which today's Kau Alik still manages. Several of the groups also took this occasion to coin new names (cf. Appendix II for these).

Nanumea continued to have both an official and unofficial head chief for a period of some twenty years, from about 1936 to 1956.<sup>6</sup> During this time three Chief Kaubure and four Ulu Alik served the island (Appendix III). Finally, in 1956, the practice of appointing a high chief to represent what elders saw as the island's interest, over and against that of the central government, was forbidden by the colonial government, citing interference by the "unofficial high chief" in the workings of Nanumean's local government.<sup>7</sup> Thereafter, until 1966 when the new local government ordinance abolished the Chief Kaubure position, Nanumea continued to select this individual from the chiefly lineages and ritually install him in office as the island's aliki.

The present Island Council form of local government was introduced throughout Tuvalu in 1966. The Local Government Ordinance of that year called for elections by voters 18 and older to each Island Council, with Council members selecting from among themselves the individuals who hold the positions of President and Vice-President. Any adult who wishes to place his or her name in nomination and stand for election to the Council may do so. There is no provision in the Ordinance for the position of High Chief, and Nanumeans interpreted the law to mean that their institutionalized chieftainship could no longer

exist.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in 1966 the office holder, a man who had been ceremonially installed only a few months beforehand, stepped down without fanfare and Nanumea's chieftainship was no more.

The apparatus by which the chiefly lineages had discussed their affairs, and selected and installed new chiefs still existed, however. An informal grouping of leading Nanumean elders known collectively as te kau aliki, "the assembled chiefs," continued to meet from time to time. About 1970, in island-wide discussions and in consultation with the Island Council (some of whose members were members of the chiefly lineages), this group was given formal recognition and called upon to assist the Council. The chiefly lineages appointed a total of twelve members to this newly constituted group known as the Kau Aliki, "Council of Chiefs." It was also referred to in more oblique fashion, possibly in keeping with the spirit of the widespread view that Nanumea no longer had an official aliki, chief, simply as "the twelve," te tinongafulu mo toko lua. "The Twelve," it was decided, should continue to work to ensure that customary Nanumean rules, which had traditionally been promulgated by the chiefs, not by the central administration, were obeyed. It was felt that the elders of the group of twelve would be more successful in seeing that these rules were enforced than the Council would be, since they carried the weight of traditional authority, and all knew that they represented te fenua (the community) and not the government (maaloo), as the Council was often accused of doing.

This twelve-man Council of Chiefs carried on with its prescribed duties for three years, until the meeting in Nanumea's community hall in July 1973 which left me, a newcomer to Nanumea and not completely

familiar with the varied fortunes of the chieftainship, confused. Certainly there were varied motives behind the move to abolish the recently established group of twelve, the Kau Alik, motives that were considered briefly above. But I think it is clear from considering the events of that day in this widened perspective that what had occurred was not some ultimately final knell tolling for the chieftainship.

#### The Council is Re-Constituted

When I returned to Nanumea in 1984 several major changes had taken place in the structure of Tuvaluan government. Britain's former Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony had split into two parts in 1976, recognizing the long-standing linguistic and cultural differences between the Polynesian Ellice Islands and the Micronesian Gilbert Islands. Subsequently, Tuvalu had, in 1978, achieved its independence and by 1984 was under its second post-independence Prime Minister. Tuvalu was now governed by Tuvaluans and this had effected some major changes in attitude. One change in Nanumea which was indirectly linked to independence was the re-institution of the Council of Chiefs.

The new leader of this Council, Malulu, told me that the Kau Alik remained dissolved during most of the 1970's. Its former leader, Takitua, was growing older and the functions of the group continued to be carried out by the committee selected by the Island Council. During the celebrations in Tuvalu's capital marking Independence in 1978, however, Malulu discussed the chieftainship with Tuvalu's new Governor-General, Sir F. Penitala Teo, a long-standing former government administrative officer. The Governor-General, Malulu said, urged him to once again assemble Nanumea's Council of Chiefs, pointing out

that Tuvalu needed its traditional chiefly organization as well as the new form of government.<sup>9</sup> Thus in about 1979, the Kau Alik was once again established in Nanumea. Its role, as before, was to represent the island (fenua), particularly in ensuring compliance with Nanumean customary law dealing with feasts, newcomers, and communal lands. Instead of having twelve members, the new Chief's Council was re-constituted with seven men, one from each of the seven chiefly lineages. While known officially as the Kau Alik, it is still often referred to in the oblique manner of years ago as "the seven," te toko fitu.<sup>10</sup>

Another post-independence change which may have had an effect on Nanumean's chieftainship or may have effects in the future is the move by some other Tuvalu communities to reinstate their traditional chieftainships. In the 1966 local government reorganization, only the island of Vaitupu retained its traditional chiefly office. During my initial stay in Tuvalu in 1973-75, no other community had a chieftainship. In about 1976 or 1977, however, after separation from the Gilbert Islands but before independence, Nukufetau re-established its chieftainship. This was followed, soon after independence in late 1978 or 1979, by Niutao's reinstatement of its chieftainship.<sup>11</sup> Members of Nanumea's chiefly lineages have watched these developments with interest and have begun to discuss the possibility that Nanumea, too, might go further than having a Council of Chiefs and re-establish its own office of High Chief. Such a move would require the approval of the community, and the members of Nanumea's Kau Alik had not brought it up for open discussion at the time of my stay in 1984.

In this discussion so far we have looked at ways in which the chieftainship has changed in the past century, but not squarely at the institution itself. In the remainder of this chapter I want to consider an enigma in how the traditional chieftainship was organized, procedures in the installation of a high chief, and the crucial function of Nanumea's high chief as buffer between the island and the powers of uncertain nature.

#### An Enigma: Two Chiefs?

Early descriptions of Nanumea provide a few comments on political organization since most visitors had at least brief contact with individuals they describe as "chiefs" or "kings." The accounts are not consistent, though, in their depiction of the number of leaders Nanumea had. The first mention of Nanumea's chieftainship is the richly descriptive account by whaling captain Henry Pease. He repeatedly met and had discussions in 1853 with "the king and his chiefs," and describes the king as "about 35 years old." Many of the other chiefs were old men, though, some "from 80 to 100 years old" in Pease's estimation (Pease 1854).

But where Pease met with a single leader who acted as spokesman for the assembled chiefs on numerous occasions during the three-day visit ashore, some later visitors presented a slightly different picture of the political situation. In 1866, just a little more than a decade after Pease's visit, a trading vessel under charter to the London Missionary Society brought missionary A.W. Murray to Nanumea in the first attempt to establish a mission station there. Murray was singularly unsuccessful in this effort but he managed to meet



briefly with "the chief and principal people." The chief, whom Murray names as Tuinanumea, refused to permit the missionary to go to his house, saying that it was sa, "sacred" (Murray 1866). A German naturalist who also went ashore in Nanumea during this visit is the first to mention the existence of two leaders. He says, "from the natives I learned that two chiefs, of whom only one, though, bore the name of Tui Nano-mea [sic], together with the priests, about seven of them, reigned over the people" (Graeffe 1867:1189).

The next foreign visitor to Nanumea was also left with the impression that there were two "kings" or high chiefs. In 1870, four years after Murray's initial visit, the L.M.S. tried again, unsuccessfully, to persuade Nanumeans to accept a Samoan mission teacher. On this visit, missionary S.J. Whitmee was led by an elderly man, whom he described as "the chief orator, a kind of prime minister" to a central square where the people were assembled around "two grave old men, who were pointed out as the kings" (Whitmee 1871). It is clear from this account that it is Nanumea Whitmee is referring to in the quotation at the head of this chapter which notes that at one Tuvalu island there were "two kings upon equal footing." A year later, another L.M.S. representative sent ashore "presents for the two kings of the island whose names are Rie and Manatu." He later met them, describing Manatu as "a young man tall and with a very wild look." The other "agile old man of middle stature" seemed to have the greater authority, and was introduced with the words, "this is Rie the king" (Powell 1871). It was this older man, Lie in today's orthography, who "flew into a passion" at Powell's insistent requests to leave a teacher and ordered the missionary off the island.

Missionary reports for the next few years continued to refer to the existence of "two kings," or else made only ambiguous reference to the leadership. In 1873, for instance, the old man Rie was described simply as "one of the principal chiefs," and Powell's comment on the eventual acceptance of Christianity seems to point to a single high chief, noting that in February 1873 the "king" and chiefs passed a law allowing the teacher to observe the Sabbath (Powell 1878). But in reporting on the conversion following his 1874 visit to Nanumea, missionary G.A. Turner again named as leader both Manatu and Rie, noting that "the two kings, eleven of the rulers and half the population have embraced Christianity" (Turner 1874). The last mention of their being two leaders is G. Turner's 1876 report, where in summarizing Nanumean leadership patterns he remarks that there are "two kings and 53 heads of families who deliberate and arrange political affairs." From this date on, whenever Nanumea's leaders are referred to, a single chief or "king" is mentioned.

These early reports are puzzling on several counts. For one thing, they are ambiguous. Where Whitmee's summary says that there were "two kings upon equal footing," it seems clear from Powell's encounter that the older of the two kings he met had greater authority. Yet this same man, Lie, was later referred to simply as "one of the principal chiefs." Still later yet the "old king Lie" and ten supporters were taken to Nui (G. Turner 1876).

But more problematic still from my point of view is the insistence of Nanumean elders today that only a single high chief could hold office at a time. I repeatedly asked whether, in their view, it would have been possible for Nanumea to have "two kings" at

any given time, and people always replied that this was impossible. What, then, is the solution to this ethnographic puzzle? Has Nanumean political organization altered so in a century that today's authorities have no knowledge of the "system" as it operated in the days of their grandfathers? Were the missionaries and other early reporters misled or mistaken?

In my view, both of these explanations are partly true. We have seen that in Nanumean political theory today one widely accepted principle is that there are two chiefly lineages which traditionally provided the ruling chief of the island. While people assert that only one could reign at a given time, they also note that these two lines should, ideally, "go in turn," fakaholo, in providing a chief. When one lineage's chief stepped down or died in office, it should normally then be the turn of the other lineage to supply the high chief.<sup>12</sup>

It seems possible that early visitors inquiring about Nanumea's leaders (through the imperfect medium of Samoan or other interpreters who did not speak the language of Nanumea) were informed about the existence of the two "true" lineages of chiefs, and in some cases introduced to the leader of each of these groups. This could easily have led to the impression that the island in fact had two "kings." In most cases, though, it is clear that a single chief acted as main spokesman for the community. The most detailed account of all, Pease's dating from 1853, clearly refers to a single high chief with whom the whaling captain had considerable contact. The older of the two "kings" the missionaries met, Rie, was evidently the island's reigning high chief since he is referred to in this manner several times and he

clearly wielded greater authority than the younger man, Manatu. Moreover, by 1878 Rie is no longer mentioned and the island's chief is named as Manatu (Powell 1878), a man who Nanumeans today say succeeded the older man. It is known from genealogies that "Rie" is Lie, who belonged to the lineage Te Aliko a Muli, while Manatu was from the lineage Tuinanumea, which has links with Te Aliko a Mua.

#### The Installation of a High Chief

A reigning chief had no set term of office, but served for as long as he enjoyed the confidence of the community or until he died. Since most chiefs were relatively old men, a considerable number served until their deaths. There were a variety of reasons for stepping down before that time, though, and periods in office varied greatly in length. During the present century some chiefs remained in office for nearly two decades, while others served for just two or three years. In the case of the island's last chief, the term in office was less than a year. Table 4-1 presents information on the terms and reasons for stepping down of Nanumea's chiefs who served from about 1895 to the time of the last aliki in 1966.

The procedure for removing a chief from office in cases where the community was no longer satisfied with his performance was relatively simple. A representative of the chiefly lineage Te Aliko o te Tai, or several representatives together, visited the reigning chief and discussed the situation, asking that for the "good of the community" the chief give up his position. Usually, to judge from the testimony of informants who have been involved in these proceedings during this century, the aliki agreed to do this. It is likely

Table 4-1      Reasons for Relinquishing Chiefly Office

| <u>Chief</u> | <u>Reason for Relinquishing Office</u>                 | <u>Date</u> | <u>Years in Office</u> |
|--------------|--|-------------|------------------------|
| Niti         | Died in office (old age)                               | c.1903      | c. 6-8(?)              |
| Pou          | Disfavor of community, island inundated by tidal wave  | c.1905      | c. 2 (?)               |
| Tukia        | (Unknown)  | c.1907      | c. 2 (?)               |
| Sosene       | Disfavor of community, prolonged drought               | c.1917      | c.10                   |
| Metai        | Died in office (old age)                               | c.1928      | c.10                   |
| Malulu       | Died in office (old age)                               | 1931        | c. 3                   |
| Malesa       | Disfavor of community, "favoritism"                    | 1948        | 17                     |
| Pito         | "Promoted" to position of Magistrate                   | 1952        | 4                      |
| Esekia       | Died in office (old age)                               | 1958        | 6                      |
| Takitua      | Disfavor of community, "misuse of government property" | 1961        | 3                      |
| Uni          | Died in office (old age)                               | 1966        | 5                      |
| Paitela      | Introduction of island council form of government      | 1966        | c. 6 months            |

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| SUMMARY: Reasons for leaving office                          | Cases (out of 12) |
|--|-------------------|
| Community displeasure at "act of nature" . . . . .           | 2                 |
| Community displeasure at behavior of office holder . . . . . | 2                 |
| Death of office holder . . . . .                             | 5                 |
| Other. . . . .   | 3                 |

## NOTES

Source: field notes, Takitua's family ledger book and Tuvalu government files

Individuals listed here held the official government position of "Chief Kaubure" of Nanumea. A full list of Nanumea's aliki, including the "unofficial" position of Ulu Aliki, "high chief," is presented in Appendix III.

that the removal of a chief in this manner was only possible when there was broad consensus among community elders.<sup>13</sup>

The death of a chief in office, or the removal of a chief, required that the kau aliki, the "assembled chiefs" of Nanumea, act quickly to select and install a replacement. The selection process involved several stages. Initially, each of the seven chiefly "branches" met separately at the house of one of its senior members to select one or more candidates that the group would put forward as Nanumea's potential high chief. Several people described meetings of this nature they had attended. In 1966, when a replacement for the aliki Uini, who had died in office, was to be selected, representatives of the Aliki a Muli lineage met in the house of the former island chief, Malesa, according to his son Seselo. Seselo recalls that there was quite a bit of argument over the group's candidate. One man was selected but then was rejected when it was remembered that he was an illegitimate child. Another possible candidate was felt to be inappropriate because his wife was not from Nanumea. Laiti, a member of the Aliki a Mua lineage, added that in meetings of this nature he had attended, the speakers included only men who traced their descent in the group exclusively through male links. Other informants said that in these informal meetings female members of the lineage could also express their opinions.

At an agreed upon time, all of the seven chiefly groups met jointly in the community hall. Here, in public discussion in which all members of each lineage (whether they traced membership via male links or a combination of male and female links) could contribute, the merits of each group's candidates were debated. Generally it was

felt that the new island chief should come from a branch other than the one that had formerly been in office, and by long-standing tradition the lineage Te Aliko o te Tai was not considered among those which could provide the reigning chief. When a potential new chief had been decided by consensus, he was asked whether he felt he was able to "care for," tausi, the island. If the person replied negatively, another candidate was chosen. Otherwise, arrangements would begin for this man to be ceremonially installed as Nanumea's aliki.

Preparations for the installation ceremony could sometimes include the construction of a new house for the chief-elect. Thus, Tepou and his wife Tepula recall the events surrounding the installation of chief Malulu in the late 1920's. As the chief-to-be's sister's son, tuaatina, Tepou was sent by his father to assist in the household of his uncle. With just a week to go before Malulu was to become chief, the seven chiefly lineages, under the direction of "Lavega's group" (i.e., the descendants of Lavega in the foundation narratives considered in the last chapter) mustered their forces and built a new house for the soon-to-be chief of Nanumea. Men of various lineages were sent to their lands to cut the required heavy and small timber, while male elders made sennit cord and women prepared thatch. The house was completed in time. The chiefly lineages also worked hard to gather sufficient green coconuts in the motomoto stage of development to feed the entire island. The night before the installation ceremony, young men of the chiefly lineages went out torch fishing (llama) for flying fish for the next day's meal.

Early in the morning of the day selected for the installation ceremony, representatives of all the chiefly lineages gathered

at the house of the senior member of the Aliki o te Tai lineage, Lavega's group" as Tepou called it, and then proceeded to the house of the chief with gifts, including a new wrap-around cloth (hulu) and other new clothes which the chief would wear in the community hall. Members of the chief's household and his kinsmen, especially his tuagane, his opposite sex siblings and cousins, meanwhile, had prepared his house by spreading it with new mats supplied by his sisters and cousins, and by making food delicacies to feed the visiting party of dignitaries. Besides being a time for the presentation of gifts and of a meal in reciprocation, this visit is intended to be an opportunity for elders of Lavega's lineage to formally "lecture" (polopoloaki) the chief-to-be about behavior befitting a high chief. Tepou recalls the following as among behaviors his uncle was advised against. Don't:

- participate actively in parties or public recreational events;
- carry objects around in one's hands;
- pick up children playfully or place them on your shoulders, back or other parts of your body;
- go to the bush or to Lakena islet to work, or climb coconut trees.

On the other hand, it was expected that the chief wear clean and presentable clothing at all times, and if he did go to the bush to work on his lands surreptitiously, he must make the journey in good clothing while his wife or a child carried his work clothing by some other route. Before he returned to the village, he would bathe and change to clean clothing again.



There were other behaviors that those who held the position of chief were advised against. Thus, Takitua recalls that when he and two members of the chiefly lineages lectured Pito in 1948 they instructed him not to be argumentative, to be circumspect in his behavior with women, to refrain from fighting with his wife, and not to visit or eat at the houses of people in the village. All of these behaviors were forbidden, tapu, for the aliki of Nanumea.

The formal installation of the chief took place over two days. The first day was occupied by the installation ceremony itself (the fakahopoga). While representatives of the chiefly lineages were being received at the chief-to-be's house and were lecturing him, the rest of the island was assembling in the center of the village at the ahiga. According to Tepou, formal seating in the hall was altered somewhat for this ceremony and the seven chiefly lineages occupied the entire Haumaefa end of the hall, leaving the other end for people of the non-chiefly lineages. At the Haumaefa end was gathered the food which would provide the noon meal: fish caught by young men the night before and the green nuts and other ingredients of a recipe known as poi.<sup>14</sup> This dish was prepared in the hall itself by pounding the foodstuffs in large mortars, with members of all the chiefly lineages contributing the produce and the labor. The ahiga and its surroundings were soon to be the scene of a spirited mock-fight between the chief-to-be and his supporters, the kau aliki or "assembled chiefs" of all the chiefly lineages and the people of the island. At his house, the chief was dressed in festive ceremonial garb, including colorful dance skirt and neck and arm wreaths, and flower garlands made by his female kinsmen. Once all was ready, the

chief, in the company of a group of men of his own lineage and led, people say, by a representative of Te Alikī o te Tai lineage, walked toward the village center.

As they approached the hall, a ceremonial battle, or tauala-palapa, began in an exuberant and playful manner on the "village green," the malae, outside the ahiga under the gaze of the assembled community. The young men of the chiefly lineages took on the young men of the non-chiefly lineages in repeated engagements, using mock weapons consisting of dry fallen coconut leaf stalks (kaulama) which had the leaflets bound up with sennit cord at one end to produce a 4" thick, relatively soft hitting surface. These long tapered weapons are the lapalapa from which the ceremonial fight takes its name, taua-lapalapa, "fight [with] lapalapa."

Strategy in this battle, which was fought to the accompaniment of shouted cries (kailau) with elaborate dance-like gestures, (maaneanea) in which a fighter moves daringly close to his opponents, consisted of being first to strike the opposition with the lapalapa. Iulia, an elderly woman who told me about her father's installation as high chief in the 1930's, recalled that people of one sub-branch of the chiefly lineage Tuinanumea fought with slightly different weapons made of green coconut leaf stalks (kaupalo) left unbound and slightly longer than those of the opposition. Tepou added a slightly different variation:<sup>15</sup> men of the chiefly lineage Te Alikī a Muli had the prerogative of fighting with an especially long weapon, the matatahi (literally, "single-end"). A member of this group, which for the duration of the fight was known as te kau o te matatahi, "the matatahi group," would trace a circle in the sand in front of the

hall. Standing inside this circle, he would fend off all fighters who tried to approach. Since they had shorter sticks than he did, they had to be particularly skillful to stand a chance of hitting him before being hit. In any case, the "competitive hitting" (fakatau hahau) continued, with warriors dashing out from their group to meet an opponent somewhat in the fashion of sword duelers. Blows were struck and parried, and those receiving the worst of the encounter retreated to the safety of their group.

While the mock battle raged, the chief-elect<sup>16</sup> was escorted to his seat (nohoaga) in the hall, at the center post on the inland side of the building. Normally, informants report, the island's high chief presided over gatherings in the ahiga seated at this post with a ceremonial wooden backrest, fakapalega, as a marker of his position. For installation ceremonies, though, female kinsmen of the chief-elect prepared his seat in the elaborate fashion that is now reserved for wedding and first-child ceremonies. The nohoaga was constructed by piling layer on layer of coarse mats (kapau), then layers of floor mats (papa), and finally several elaborately decorated fine mats (epa). This yielded a dias some 12 to 18 inches high upon which the chief-elect sat.

The involvement of the chief's kinsmen in this ceremony has already been mentioned. Now, at the start of the meal in the community hall, the chief's tuaatina, the children of his sisters and female cousins, featured in a prominent role. Before the ceremony, the children of the new chief's classificatory sisters decided among themselves which two or three would have the honor and the responsibility of "feeding" the chief. Their service began at this meal and would

continue throughout his reign. At this ceremony these individuals, two or three at most, and usually including both men and women, sat behind the new chief in his central position and moved forward when it was time for the meal to begin. Instead of eating together as a community in customary fashion, the chief ate first, being literally fed by hand (fakapuku)<sup>17</sup> by his tuaatina. It is not clear from people's descriptions whether the chief ate his entire meal this way, or only a few ceremonial bites, but once he had been fed in this manner the rest of those assembled in the hall ate.

The coconut dish poi, drinking nuts and fish accompaniments were distributed from the chiefly lineages seated at the Haumaefa end of the hall to the non-chiefly lineages opposite them, and all ate. In usual fashion, speeches followed the meal, with speakers from each of Nanumea's kin groups, but particularly from the chiefly lineages, addressing themselves to the new chief, giving advice on fitting behavior and generally showing respect, "honoring their chief" (fakammalu te llou aliki) as Iulia put it. Later in the day entertainments continued, including more mock-fighting and sometimes the traditional ball game of ano. Dancing, faatele, was also common and sometimes continued until well into the evening.

Though the formal installation ceremony had been held, the chief would not assume office until the second portion of the proceedings was over. This took place the following day with a gathering in the ahiga at which only men and teenaged boys were allowed. Informants invariably recall this all-male gathering, the taumalo, as a time of mirth. A cryer would move through the village announcing, "We are going to have the taumalo tomorrow." The women of each family

prepared large quantities of a variety of foods, knowing that a part of the fun of this meal was in competing to be ready with the various dishes that would be called for. Elders and young men sixteen and older gathered in the hall, disregarding customary rules of seniority so that all could sit in the front row at or in line with the posts of the building. As Tepou recalls this day, his role, representing his lineage, was to call out to those gathered the order of foods to be eaten and also to supervise the inspection as each family brought its contribution to the hall.

The first food was the venerable and ancient staple of Nanumea, a baked pudding made of the pulaka root. A runner would cry through the village, Taki tahi a kao i te taumalo, kao faka fonu, "For each person in the taumalo ceremony, one coconut shell overflowing with baked pulaka pudding." Already prepared, each household's women would send the requisite number of shells to the hall. According to informants, this first dish was always eaten in a playful way. People would begin eating, but before anyone could finish his shell of pudding, a cry would ring out in the hall: "Let's run," taatou koa ppolo. Amidst great mirth, all those in the hall, including the island's new chief at his centrally located seat, would select a part of the hall to their pleasing, dash to it, sit down by the food tray there, and commence eating again. This was repeated several times before the baked puddings were completed.

Other foods eaten during this meal were a tour de force of the island's traditional delicacies. Again, as Tepou recounted it to me, he would call out the next food, perhaps uttanu fakatuga (the interior of sprouted coconut which has been stored for a long period

of time in storage pits, making it especially dense and sweet). The cry would move through the village announcing that this was next and hurriedly women of each household would send these for their men. Each family's contribution was brought to Tepou, who would pronounce the verdict: either one's foods passed (hao) or they "fell" (too), depending on whether they were what had been called for. Sprouted coconut that had clearly not been in the storage pit the requisite length of time failed this test, and this was announced to those present. The day went on, with several other foods being called for and with households rushing to provide them to those in the community hall.

According to Tepou, this feast served several purposes. Its primary aim was to "entertain," fakataahao, the new chief. At this time, the man had not officially assumed office and was still free to engage in light-hearted pursuits of this nature. This day, however, would be the last time he could do so during his reign as the island's aliki, since from now on the chief's behavior had to be marked by decorum and seriousness and he would be shown deference by people of the community. The feast also served as a test of the preparedness of the island's households. Those who had husbanded supplies of stored food (and most of the dishes this day called for foods that were dried or otherwise had been stored for some time to achieve the proper quality) were toka, "prepared," and were able to send the called-for dishes to the hall. The inspection and pronouncing sentence ensured that all knew who was and who was not prepared. This festive day also had associations with the coming of age of young men of the community. As noted, only those who were sixteen years and older could attend. At this age they were men, taagata. In traditional times, Tepou notes,

they would now have been able to don loincloths, funa malo,<sup>18</sup> and go to battle with the men. In the Christian era, with both battles and loincloths things of the past, men of sixteen years and up still find they have reached a new juncture: they are required from then until the age of 50 to participate in community work projects.

#### Chiefly Behavior and Activities

Portions of the installation ceremony for a new chief emphasize the existence of behavioral restrictions for Nanumea's leading aliki. Let's consider some of the other restrictions that informants mention. Monise, whose great-grandfather Niti had been Nanumea's aliki around the turn of the century, had heard that when his ancestor was high chief the people of the island went to some pains to avoid the chief's house unless they had specific business there. If they had to pass by the house, they walked as far from it as they could, rather than close by. If they did have an errand, for instance to bring a food gift to the chief, they completed this and left immediately.

According to Monise, his ancestor did no physical work and remained in his house most of the time. His role, Monise added, was to "think for the welfare of the island." When the Chief's Council, Kau Alike, held a meeting, a group of chiefs would come to escort the reigning high chief to the ahiga and would escort him home again when it was over. The distance between the chief and the other members of the community was further emphasized by a taboo on the chief's defecating near the village or with other people. Again, in the case of Niti, Monise was told that his great-grandfather walked alone almost

half the length of Nanumea islet to defecate at an isolated ocean beach. To further disguise this activity he would fish with a net along the reef before returning to the village, later changing into dry clean clothes brought to the beach by a child relative. The child would then carry home the aliki's wet clothes and any fish caught.

While his behavior was circumscribed by customary rules, the high chief took part in numerous activities. If his primary role was to "sit" (that is, occupy the "seat" or nohoaga of the aliki both in a literal as well as figurative sense), he was required to do so in a variety of contexts. Island meetings, deliberations of the Council of Chiefs and feasts required the presence of the high chief as the representative of the fenua (the island) as well as the community.

There are few sources to draw on today for information on the chief's political role. As might be expected for an office in which the incumbent was "democratically" elected and from which he could be expected to step down in times of natural calamity, the evidence that does exist points to a limited role for the chief in wielding political power. Pease's account dating from 1853 (Pease 1854) provides the earliest material on the Nanumean chieftainship. The high chief, with whom Pease had several long interviews, was clearly an individual to whom deference was shown and one who exercised the prerogatives of delegated authority. It was he who invited the whaling captain to come ashore, assured him he would come to no harm, and spoke on behalf of the assembled chiefs on numerous occasions. Furthermore, during the lengthy ritual on Pease's first day ashore the "king," as Pease's narrative calls him, issued commands at key points to others present.



Yet this person was under considerable constraint as well. Pease says he was about 35 years old, much younger than many of the chiefs, some of whom were too elderly to walk to the seashore. During a meeting in the town square "all the old chiefs [were] sitting around the king, proposing questions, which he repeated in a slow, clear manner." In other words, the king merely channeled the questions to Pease and relayed the answers from him, apparently deferring to the experience and age of the others present. When Pease was preparing to leave after having met with the "king and his chiefs" in the council house, all the chiefs (including, it seems, the king) discussed whether the "common people" would be allowed to "salute" Pease. The "majority ruled that all who could get an opportunity so to do...should have the privilege." Finally, the king's freedom of interaction with Pease required the consent of the "old chiefs." He told Pease on the first morning ashore that he could not meet with him before the ceremonies were completed because "the old chiefs would not permit it." And on leaving, when Pease asked the king to come aboard the ship, "he replied that he could not, without permission from the old chiefs." This is despite the fact that the king himself was the one who was able to refuse permission for his own nephew to go to the ship.

All of this suggests a situation in accord with what Nanumeans over a century later would describe. That is, a titular position of reigning high chief in which this person is regarded as "first among equals" during his reign and occupies an office which commands respect and most certainly entails responsibilities of both a secular and a sacred nature. Yet this office had little meaning apart from the Council of Chiefs, all senior representatives of their respective

chiefly lineages, from whom the chief himself had been chosen. Decisions about important matters would have been made by consensus by the group of assembled chiefs, as Pease describes.

The restrictions imposed on the high chief suggest a conception of importance of this individual far outweighing his apparent political role. These can be grouped into separate categories:

Work. The high chief could participate in a limited way in subsistence activities (he could fish alone, as above; he could sometimes work in his garden lands if he took care to do so surreptitiously). But he was also the recipient of weekly food gifts from his tuaatina kinsmen who had "fed" him at the installation ceremonies and of a similar weekly "feeding" by the Council of Chiefs. Thus, while the chief was allowed to carry out some work, it is likely that most of a reigning chief's subsistence needs were met by his kinsmen and the chiefly lineages.

Residence. The chief's house was effectively off-limits for the general population. While, at least in this century, the chief does not have a residence that is set apart from others in the community, nor one that is markedly different in physical appearance, it is still tapu, restricted. The chief might entertain visitors at home, but these are limited to official visits, not those of a casual nature. Similarly, the chief was expected to remain aloof from normal reciprocal visiting with neighbors and kinsmen. In one case which several people discussed with me, a reigning high chief of several decades ago came under strong criticism from a sizable segment of the community for ignoring this rule and accepting the hospitality (and cups of tea!) of friends in their houses. Transgressions of this nature have

been conceived in recent years as problematic because the chief can be seen as taking advantage of his position to "mooch" (matakai). I suspect that in years past the rationale related equally to the need for the chief to remain physically aloof from others.

Person. Some of the restrictions the chief was warned about entailed refraining from bodily contact with others and from frivolous behavior. Thus, he was not even to playfully toss his own grandchildren around or place them on his back or shoulders. He was obliged to conduct his personal toilet far from the village and out of sight of others. He could not take part in entertainments.

#### The High Chief as Intermediary

In my view these limitations and others discussed in this chapter complement a conception of the reigning chief of Nanumea as someone who was not only to be respected and honored (fakammalu), but also of someone who was "sacred" (tapu). If the chief held only nominal political power, as informants' testimony and documentary evidence suggests, he was the focus of a much greater potency for Nanumea, in his status as intermediary with some of the forces of the universe.

Recall, for instance, the "blessing" which descended on the island during the reign of either of the two main lineages of chiefs, Te Alikī a Mua and Te Alikī a Muli. For reasons that are not apparent today, other than their connection with the rightful order of things, these two lineages brought to Nanumea the favor of those beings or powers who controlled the fish of the seas and the produce of the lands. The other lineages of chiefs seem to have lacked this special link to the universe, or to have had it only in small measure. At

one meeting of chiefs and elders I attended, for instance, there was discussion about how the dry spell and relatively poor fishing conditions which had prevailed for some time might be ended if Nanumea returned to its traditional position of having an occupant for the office of high chief. Joking comments were then made about how this had better be the "right" lineage though, for all recalled what had happened when a chief had been selected from another lineage some decades ago: the reef fish had disappeared, leaving only those a few inches long! The meeting broke up on this good-natured note intended partly as a jest, but which served equally to remind the hearers of the ancient link between the chieftainship and the powers that be.

Other evidence of the connection between the chief and the elemental powers lies in stories widely known in Nanumea of two disasters which befell Nanumea because of the misdeeds of chiefs in the past. The first of these disasters or "curses" (mala) took place during the reign of the chief Vaetolo, during the early 1890's. Up to this time Nanumea had an abundance of tridacna clams (the "giant clams" of popular south seas literature) in and outside the lagoon, but particularly inside it on all the coral outcrops which rise up from the sandy bottom. These clams were an esteemed source of food. Some years after Nanumea accepted the first Samoan missionary, the island's chief agreed that a portion of the weekly food gifts supplied to him by the island should go instead to the resident L.M.S. pastor. For reasons not specified in any version of the story I heard, Vaetolo became jealous of the "feeding" contributions made by people each week to the pastor and decreed that henceforth these should all come to him as well. People complied. A severe drought ensued, and with

it the faahua (tridacna) clams in the lagoon all perished. Seeing the calamity his actions had caused, Vaetolo relented and the weekly feeding of the pastor resumed and has continued to this day. The faahua, however, have never returned to the lagoon.<sup>19</sup>

The second disaster took place about a decade later during the chieftainship of the aliki Pou. This man was, people say, well known for being a womanizer. During his term in office the island's policeman would arrange secret meetings with attractive women for the chief. One of these women became pregnant and bore the chief's illegitimate child. It was at this time that the only tidal wave people had known or heard of hit Nanumea, causing severe damage and inundating the entire village area from the ocean to the lagoon shore. No lives were lost but the message which people received was that the elemental powers had shown displeasure with the high chief's transgression (soli) of the rules (tulaafono) governing the high chieftainship. The chief was replaced.

While I heard these stories from several sources during both fieldtrips to Nanumea, one informant used them both as an illustration of the importance placed on the office holder obeying the rules. To break these laws, even by carrying a grandchild on one's shoulders, was to risk the continued "luck" (manuia) of the community and, in cases of severe breach, to precipitate disasters such as these two.

Even inadvertent breaches of the code of conduct expected of the high chief might put the community at risk. Concerns over the chief's person were such that if he so much as stumbled while walking, a feast must be held to nullify any possible ill effects which might befall the community. As people recall this type of situation, anyone

noticing the chief trip or hurt himself would inform the Council of Chiefs, "the chief has tripped [or fallen, etc.], we are going to have a fakanofonofo feast tomorrow." People then prepared feast foods and the next day was a holiday in which all assembled in the community hall to eat together. Informants are not specific about the activities which took place during a fakanofonofo, but note the importance of this rite in counteracting possible ill effects arising from the mishap.

In this regard the experience of the whaler Henry Pease in Nanumea in 1853 is significant. Pease (1854) reported that people repeatedly referred to him as a "chief" (he gives no Nanumean term for the word) and that he had an escort or bodyguard of four other chiefs during his entire three-day stay ashore. These men even remained with him as he slept, sleeping in a rectangle completely surrounding him. Pease notes:

They attended me in all of my movements, never losing sight of me during the time I was on the island. I accidentally got a small scratch on my face, so that the blood appeared, which gave them great alarm, the king in particular; he repeatedly referred to it, and it was very difficult to persuade him that it was of no consequence. It appeared to me that they were fearful if any harm should befall me while on the island, some great calamity would come upon them in consequence.

It is difficult today, impossible perhaps, to probe very deeply into the philosophical and religious thinking which undoubtedly underlay conceptions of the chieftainship. Yet clearly, as we have seen, Nanumeans conceived of the reigning chief as a moral intercessor between the island and the unnamed powers of the universe. He was responsible through his upright behavior and the sanctity of his

person for the continued prosperity and well-being of the island, and for maintaining an equitable balance. One might argue here that a primary function of the high chief was the maintenance of this ultimate moral order. On this basis the ceremonial, religious role of the chief was dominant and the political functions of the office secondary.

Little is known today of the chief's involvement in religious rites in the pre-Christian period. Indeed, little is known about pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices at all. This aspect of life was the most thoroughly condemned and energetically suppressed by the early missionaries, who also preached against other practices which they suspected had associations with religion.<sup>20</sup> Pease and others who visited Nanumea before the conversion note, though, that some individuals they met were "priests." But the mere use of the word "priest" tells us little about how Nanumeans conceived of these individuals or what their role was. Furthermore, Pease's usage of the terms "chief" and "priest" is ambiguous and he seems to use them interchangeably in many instances. Thus, at one point in the long quarantine rite he underwent on his first day ashore several individuals approached, and Pease notes, "I supposed [them] to be priests." At another point he describes ritual portions of food being placed "before the chiefs or priests" [emphasis added]. Not long after he arrived on shore he was required to sit on the beach for several hours while, he says, "The king with all his chiefs are engaged in religious ceremonies and consultations...to intercede with their dieties." And in one of the last portions of the long ritual of incorporation where words were uttered and water sprinkled over a skull, Pease describes this as done by "the old chief."

It is evident from his detailed account that Pease witnessed complex rituals of a religious nature (i.e., dealing with spiritual beings) and that some people acted as ritual experts during the proceedings. But what is not so apparent is whether these experts were indeed priests, or whether all chiefs took part in religious ritual. This latter possibility would help explain Pease's inability to be certain who the priests were, and it also fits with statements of informants today that lineage heads had the responsibility for dealing with lineage "gods," feao. Graeffe's remarks quoted at the head of this chapter about Nanumea being ruled by about seven "priests" further reinforces this view. In my opinion, it seems probable that there were some religious specialists whose primary identification was as "priests," but equally likely that high ranking chiefs and lineage heads also shared priest-like ritual and religious prerogatives. Certainly no clear demarcation between these two groups of individuals emerges from Pease's or any of the other early descriptions of Nanumean society.

If any of Nanumea's chiefs took part in these rituals of incorporation then it is certain that the reigning high chief was also centrally involved in pre-Christian religious and philosophical beliefs. We have already seen repeated instances where the chief was closely associated with the land and with the continued balance and harmony of nature. While specific details of the high chief's ritual role are not available today, there can be no doubt about the vital significance of this individual, the direct successor of Nanumea's founder, and of the office he represents, in Nanumean cosmological thinking.



## NOTES

The quotes in the excerpts which begin this chapter are taken from Graeffe (1867:1189) and Whitmee (1871).

1. Strictly speaking, it was not the office of high chief, but of "Chief Kaubure," "leader of the councillors" which, along with the position of Magistrate, was replaced by the present Island Council system. Nanumeans had long considered the "Chief Kaubure" to be the high chief though, so terminating this office was equivalent, in Nanumean eyes, to abolishing the position of high chief. This is discussed more fully below.
2. The word aganuu is a Samoan borrowing (cf. Milner 1966, Samoan aganu'u, "Custom(s)"). The Nanumean term for custom or tradition is tuu. Nanumeans sometimes combine the two words in an emphatic construction tuu mo aganuu, "customs and traditions."
3. This abbreviated discussion of Nanumeans' ultimate acceptance of a missionary after years of determined resistance is presented here as part of my discussion of the gradual penetration of outside powers into Nanumea. It is only a partial account, however, in that it does not present Nanumean oral historical material, which makes it clear that there were complex internal political forces in operation at this same time, forces which were instrumental in the decision by Nanumea's leaders to finally accept a "teacher." This material will be presented in a separate publication.
4. Nanumeans have recalled Vaetolo's difficulties with the island's pastor somewhat differently in oral tradition. The mala i aa Vaetolo, "Vaetolo's disaster," a drought of catastrophic proportions, is said to have been precipitated when this high chief forbade people to contribute food to the pastor each week and instead ordered that such gifts come to the chief as they always had traditionally. The linkage of the high-chief's actions with order in the universe is discussed later in this chapter.
5. The 1894 laws do not specify the nature or number of people to constitute the Council, apparently leaving this to each island government to decide. Traditionally, each Tuvalu community already had such a council of elders, normally made up of lineage heads and leaders of chiefly groups. Late in 1893 Nanumea had a Council of nine individuals (Tuvalu National Archives 1893). The term kaupuli used in the laws is a British corruption of Tuvaluan kaupule, "group [of] leaders."
6. Information from different informants on when the elders began to appoint the "unofficial" chief is not entirely consistent. Some say this began in the 1940's--if so, then the reorganization which took place then was likely the source of this move too. But other informants, including Iulia, whose father Maiiau

was the first aliki appointed to the new position, recall that this happened in the mid-1930's. I have used this date in my depiction here (and in Appendix III), but some uncertainty remains.

7. Government displeasure with Nanumea's emphasis at this time on its traditional chieftainship is obvious. In a touring report written after a visit to Nanumea on November 8, 1956, a government administrative officer noted:

During this [meeting with the Island Council, an elder] talked in a manner which showed that the group of people who called themselves "chiefs" has the idea that they can do anything with any members of the Native Government. I made it clear to the three chiefs present in this meeting that they have no powers whatsoever over the Native Government or the Is. Council...I went further to tell this meeting that although Nanumea has in the past been in the habit of having an unrecognized High Chief in the Island Council, this is to stop from now on unless the Resident Commissioner recognizes their High Chief (Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony 1956).

The following year on a visit to Nanumea another touring officer reported:

[The Magistrate] raised the question of a high chief and seemed to favour the idea since his is a member of the principle family involved and I suspect would be in the running. The government's views on Ellice Island High Chieftainship were reiterated as they had been last year... and the sad moral story of the so-called chiefly families meddling with administration on Nanumaga was related. I had the impression that the question will arise again later (Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony 1957).

In 1958 the matter did arise again, when a delegation of chiefs asked that their Head Chief be allowed to sit with the island government. The central government again refused. But in its insistence on keeping administrative matters simple it misrepresented (or misunderstood) the nature of Nanumea's chieftainship, to the point of denying the existence of the role of High Chief. The touring officer reported:

My reply to this [request] was in the negative. I explained to the Council that there used to be no administrative objection to their unofficial High Chief sitting in Native Government Courts and other functions as long as he and the so-called chiefs knew that the Council was the ruling body or in other words was the only government on the island... I told the meeting that they knew perfectly well that there is no paramount chief on Nanumea or in the Ellice Islands. If the so-called chiefs on Nanumea think that there is a

high chief on Nanumea, I was sure if they were asked to point out who was the paramount chief, they would have a war between themselves as each one would like to be the paramount chief. To strengthen my statement that there is no paramount chief in the Ellice today, I asked the meeting whether anyone on Nanumea or any other island could if he/she wished disregard whatever a so-called chief asks him/her to do? "Yes," was the reply. I told the Council that is not the case in other places where they have real high chiefs (Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony 1958).

8. In fact, there was no provision in the new laws banning the office of High Chief and Nanumea could, technically, have restored its Ulu Alik, "unofficial high chief" position at this time. People told me, however, that they felt the government's antagonism to this office (expressed in 1956 and following years) made such a move impossible.
9. Ironically, this same individual, while an administrative officer in the Colony government, had earlier strongly opposed Nanumea's efforts to retain a high chief in addition to government appointed officials.
10. While this euphemism serves to help avoid any implication that this council of elders serves as Nanumea's leaders (its aliki), it seems likely to me that it has other roots as well. The term aliki has been incorporated into Nanumea's Christian philosophy as a translation for the Biblical word "Lord" (i.e., Jesus Christ), which probably leads to some ambivalence about its continued use to refer to community elders.
11. People in Nanumea and other parts of Tuvalu discussed this with me, but the dates were supplied by Tuvalu's Prime Minister, the Rt. Honorable Dr. Tomasi Puapua, during discussions in Funafuti, June 1984.
12. Ideal rules and actual practice do not always correspond, though. Appendix III tabulates information known about Nanumea's leaders from 1866 to the present and makes it clear that other lineages than those of the "front" and "back" chiefs have supplied the high chief during this period. In my view, this "discrepancy" between political theory and practice is a likely indicator that the chieftainship was undergoing changes away from what seems to have been a dominance by the two lines of Tepaa and Teilo at the time of first western contact. It may be that the reorganization of the chieftainship as recounted in Takitua's tale of his ancestor Logotau (Chapter 3) was a catalyst for these changes-- though this is speculation at best.
13. The chief in office did not necessarily agree with the criticism implied in the request to step down, but it was impossible to hold the office without the continuing support of elders of the community. As Takitua, who had himself been asked to step down, phrased

it: "When [the] people are angry it is appropriate to sit [i.e., step down]" (Mana tino e tteke, e ttau o noho).

14. Everyone who discussed these ceremonies with me emphasized that the primary food served was poi, which is made exclusively of produce of the coconut palm: the green meat of the coconut in the motomoto stage of ripeness (this is more mature than the flesh in drinking nuts, but thinner and more tender than meat in mature nuts), the sweet fibrous center (uttanu) of mature coconuts which have fallen and sprouted, and sweet coconut sap (kaleve). Associations of the coconut with the chieftainship and with Tefolaha are discussed in Chapter 8.

15. My account here is assembled after many discussions on this topic with a variety of older informants. Some of the variations in their accounts is expected, since people remember selectively and also participated in different installation ceremonies. An example of a case where I needed to select between accounts was Iulia's recollection that only members of the chiefly lineages took part in the taualapalapa mock-battle.

All other informants recalled it as pitting the chiefly and the non-chiefly groups, and this appears to me to complement other examples of the extensive dualism between these two segments of Nanumean society examined throughout the book, but particularly in this chapter and in Chapter 6.

16. Tepou said that while the chief normally did not fight in this battle himself, nothing prevented him from doing so, as he was still "free," that is, he had not yet assumed the office of high chief.
17. The word fakapuku means, literally, to "feed by hands full," i.e., to take food in one's cupped hands and feed someone. Tepou and Tepula told me, however, that at ceremonial feedings they had seen, a spoon was used. The new chief's tuaatina only fed him in this special manner at the installation ceremony. Weekly thereafter, however, and continuing on throughout his reign, they took baskets of food to his house.
18. The feast takes its name, taumalo, from the fact that each time it is held new young men are eligible to take part, they are "taumalo," "counted in the malo," or old enough to wear the loin-cloth which was the traditional dress of adult men. After a brief visit to Tuvalu in 1866, a German naturalist (Graeffe 1867:1187) noted:

"[in Niutao] almost all the men wear the maro [sic], while adolescent boys and girls walk about in nature's costume." Of Nanumea he noted, "the natives dress themselves like those on Niu-tao, although the maro is even narrower here, and entirely grown-up boys and girls go completely naked."

It is likely that there were formerly religious aspects to this ceremony as well as other elements of a formal rite of passage which are no longer remembered today after more than a century of Christianity. There was probably also a rite of passage marking the transition of girls to womanhood, but as far as I know nothing is recalled of this today. The term tautiti, complementary to taumalo, and meaning "counted in the titi," that is, able to don a fiber skirt, is known by older informants but is recalled as an age stage and not as a ceremony.

19. There are numerous versions of this story of the mala i aa Vaetolo, "Vaetolo's disaster," which has entered oral tradition in Nanumea. Most name the chief whose actions are believed to have led to the calamity as Vaetolo. Records (Gibson 1892) show that he was the reigning aliki when the British protectorate was proclaimed in 1892. The drought mentioned in these tales is undoubtedly the severe one which struck northern Tuvalu following a hurricane in 1890, reducing many to near starvation. In a touring report dated September, 1895, for instance, the British Resident of the new protectorate noted that most islands in Tuvalu had recovered from the effects of the 1890 hurricane, except for Nanumaga and Nanumea. Both still lacked rain and at Nanumea he says, "In one house I found the people eating the dried seed pods of the mangrove" (Swayne 1895). Elderly Nanumeans described this time to me as one of hunger and weakness. Children of five and six years of age still crawled like babies, they said, so weak from hunger were they.
  
20. Perhaps some of the surprising vehemence of this condemnation arose from the strength with which Nanumea first rejected all overtures from the missionaries. After several abortive attempts to establish a station it was clear that Nanumeans desired no change, that, as Powell put it, they wished to remain in "their chosen darkness." But he also notes that "this island has excited peculiar interest among both missionaries and teachers" (Powell 1871:50).

Despite this "peculiar interest," early missionary reports make clear the extreme revulsion these emissaries of a new belief system felt for Nanumea's traditional practices. To travel to un-Christian Nanumea from Tuvalu islands which had allowed missionaries to land was to move into "still deeper darkness" (Murray 1876:407). Nanumeans were characterized as being in a "lower state" than their Tuvalu neighbors (Murray 1866:41), and the religious rites of incorporation for visitors to the island were repeatedly referred to as being "devilled" (Whitmee 1871:24). One report fears that two Christian Nanumeans who had arrived from another island might be "unable to endure the persecution of their heathen countrymen" and concludes, "May the Great Shepherd preserve these lambs in the midst of the wolves!" (Powell 1871:51).

We have already seen that even non-missionaries joined in this scorn for Nanumea's tenacious hold on its pre-Christian culture, as in British naval captain John Moresby's blunt characterization in an official government report, "They are all Devil worshippers" (Moresby 1872:165), and his subsequent firing of shots to "give them an idea of the white man's power" (Moresby 1876:80).

## Chapter 5

NON-CHIEFLY DESCENT GROUPS: "KOPITI"

"Kopiti is a very old Nanumean word. It [means] all of the families of Nanumea... [They used to say] 'we are going to meet in kopiti.' You would then see that you were related with that group, and that there were your [distant] relatives, in relation to land. Yes. Because if you had land that I had given you, you were in my kopiti."

Tepou, at Nanumea, May 1984

Kopiti n. 1) non-chiefly land holding patrilineage, named; not exogamous, but normal incest rules apply to marriage within one's kopiti. Contrasts with maga. n. 2) (informal usage) any corporate kin group in Nanumea.

K. Chambers, Nanumea Lexicon, ms.

Until very recently many Nanumeans were members either of one of the chiefly descent groups or of a second type of patrilineal group known as kopiti. Based on similar principles, the main difference between these two types of descent groups is that kopiti were not formed with reference to descent from the founder, Tefolaha, while chiefly groups were. Thus, in a simplistic sense one could contrast chiefly "branches," maga, and kopiti as chiefly and non-chiefly descent groups, or as chiefly and "commoner" descent groups. But this distinction overstates the contrast as seen by many Nanumeans today and has the further disadvantage of emphasizing a hierarchical distinction which, while recognized, was not apparently highly stressed. It is also problematic

because there were some cases where individuals held membership in both types of groups.

Kopiti groups appear to have functioned as corporate patri-lineages which carried out several significant functions in traditional society. They acted as land holding corporations with a considerable degree of continuity in time. Their members maintained a sense of group identity, used a common name (often of the sort "people of the group \_\_\_\_\_"), and in some cases carried out traditional responsibilities reserved for them alone. One important function, and the one that probably resulted in the rapid decline of kopiti after the introduction of Christianity to Nanumea, is the association of each kopiti with one or more of the old gods. These functions will be considered in greater detail below (see also Appendix II), but first it is useful to consider what Nanumeans today are able to recall about kopiti and the process through which I pieced together my understanding of these archaic groups.

#### Current Knowledge of Kopiti

From the outset of fieldwork in Nanumea I encountered the term kopiti, although its use was puzzlingly variable. Very early in my research one informant, speaking through an interpreter, said of kopiti, "It is like your family [kaaiga]." Other informants used the word to refer specifically to parents or, in one case, grandparents. Only a few people were able to give a specific meaning for this now archaic word. One man, in his forties in 1973, defined kopiti in this way:

Many different families with one "root," grouped together, traced through your father's side only, back to a single person. Each kopiti had a name, somewhat like a nickname. Old men in each kopiti kept track of who the members were.



This was by far the most succinct and thorough definition I obtained for kopiti.<sup>1</sup> Gradually I incorporated what other informants also said and extended those remarks to construct a working definition: kopiti were broadly based patrilineages, corporate in nature, and each had a name and identity.

An important question that emerged from these initial enquiries concerned the functions of kopiti. Clearly they no longer existed, except in people's memories. What was it, then, that they had "done" in traditional society? This question proved to be a difficult one for people to answer. One elderly informant who had been born late in the 19th century while kopiti were still partially intact explained simply: "They ate together."<sup>2</sup> Others felt that the main function of these groups was festive. In addition to eating together in the community hall they came together from time to time, much in the fashion of a reunion. Another response was that kopiti were associated with land, although most people were not able to be very specific about this latter point. Finally, kopiti were known to have been associated with what a few older informants remember as the worship of skulls.

When we began our first household survey and census in late 1973, my wife and I sought to gather systematic information about kopiti. We asked people the name of their kopiti and also the names of those of their mother and father, hoping in this way to compile detailed data on the numbers, names and structure of these groups. At this time we had not met a single person who could recall the names of more than two or three kopiti. The most knowledgeable informants, when pressed, commented that there had been perhaps seven or eight of these groups at the turn

of the century, with as many as one hundred people in any given kopiti-- some were smaller, some larger. This information they recalled from gatherings of kopiti they had participated in.

The census question gave us several interesting leads. First of all, it confirmed our suspicion that for the great majority of Nanu-means, kopiti were not functioning entities. In response to the question, "Do you know the name of your kopiti?", most people replied negatively. A few misunderstood the term. In all, only about 150 people (approximately 30% of the adult population) were able to respond with the name of a kopiti.

A second interesting thing to emerge from this survey was the apparent lack of consensus among individuals regarding the names of the groups. From the responses of people who could recall the name of their own kopiti or those of their parents we compiled a list of 26 names. These are given in Table 5-1 in alphabetical order, together with tabulations of the numbers of people who responded with each name.

While 26 named land holding descent groups might not be an inordinately large number for an estimated population of about 700 at the turn of the century, it contradicts statements by elderly informants that about seven or eight kopiti groups gathered together whenever there were group functions.

Hoping to clarify what seemed to be contradictions here, we took the list to Taulialia, a community elder widely considered to have the best memory for names, genealogy, descent groups and other aspects of traditional life. I read the list to Taulialia and he was able, almost immediately, to divide it into four categories. Taulialia called his first grouping "real kopiti" (kopiti ailoa). There were seven of

Table 5-1 Kopiti Names Given in 1973 Census of Households

| <u>Name</u>      | <u>No. Individ.<br/>Giving Name</u> | <u>Name</u>                   | <u>No. Individ.<br/>Giving Name</u> |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Falekelekele     | 1                                   | Te Alatuu Tapu                | 8                                   |
| Falemua          | 4                                   | Te Alike a Mua                | 2                                   |
| Faletolu         | 23                                  | Te Alike a Muli               | 6                                   |
| Fenuagogo        | 23                                  | Te Kau Alike                  | 7                                   |
| Fiapalolo        | 1                                   | Te Kau o te Afaga o<br>Maagai | 3                                   |
| Filikafai        | 22                                  | Te Kau o Telagai              | 2                                   |
| Kopiti haa Tonga | 7                                   | Te Malie                      | 6                                   |
| Kopiti Samoa     | 17                                  | Te Paaheiloo                  | 10                                  |
| Lalofetau        | 7                                   | Tiilaa                        | 1                                   |
| Maheku           | 42                                  | Tuinanumea                    | 1                                   |
| Mahikava         | 19                                  | Tumau [i Nanumea]             | 18                                  |
| Malele           | 1                                   | Tumau i Alofa                 | 1                                   |
| Pihelea          | 2                                   | Uma                           | 20                                  |

Note: The number of responses is unlikely to reflect accurately the comparative "sizes" of kopiti. In some households a parent supplied kopiti names for his or her children, even though the children themselves did not know the name, thereby swelling the number of "members" for some kopiti. Also included here are names supplied for the kopiti of respondents' deceased parents. Nevertheless, there is a rough correspondence between the number of responses and the likelihood that a name was recognized by Taulialia as a "true kopiti."

these. In the second category were, he said, simply names for lands, most of them in the village area. The third category were, Taulialia said, not kopiti, but rather the names of chiefly descent groups, aliki maga. Finally, there was a residual group of names that Taulialia found anomalous for one reason or another. These four categories are presented in Table 5-2.

Three important observations about kopiti emerge from Taulialia's remarks. Firstly, some groups seem to have been referred to by several synonymous names in contemporary usage. This accounts for some of the ambiguity I encountered. Secondly, it is apparent that a number of people replied to the question, "What is the name of your kopiti?" (that is, what is your non-chiefly descent group?) with the name of a chiefly descent group. This response is interesting in light of the interrelationship and complementarity of chiefly and non-chiefly descent groups (cf. Chapter 6). Thirdly, as the notes to Table 5-2 indicate, the anomalous residual category identified by Taulialia includes entities felt by respondents to be kopiti but disputed by this elder.

At this point in the research I found it tempting to accept the "expert" testimony of Taulialia and view the seven kopiti he had named as "true kopiti," and the others as spurious or anomalous for one of the reasons he had given. But the tantalizing question remained: why had so many people given the "wrong" answers, and why had informants given names of entities which, in Taulialia's view, were not corporate patrilineal groups at all?

It seems likely that the answer to this question hinges in part on the fragmentary knowledge most people have of groups to which they do not belong. Also relevant here are the flexibility and the processual

Table 5-2 Categories of "Kopiti" Names from 1973 Census

| <u>Kopiti</u>               | <u>Village Lands</u>             | <u>Chiefly Lineage</u>        | <u>Anomalous</u>                    |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Faletolu <sup>(a)</sup>     | Falekelekele                     | Te Aliko a Mua <sup>(d)</sup> | Falemua <sup>(f)</sup>              |
| Fenuagogo                   | Lalofetau                        | Te Aliko a Muli               | Te Malie <sup>(g)</sup>             |
| Kopiti haa<br>Tonga         | Te Afaga o<br>Maagai             | Te Kau Aliko <sup>(e)</sup>   | Te Paaheiloo <sup>(h)</sup>         |
| Kopiti Samoa <sup>(b)</sup> | Filikafai                        | Tuinanumea                    | Tumau i Alofa <sup>(i)</sup>        |
| Maheku                      | Te Alatuu<br>Tapu <sup>(c)</sup> | Uma <sup>(c)</sup>            | Tumau [i<br>Nanumea] <sup>(j)</sup> |
| Mahikava                    |                                  | Pihelea <sup>(d)</sup>        | Fiapalolo <sup>(k)</sup>            |
| Uma <sup>(c)</sup>          |                                  |                               |                                     |

## Notes:

Categories from discussion with Taulialia Poepoe.

- a. Also called Te Kau o Telagai (Table 5-1), but Faletolu is its "proper" name.
- b. Also called Filikafai, but Filikafai is, properly speaking, the village land which this kopiti had as its base (nohoaga).
- c. According to Taulialia, Uma is the name both of a kopiti and a chiefly lineage. See Appendix II for further discussion of this. The name Te Alatuu Tapu is a synonym, but properly speaking is the name of one of the village lands which this kopiti had as its base.
- d. Te Aliko a Mua and Pihelea are synonyms for the same aliko group; the latter name came into use during World War II after a reorganization of the chiefly groups (cf. Chapter 4).
- e. Properly speaking the term kau aliko refers to chiefly descent groups as a whole, not to any particular group. Most people who gave this name for their kopiti were members (I later learned) of the chiefly lineage Fakavalevale (Appendix II).
- f. In Taulialia's opinion, Falemua was anomalous because it was neither a kopiti nor the name of a land parcel. It is possible that this "non recognition" of the name Tepou claims for his kopiti is involved with the differing views of society presented in Chapter 3, and later in Chapters 7 and 8.
- g. "An old name bestowed by the community on a group who kept the peace in pre-contact times," said Taulialia. It was associated with the descendants of a single individual, Teuhie, but not, according to Taulialia, a kopiti.

Table 5-2 (continued)

- h. Taulialia was unaware that others believe this to be the name of one of the seven chiefly lineages. See Appendix II for more on this group under its more common synonym Fakavalevale.
- i. A recent name, created by members of one family, Taulialia said.
- j. Saying that he had never heard this name, Taulialia noted that it was similar to (i), the sort of name people create. He seemed unaware of its widespread use by members of the chiefly lineage Te Aliko o te Tai as a synonym, possibly because the name was apparently coined only recently.
- k. Of unknown origin. I neglected to ask Taulialia about this one.

nature that seem to have characterized these corporate groups. To document the exact number and names of kopiti would probably always have been a problematic task, even when kopiti were functioning groups. Also, while Taulialia's memory is truly phenomenal, so much so that he is admired throughout Tuvalu, it is also necessarily limited to events within the scope of his own experiences. Thus I think we need to consider what it is that Taulialia was saying when he said, "These seven groups are real kopiti groups, these are land names, these are chiefly groups and, finally, these are really nothing like the above groups at all."

First of all, Taulialia clearly was giving his own opinion, although he did not phrase it in this way. As a recognized authority he is characteristically very definite about what he knows and does not know. On the other hand, over the years in working together with him, it often became apparent to me that his specific knowledge about another patrilineage or a chiefly kin group of which he was not a member was quite limited. Usually he was reticent to try to explain things when he felt that someone from the other group could do it better. In these situations he would say, "I don't know," or "Please go see so-and-so." Insofar as Taulialia was willing to comment on the kopiti names we had collected, I believe that he considered that he could make a real contribution, one based on his exceptional and renowned memory for names. However, it is important to remember, as the competing views of chiefly descent groups discussed in Chapter 3 make clear, that one person's statement may directly contradict that of another, even though both may be recognized experts.

Nonetheless, the lack of consensus about kopiti groupings continued to surprise me. Unlike the chiefly groups, membership in kopiti

does not seem to have carried with it much prestige. In terms of the status and political prerogatives conveyed by membership, there was probably little to choose between one kopiti and another, and flexible membership practices seem to have enabled people to affiliate to advantage in terms of land rights. I felt that the existence of numerous conflicts in different informants' assessments about kopiti names constituted an important clue about the nature of kopiti. Particularly because my informants were considered reputable and knowledgeable, I continued my search for the meaning behind this conflicting testimony.

Two of the descent group names that Taulialia found to be anomalous and discarded as not "true kopiti" (Table 5-2) gave me particularly useful clues to the puzzle. Falemua, which translates literally as "First House," is associated with the family of Tepou and as far as I know, it is not used by anyone else in Nanumea. Taulialia said it is not the name of a piece of land, nor did he believe it to be a kopiti. He suggested I ask Tepou about the name. Tepou's point of view proved quite different. He was emphatic that Falemua is the name of the patrilineage of his father and he supplied a list of other elders, some quite distantly related but all through patrilineal links, who he says were members of this kopiti. An additional few individuals were pointed out as members through having kopiti lands from Tepou's family, obtained long ago. Most of these individuals were deceased and few had male offspring then living on Nanumea.

A second example of a group which Taulialia found problematic is called Te Malie by its members. Widely known in Nanumea, this name is associated with the descendants of a single person, Teuhie (fl. ca. 1870), who is remembered as a peacemaker, in contrast to other notable



individuals of that era renowned as warriors, toa (or troublemakers, as some would explain this role today). Despite Taulialia's view that this group does not constitute a kopiti, the current day members dispute this.

What was it about these groups that led Taulialia to class them as something other than kopiti? For Falemua, I suspect the problem lies in its relatively small size in comparison with many other descent groups. While used by Tepou and a circle of patrilateral kinsmen of his father, the name was not apparently widely recognized by other members of the community. There are several possible explanations for this, but one possibility, perhaps the most likely one, is that the name is of recent origin. This would corroborate what some, especially those who do not side with Tepou's view of things as presented in Chapter 3, say: that he and his family assert a point of view about their position that is not wholly accepted by other Nanumeans at present. It is also possible that the kopiti Falemua was formerly more extensive than it is today, and hence more widely known, but through the passage of time there have been relatively few patrilineal descendants of its several branches.

For the group called Te Malie it is likely that the problem lies not so much in the group's limited breadth, but rather in its linkage with a particular individual and his exploits as a Christian "peacemaker." In opposing several non-Christian warriors who wished to see Nanumea retain its traditional religion, and ultimately triumphing, Teuhie became a notable figure and was seen by his descendants as the founder of their kopiti. But "real" kopiti were involved not only with the land holdings of their members, but also with the worship of Nanumea's old gods. Thus, like Falemua, this kopiti was anomalous. Each of them differed in significant ways from a common standard.

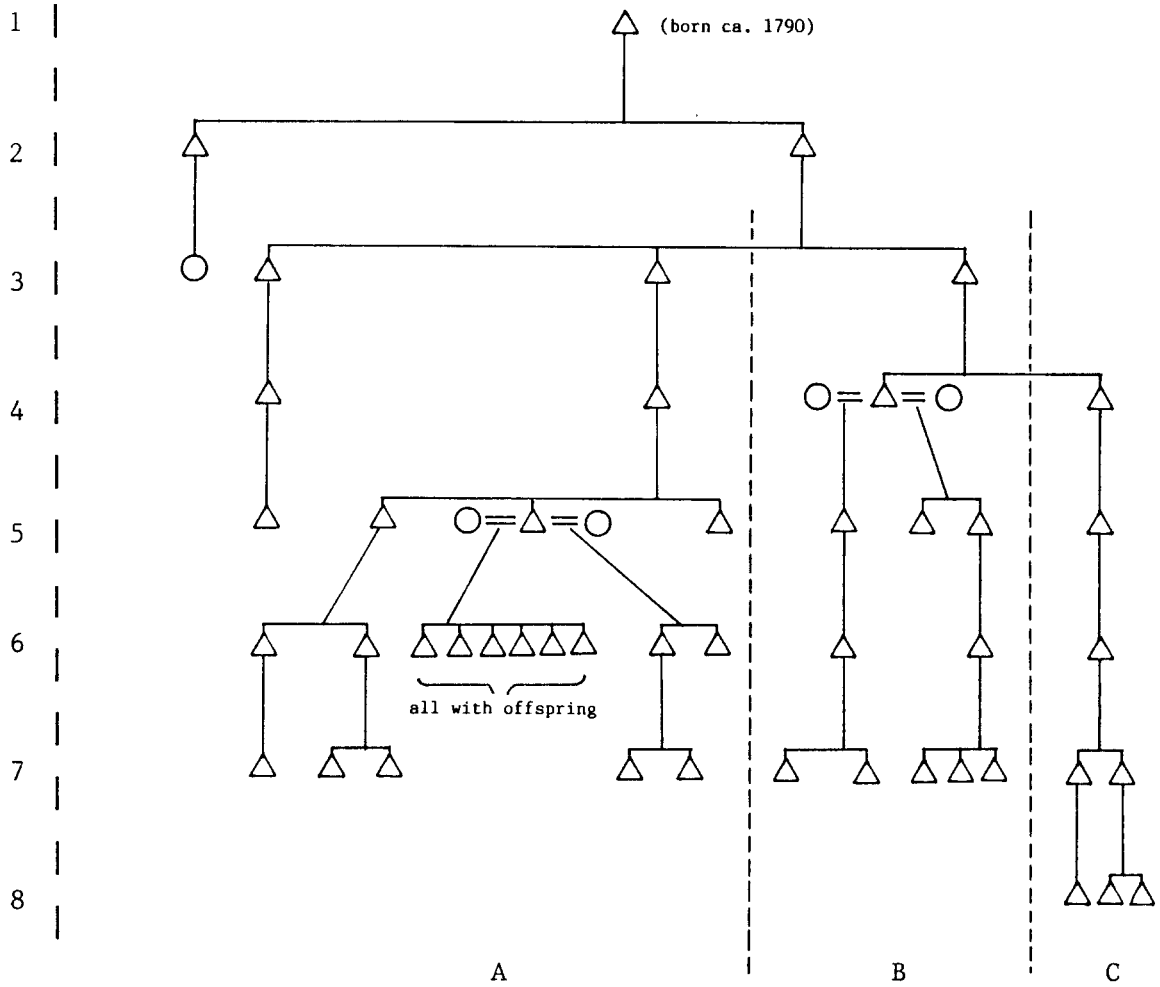
I also made another useful observation. Of the core set of names which Taulialia had characterized as "true" kopiti groups, none were rejected by any other person I talked to in the course of my research. That is, people might not remember the name of their kopiti or even the names of any kopiti. But when presented with the list of these seven kopiti names, those who were able to comment all agreed: "Yes, those are the kopiti I recall hearing about." I feel that this indicates that these seven kopiti are indeed "true" in the sense that others are not--they conform to expectations about an ideal type of kopiti at the turn of the century. In contrast to others which may have been either in decline or newly formed, these seven were apparently well established entities. Let us now consider what these accepted criteria of kopiti are and more specifically the functions of kopiti in traditional society.

#### Kopiti and Land

The most basic function of kopiti in pre-Christian society seems to have been their control of land. These corporate patrilineages controlled the pooled land resources of their members, with the oldest men in each segment having jurisdiction over usage. Prior to the land reforms imposed by the British colonial government beginning early in this century, most land parcels that an individual had access to were those of his or her patrilineage. Figure 5-1 diagrams a kopiti and illustrates its continuation and change through time. The founders of the kopiti depicted here are considered by informants today to be the three brothers in generation 3, even though a few informants could recall the name of their father and grandfather. These three would have received the estate of their father, as well as possible additional lands

Figure 5-1

A "Kopiti" Patrilineage



Source: Genealogy of the kopiti Mahikava, with some simplification. This diagram is a schematic only, omitting females of this descent group (who do not normally transmit membership), and ignoring cases of adoption.

through will, adoption, and other means of conveyance known in traditional society. The bulk of the land making up the estate would have come from their father, however.

While the brothers are alive, the land would have been used jointly by them and their families. This joint use would usually continue through the lifetimes of the next generation, even after the three original siblings died. In time the corporation grew in breadth and depth as younger generations married and bore children. Land tenure of this sort, known as kaitahi (literally, "eat together"), was the normal type of tenure within a kopiti patrilineage. By the time generation 6 (born between 1908-1925) are adults, the original set of brothers and most of their sons as well (i.e., generations 3 and 4) have died. The corporation is now more broadly based, with three distinct segments, but continues to bear the name that originated early in the formation of the group. One of the descent lines of the original set of brothers has died out. Relationships between segments of the patrilineage are beginning to become more distant, and at the same time the de facto division of land has begun. For example, the two brothers in generation 7, segment C use parcels of land that were previously used only by their father before them. The other two sub-divisions of the kopiti are also using their lands separately.

Segmentation of the descent group takes place either through gradual attrition, as relationships linking the segments become so distant that they are no longer recalled, or through the process of marriage between individuals from separate segments. Since such marriages mean that the former kin relationships are no longer recognized, marriage within kopiti trims the group down to a smaller core. This also results

in the kopiti group losing some of its lands. At the same time, a process of accretion is at work, whereby additional lands are acquired by the kopiti through adoption, through wills, and from the estates of women who have married into the group.<sup>3</sup> Thus, lands held by any given sub-segment of the kopiti may increase or decrease in time.

Although the kopiti shown in this example had retained its name and recognition as one of Nanumea's non-chiefly descent groups until the 1950's, it seems likely that had kopiti continued to exist it would soon have divided into two, with B and C probably continuing and A remaining as a single separate entity. The increasingly distant genealogical links between these two segments would make marriage between members possible, and eventually a marriage will occur between them. When this happens they will formally cease to consider themselves part of the same kopiti. At this point a decision will have to be made about which is the "core" and which the periphery, and hence whether the original name is retained by one segment, or both adopt new names.

This analysis demonstrates several things. It shows how kopiti are likely to have altered through time, through processes of fission generating new segments as the original group became unwieldy, and as intra-kopiti marriages took place. It also shows the necessary development of new names and new identities as groups evolve in an endless process through time.

Let us now briefly reconsider Taulialia's insistence that there were seven kopiti groups and that their names were those given in Table 5-2. His insistence means, I believe, that these seven groups are the ones he recalls as being those of longest duration and most stable format at that point in time. If, for instance, there were to be a marriage

between individuals in segments B and C of the kopiti shown in Figure 5-1 (say at generation 6 or 7), it is most likely that segment C would split off from the original kopiti. Members of this segment would no longer consider themselves to belong to the parent kopiti, and in time would assume their own name and identity. For some time after this, perhaps for generations, people would be likely to regard the original kopiti as a "true" non-chiefly descent group, and the newly generated one, still in its infancy, as anomalous. It would have fewer members, less land, and a shallow time depth and untested longevity, since its founding ancestor was still living. Its name, if it had one, would probably be one its members had recently chosen for themselves, and hence would not be widely known and might not have achieved community-wide acceptance. Seen in this perspective, it seems likely that Taulialia's list comprises the established major kopiti, but not necessarily all kopiti. For, at any given time, there must have been both such long standing core groups as well as some more recently formed and less well recognized groups.

Besides its assortment of land parcels scattered throughout Nanumea, each kopiti had one or more residential lands within the village. This was its nohoaga, its "seat" or base. Elderly informants today assert that in pre-Christian times Nanumeans lived scattered on their kopiti lands and not in the compact village as they do today. When one considers the names of kopiti groups, particularly the major groups identified by Taulialia, most of them designate both a group and also are the names of residential land parcels within the overall boundaries of the village. It is interesting to note that the second category of names in Table 5-2 also prove to be land names, most of them names of lands in the village area. The locations of these kopiti residential "seats" is

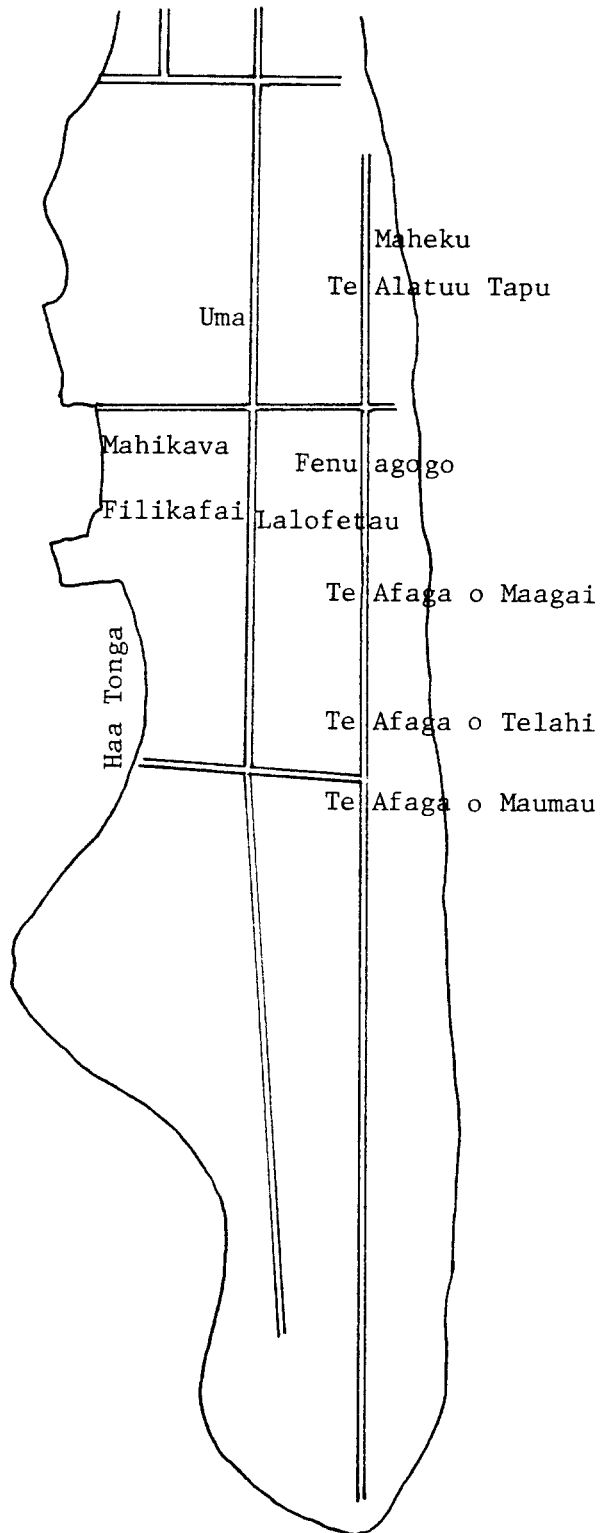
shown in Map 5-1. The association of both the well recognized and the minor kopiti groups with land located in the village area appears to be an archaic pattern which existed long before the intrusion of missionary and colonial powers into Nanumea. It also seems likely, to judge from the evidence of place names and from observable evidence of long-term occupation in today's village area, that kopiti descent groups lived in this general area, rather than scattered throughout Nanumea. In my view they probably lived in small hamlet-like groupings on their own residential nohoaga, "home base lands" within the village area itself.<sup>4</sup>

Because these residential clusters occupied named plots of land long associated with each group, they may have been perceived by Nanumeans quite differently than the geographical arrangement of today's village. This is because the change involved in switching from residence in one's kopiti nohoaga to a grid-like village pattern imposed (or at least encouraged) by mission and later colonial authorities meant more than just moving one's house. In many cases it meant moving to land not owned by one's family or one's patrilineage. The term fakkai, "village," today connotes this new arrangement, a communal sort of arrangement where to a large extent kinship boundaries no longer coincide with residential boundaries.

However, the kopiti pattern of residence continues to persist today in a few cases where people have remained located for several generations on land they own in the village. Descendants of an original sibling set (who have now all died) live today on three or four housesites in a contiguous row. These housesites may be occupied by the grandchildren of the original kopiti members. This current arrangement is not a true duplication of kopiti residence, but rather a reflection

Map 5-1

Kopiti Lands in Nanumea Village





of the fact that some people have managed to remain living on their own land in the village. In many other cases today, people live on lands owned by bilateral kinsmen or by non-kinsmen.

#### Links with the Gods

A second major function of kopiti groups seems to have been their close association with the worship of Nanumea's pagan deities. Elderly informants say that each descent group leader officiated in this worship. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 8 below, in both Nanumea and in neighboring Nanumaga (but not in the other islands of Tuvalu), the propitiation of ancestral skulls was central to the community's traditional religion. Religious observance seems to have involved kopiti at two levels. The first was the veneration of skulls of departed ancestors, the periodic making of offerings to the skulls, and, one can presume, the offering up of prayers for assistance and protection by the ancestors. Another religious practice which probably involved kopiti was the worship of particular island-wide gods. The strongest evidence that individual kopiti were associated with one or more specific gods and not with others lies in the names of kopiti land parcels within the village. Another source is traditional narratives which mention that specific groups were associated with certain of the gods.

Let's consider the land-based evidence first. Some of the land parcels named in Map 5-1 are linked with the old gods. The shoreline parcels named "Te Afaga o Maagai," "Te Afaga o Maumau" and "Te Afaga o Telahi," for instance, incorporate the names of three of the most important pagan gods, Maagai, Maumau and Telahi. These land names translate as "the canoe landing place of the god Maagai" (or Maumau, or Telahi).

Interspersed between them along the shoreline are some of the other "home base" lands of Nanumea's kopiti, while still other lands are located inland. It is probable that these lands whose names refer to the pre-Christian gods were involved in the worship of those gods. While specific information about this association is lacking today, it seems likely that some of the ritual proceedings which took place when newcomers reached Nanumea, proceedings which involved the major gods including those named above and which took place at the shoreline, were held on these lands named for the gods (cf. Chapter 8 for more information on these rites, and on shrines to the major gods). One can also suppose, although there is also no direct evidence for this, that the elders of the kopiti which controlled these lands were involved with hereditary responsibilities for the worship or propitiation of the gods associated with them.

Another source of information about links between kopiti and the pagan gods is traditional narratives. For example, in one long story recounting a series of Tongan invasions of Nanumea in the distant past, Nanumeans are warned of the approach of the Tongan war fleet by their gods. Each "clan" (as one informant, speaking in English early in our fieldwork, phrased it) had its own gods, and the men in those groups whose job it was to propitiate them called in turn on Te Feke (Octopus), Te Puhi (Eel) and Te Matagi (Wind) to assist in defeating the fleet. While one asked his god to produce a great wind, the others asked theirs to deal with the anchored flotilla of canoes. Octopus held all the anchor ropes while Eel gnawed through them one by one. Then, when Wind was blowing at full pitch, Octopus released the ropes and the fleet drifted away.<sup>5</sup> Here, in narrative form is a fleeting glimpse of the linkage of the gods of old with kopiti groups.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to be more specific about associations between particular kopiti and the gods, because virtually all this knowledge has been lost. In fact, the linkage of the old land-holding patrilineages with religion is very likely the reason for the rapid demise of the kopiti groups as functioning entities. By the turn of the century, kopiti seem to have been largely a thing of the past. They were still recalled and were the subject of reminiscence in periodic gatherings in Nanumea's community hall until about 1917, and then in one last reunion-type feast held about 1950. At these gatherings the prerogatives, skills and history of the groups was discussed, and displays of their skills were held (e.g., traditional types of fighting which one group was noted for). But with the former religious function of kopiti banned, and with elders stripped of their religious roles, much of the coherence of each group would undoubtedly have been lost.

While there is, to my knowledge, no direct evidence on this point, it seems likely that there was strong missionary pressure on Nanumeans to disband kopiti organization. This was accomplished by forbidding the worship of kopiti gods, by banning from public use all forms of knowledge that drew on the powers of the old gods and, perhaps most effectively, by apparently dispersing kopiti from their hamlet-like clusters, their ancestral lands. The more homogenous village structure which resulted removed people from lands that were associated with the worship of the traditional gods.

#### Overlap Between Kopiti and Aliki Groups

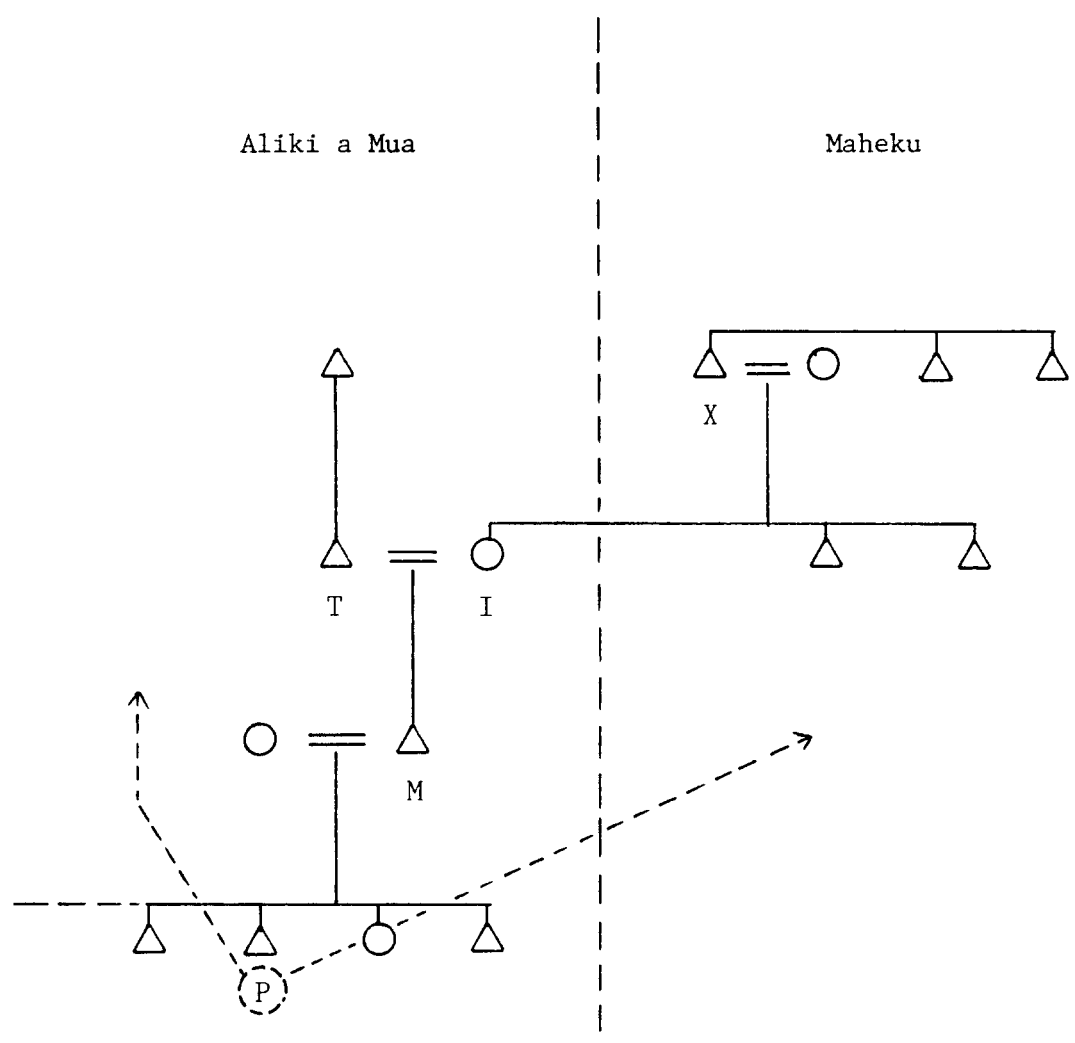
At the beginning of this chapter it was noted that the distinction between the corporate land holding groups known as kopiti and the

corporate groups known as chiefly "branches" (maga o aliki) was less than total, and that in practice there was some overlap. This needs to be explained.

Nanumean ideology asserts that kopiti groups and chiefly "branches" were separate entities and that each was made up of patrilineally related elders who traced descent from a common source, and their wives and families. While no clear rules requiring exogamy are recalled today, incest avoidance resulted in most marriages taking place outside of one's own patrilineal descent group. Sons made up the core of each of these types of patrilineage, with daughters marrying out into other groups and wives joining their husbands to make up the core. But things are seldom so neat as ideal statements imply and there were several reasons for overlap between kopiti and aliki groups. Many individuals seem, in fact, to have participated actively both in a chiefly descent group and in a kopiti.

One case of multiple membership is diagrammed in Figure 5-2. P is a patrilineal descendant and a senior representative of the chiefly group Aliki a Mua. He has represented this chiefly branch on the Council of Chiefs, long been active in affairs of the aliki, and in the 1950's served as Nanumea's Chief Kaupule, its administrative high chief. His father, M, also served long ago as one of Nanumea's high chiefs and P's lineage traces its descent to the founder Tefolaha in a genealogy which, purportedly, has only male links. P's own remarks make it clear that, in his view, his primary affiliation is with Nanumea's chiefly families. Interestingly, however, P is also an active participant in two other named corporate groups. He takes (or took) part in periodic gatherings of the kopiti Maheku (cf. Appendix II) in the community hall, joining

Figure 5-2 Multiple Membership in "Patrilineal" Groups



with its elders in feasting, speechmaking, and other activities, and claims membership in this group, as he says his father did before him.

P's father, whose main affiliation was also with the chiefly descent group Alikī a Mua, set the precedent for P's participation in Maheku. This man, M in Figure 5-2, affiliated both with his father's chiefly descent group Alikī a Mua and also with his mother's kopiti group Maheku. When M was still a child, his father, T, left Nanumea with a group of other men to take jobs in Samoa in order to pay off a debt incurred to a foreigner by one of Nanumea's leaders. This was in the 1880's. T died in Samoa, leaving his wife and young son in Nanumea. As T's only son, M eventually inherited his lands (although P claims today that these were diminished by inroads made upon them by those who were caretaking them during T's absence in Samoa). M's affiliation in the chiefly descent group Alikī a Mua was thus secure, since he descended in the male line (tele tagata), and inherited an estate of lands (manafa) of this chiefly group. But he was only a child when his father left, and his mother, I, apparently returned to her own father's (X) household and participated in the affairs of his patrilineage, the kopiti Maheku. Thus M grew up with two affiliations, and his son has continued to maintain both "memberships" by active participation.

P is also associated with a third group, which can perhaps be thought of as a "proto-kopiti." This group, known by the acronym "Tiilaa" from the first initials of the two men who founded it, Taukatea and Lauama, seems to have originated in the early years of this century. T and L were half brothers, sharing the same mother but having different fathers. Both T and L married and have many descendants, who today make up the "Tiilaa" group. Its thirty or forty members today include many

who trace their descent in it through female links (tele fafine)--P, for instance, is linked to this group through his mother. P, then, is simultaneously a member of three named corporate descent groups, two of which have patrilineal ideologies.

This example demonstrates some of the flexibility inherent in the operation of Nanumea's theoretically patrilineal descent corporations. There are a number of other examples of similar flexibility I became aware of in talking to people about their descent groups and most involve instances either of adoption (in which case the adoptee often affiliates with the descent group of the adoptive father if this differs from that of his own father, while sometimes still maintaining an interest in his or her "real" descent group), or of differential access to land. Possession of land from a patrilineage is one of the most important aspects of "membership"--having such land at once validates one's rights to claim membership and also obligates one to participate in affairs of the group, especially life crisis events which require the donation of foodstuffs or labor. When, for some reason, an individual receives little or no land from a father's estate but a substantial quantity from the mother, he (or she) may opt out of participation in affairs of the father's patrilineage in favor of joining his mother's group.

In discussing descent group membership and the patrilineal ideology which ideally lies behind their formation, Nanumeans often mention the term maalosi, "strength." Explaining to me how all the offspring of a man and his wife were counted as members of the male's descent group, an elderly woman went on to say that the difference is that the daughters will marry men from other groups. These men will be the ones to engender (fakafua) the womens' children, and the children will thus

partake of the particular maalosi, "strength," of their fathers. In the reckoning of descent a brother/sister sibling pair are equal in terms of their rights to membership since both have been engendered with the strength of their father. But while the son will, in his turn, engender his own children with the male line of the patrilineage, the daughter will need to turn to a male from another group and it will be the strength of that group which determines her children's affiliation. This idea of the dominance of the male line is expressed in the Nanumean phrase e maaloo loa te gafa o te tagata, "the male's lineage is dominant," which I heard many times from both male and female informants.

But while this concept of maalosi or dominance favors descent in the male line, it does not exclude entirely from consideration the offspring of females. Women participate in their father's lineage and partake of its maalosi. Their offspring retain an interest in the patrilineage, though one which is recognized as weak, vaivai, in comparison with the claim which offspring of their brothers can make. Nevertheless, there are many people who claim membership in theoretically patrilineal descent groups on the basis of such "weak" female links, who are said to tele fafine, "trace descent female-wise," as P does (Figure 5-2) in participating in the kopiti Maheku. While in most cases tracing descent in this way is seen as less desirable than tracing through male links, it is nonetheless relatively common. Among reasons people give for doing so are the "desire to participate" (fia kau), a reason P cites for joining in doings of the "Tiilaa" group, and also instances where a particular group is in danger of dying out through lack of male descendants. Here the "rule" is quite flexible and people who trace female descent are encouraged to participate in group affairs.



There is another significant sense in which the male is dominant in matters of descent, and this has to do with land. Here again the male is said to be strong, maalosi or mafi, in relation to the female. As one male informant phrased this, "strength lies with the male child" because the sons control the lands of the family. While the sons will inherit the bulk of the estate, and the oldest of them control the use of the lands, their sisters will either marry out (and then normally live with their families from the produce of the lands of their husbands) or remain dependent on their brothers for a share of the produce. Thus, "the eating shares [kainaga] of women and men [of the family] are not equal." Because men are considered tama o te fale, "children of the patrilineage" (cf. further discussion of this in Chapter 6), they share in the use of the lands as a matter of right, while their sisters may request use rights subject to the approval of the family head. This customary rule is seen in cases brought before the lands court from time to time, in which offspring of a deceased woman claim lands from her estate, only to have the court rule that the estate remains under the sole control of her surviving brothers.

Thus, when Nanumeans assert that the male line is "strong," the reference is both to the power of brothers over the family estate, as well as to the particular strength which comes with tracing descent through males. While circumstances are such that some people choose to affiliate with corporate groups through female links, there are some disadvantages in doing this. In the case of the chiefly descent groups, for instance, it is extremely unlikely that the members of the maga would select a person who traced female descent to represent their group within the community or to be their selection for the position of reigning

chief. Among the qualities sought in a leading spokesman are appropriate behavioral characteristics, but also the particular maalosi that only comes from tracing male descent. In the case of the reigning chief, this quality was felt to be essential since he was the significant link between the community and the will of the gods.

Although kopiti leaders were possibly not associated in quite this close way with the overall good of the island, it seems likely that these leaders, too, were carefully chosen. Not only did they need to have qualities of good leadership in order to successfully mediate between potential rival factions of the kopiti when disputes, including land disputes, arose, but they were invested with religious office as well. Since the island gods with which they dealt could affect the well-being of the community as a whole, the selection of kopiti leaders necessarily concerned all residents to some extent. It seems likely too that when it came to the propitiation of the ancestral spirits (as opposed to island-wide gods), a person who traced descent through a male would have been seen as more appropriate than someone with only "weak" ties to the patrilineage.

For these reasons, and also because male descendants normally received the largest portion of their father's estates, it would probably have been only in rare cases that an attempt was made to affiliate with either type of patrilineage through female links for any length of time. Those who traced membership through more than one female link would have only very attenuated claims upon the group and are unlikely to have continued to be considered full members. One middle aged man, referring to how tele fafine can ultimately remove one from the ranks of the chiefly groups, phrased the process in these terms:<sup>6</sup>

There are some people who are [no longer] members of the aliki. [They] trace female links once, twice, and its gone, [they] are [just] part of the island.

For kopiti groups this hiving off process, serving to keep the lineage to more or less manageable proportions and the bounds set by the patrilineal principle, would be similar, although unlikely to carry with it the sense of loss implied in the quotation above.

The existence of two types of patrilineal descent groups in a single community whose pre-contact population numbered only about 600 persons is an apt example of the innate complexity for which atoll societies are noted (cf. Sahlins 1957, Goldman 1970). This impression of structural complexity, perhaps once even more marked when both groups functioned together, is still apparent in the community activities I observed and took part in in 1973-74 and in 1984. Although time has obscured many details of the structure and interrelationships of both kopiti and chiefly patrilineages, it is clear that in relatively tightly organized Nanumea these two groups played complementary roles. One arena in which they both were involved is the community hall, the ahiga. In this public forum take place most activities of community importance, and it is here that the nature of Nanumea as a united community is most clearly demonstrated.

## NOTES

1. Years later I learned one reason why Tulaga had been able to be so explicit in his characterization of these groups. While serving as Magistrate in Nanumea's government, his father Manuella had been responsible for organizing the last of the kopiti gatherings held in Nanumea's community hall. This had been in the late 1940's or early 1950's and Tulaga, still a young man, had taken part. A reflective individual and one interested in the workings of Nanumean society, his active participation had enabled him to discuss kopiti in concrete terms.
2. This phrase kai fakatahi, "eat together," has several related meanings and thus implies more than its equivalent in English. These include: 1) joint land tenure (cf. Chapter 2 for a description of types of holdings) and 2) to eat together as part of a festive occasion. As will be discussed below, both these meanings appear to have been relevant to kopiti activities.
3. Though land normally passes in the male line, if there are no sons it can pass to a daughter and, ultimately, to her sons, thereby augmenting the land resources of her husband's kopiti.
4. Early descriptions of Nanumea support this view. Whaling Captain Henry Pease's detailed account (Pease 1854) repeatedly refers to the village as a "town." In its center, fronting on the shore, was a large open square where people assembled on several occasions and where a farewell dance was held. Nearby was a structure he calls "the Great Council House" (cf. Chapter 6). Throughout the town were other "clearings," which from his description seem to have been small squares at the nucleus of residential clusters, perhaps those occupied by kopiti.  
  
Some years later Graeffe (1867:1189) commented that "this village was of remarkable size, the many crowded huts separated by streets looking like a small town." And in an early missionary report George Turner (1874) says: "I took a stroll through the village. The houses are very much huddled together." Furthermore, Nanumeans today know of no other extensive areas of housesites on the atoll, with the exception of the tip of Lakena islet (cf. Chapter 2 regarding the subsidiary village there).
5. This is a brief extract from a much longer tale which is widely known in Nanumea and which most narrators feel to be a true tale of events of long ago, a tala mua (see Chapter 7 for additional information on narrative genres). One version of this story notes that another man called on his god Maagai for aid in a later incident in the tale.
6. His remarks in Nanumean were: e i ai ni tino e hee kau i te aliki. Tele fafine, tele fafine, koa galo, koa too ki te fenua.

## Chapter 6

THE HOUSE OF WORDS: THE "AHIGA"

"I was escorted by the king in person to the great Council House, to be present at a consultation, in which was awarded me all the rights and privileges possessed by the king or any of his chiefs...."

Whaling Captain Henry Pease, at Nanumea, 1853

"The real name of the building is not te ahiga, but te ahiga to muna, which means the place where one listens to words, where words are displayed, compared and competed with."

Discussion with Kauani, Petaia, Haleti,  
Nanumea, September, 1974

At the geographical center of the village in Nanumea stands the island's community hall, its ahiga. The large building measures 60 by 107 feet and has open sides, with a raised cement foundation and cement floor. Its aluminum roof, which glistens brightly in the hot sun on most days, is supported by cement pillars spaced at 12-foot intervals around the building, set in about 10 feet from the edge of the foundation. Inside, a few ceiling panels need replacing and the shutters which are lowered to keep out gusts of wind and rain could use repair. To an outsider, the building may appear empty, for there are no furnishings, no internal walls, no chairs or benches, no stage, no podium. It is essentially a roof over a cement foundation. But any description of the physical nature of this structure is bound to miss its most important characteristics. For Nanumea's ahiga is the focus of island-wide social

interaction. Whenever Nanumeans meet for an event that involves the whole community, the fenua, they gather in this building. Feasts are held there on important days and on a daily basis during the long annual holiday period in December and January. Island meetings under the supervision of island leaders take place there. Visiting dignitaries are usually feted in the hall and there are numerous other occasions when the building is used. All of these events are times for speechmaking and Nanumea's male elders are usually present, sitting cross-legged around the perimeter of the ahiga, each at or near a pillar "reserved" through customary usage for his lineage. The ahiga, then, is the gathering place, the eating place, the speechmaking place and the playing place for Nanumeans in their interaction as a community.

Today the ahiga is flanked on its lagoon side by a large open field which serves as an assembly area and as a place where sports and games are played. On the ocean side of the building there is a smaller open area and then the community's large lime-cement church (cf. Map 2-3). The present church, an impressive five-story structure with a colonnaded interior and bell-tower, dates from 1931. It replaced a smaller structure on the same site completed in 1906, which in turn probably replaced a local thatched building erected not long after the first Samoan missionary was allowed to reside on the island in 1873. People say that while the church and its attendant compound of pastor's house, church meeting hall and pastor's guest house is new, the central location of the ahiga is an ancient feature of the village. They add, though, that the original pre-missionary ahiga was located slightly closer to the ocean shore than it is today. Today's open assembly area, the malae, is of relatively recent origin, people add; the original malae was much smaller and was

to the seaward side of the ahiga. The present ahiga building in "permanent" materials was finished in 1965, replacing a series of earlier structures which were constructed in more traditional style with wooden pillars and a thatched roof.

A question which has arisen in my discussions with researchers who have worked in other islands of Tuvalu concerns the origins of the meeting house (or community hall) institution in Tuvalu. It has been suggested that the use of the word maneapa to denote the community hall in Vaitupu, Funafuti and some of the other islands of southern Tuvalu indicates that the institution of the community hall derives from the islands of Kiribati to the north, since the word maneapa appears to be of Micronesian origin (Gilbertese maneaba).<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the institution of the maneaba is well-developed in the central and southern islands of Kiribati (Maude 1963, 1980; Lundsgaarde 1978) and is of central importance in Kiribati social life. Lending weight to speculations about importation of the maneaba complex is the fact that most Tuvalu islands have traditions of invasions from Kiribati in the pre-missionary period. These contacts could have provided an avenue for the introduction of the meeting hall complex.

My experience in Nanumea suggests, though, that the institution of the ahiga is ancient. Certainly it is thoroughly incorporated into Nanumean socio-political life. People also believe that their ahiga and its place in the community is as integral a part of things as is the chieftainship. They view it as theirs. In discussing this issue, some Nanumeans point to the name for their building as indicative of its indigenous nature, while expressing the view that perhaps the islands of southern Tuvalu in fact borrowed the institution: ahiga, people say,

is a true Nanumean word and only Nanumea and its closest neighbor Nanumaga have this indigenous word for the building. While admitting that perhaps one or two other Tuvalu communities call their community hall by a local term, they point out that in the populous islands of Vaitupu and Funafuti the term maneapa is used and that the word is clearly of Kiribati origins (cf. Sabatier 1971).

One might also expect that Nanumean oral traditions would remark on the foreign origins of the community hall institution, if indeed it had been among the things brought with the invaders who came from Kiribati. As we have seen, narratives about these invasions are widely told in Nanumea and it is believed that the Kiribati invaders arrived about eight generations ago. But there are no traditions of the importation of the complex. In fact, the generally accepted story of the death of the warrior who subdued Nanumea, Taitai, tells of his being killed while helping to excavate holes for posts of a large building which the community was rebuilding. It was the island's ahiga.

While the ultimate origins of the institution of the ahiga cannot be determined today from evidence at hand, the important consideration in my mind is its apparent ancient nature in Nanumean life. In all my discussions with people about the past they assume that the ahiga was there, centrally situated and having the same significance in the past as it does now. The earliest written record of life in Nanumea, Pease's account dating from 1853 (Pease 1854), comments matter-of-factly on the existence of the "great Council House" to which the whaling captain was taken for a consultation with the chiefs. Pease's phrasing suggests to me that the building was then, as now, of substantially larger size than any of the other village structures. It is probably



also likely that he was familiar with similar large council houses from his repeated contacts with the islands of Kiribati. The logbook of his ship Planter (Easton n.d.) shows that Pease made frequent stops for water and supplies at several of the southern Kiribati islands.

In ancient times there was apparently a second ahiga in Nanumea, located on the islet of Lakena. Situated inland about 3/8 of a mile from the southeastern tip of the islet, this structure was probably at the center of an archaic village.<sup>2</sup> In 1974, when I first saw the site, the large foundation stones of the Lakena ahiga were still in place, describing a rectangular structure about 73 feet wide and 80 feet long. There were no other remains of the building and its surroundings had been cleared recently for a coconut replanting scheme sponsored by the central government. In 1984, I again visited the area but found the site with difficulty, as the coconut trees now formed a towering canopy and the foundation stones had all been removed to shore up the perimeter of the fresh-water pond nearby. No one living today saw this building and people say that it was in use long ago, when the ocean shoreline was much closer to that part of the island than it is now. People say that the present southeastern end of Lakena, which has a few houses and a small thatched ahiga for the use of the few residents, is growing by accretion fairly rapidly. Older informants recall the location of the sandy foreshore in their childhood as being much closer to the taro pits lying inland than it is today. A fragmentary tradition about the ancient Lakena ahiga says that the building was known as the fale tapu, "sacred building," because it served as a haven. If a person condemned to death could reach it before being despatched he or she would be allowed to live. One informant remarked that this applied also to infants who, under the

rules of institutionalized infanticide which prevailed in pre-Christian days, were to be killed.

### An Ahiga Gathering

A good introduction to the role the ahiga plays in the life of Nanumea is to consider a typical day of ahiga use by the community. One period of particularly heavy use of the hall is the annual holiday season which normally lasts from Christmas until late January or early February. This festive period, known as Po Llahi, "Big Days," spans three important holidays: Christmas, New Year and Po o Tefolaha, "Tefolaha's Day," the latter on about January 8th.

Each day during this extended period, except for Sundays and a few other days when the Island Council decrees a rest, the ahiga and the adjacent malae assembly area are the scene of continuous activity. At about 6 a.m., the trumpet<sup>3</sup> is blown, the signal for teams of players to assemble in the malae for the day's first game of ano. This traditional ball game is superficially similar to volleyball. Men's or women's teams of unlimited numbers of players face each other across an open area and attempt to return to the center the ball of plaited pandanus leaf hurled by the opposing side. Two balls are in play simultaneously. Enthusiasm for the game, which is played in colorful costume and in Nanumea usually only during this festival, reaches fever pitch. Play continues most days from dawn until near dusk (about 6 p.m.), with a lunch break of about two hours at noon.

The game takes place in the village square but the adjacent ahiga is in continuous use too. The ball game scorekeepers sit in the large doorway facing the play and are the first people to arrive at the

hall each morning. Gradually the seating places by the pillars begin to be occupied as older men come, usually bringing along their sennit making materials, and take their accustomed places. Some children may be present at this early hour, but few other family members are at the hall. Women and girls from about age 8 and up are at home preparing the foods that will form their family's platter (laulau) for the noon meal, while young men may be sleeping late after an all night fishing expedition to supply the ocean fish which are esteemed for ahiga meals. By 10 or 10:30, the family seating areas situated outside the perimeter of the pillars begin to fill up, as teenage girls come bringing the family's basket of food and cluster of drinking nuts. There may be as many as 30 older men in the hall now, some at their posts calmly rolling sennit cord, others turned to watch the ano game and still others clustered in small groups around the hall engaged in games of cards. This is a time for informality and play (taahao).

At the ano game, play will have intensified as older and more experienced players join in, spurred on by the growing number of spectators in the hall. Women's and men's teams compete separately, each playing for several sets, usually about an hour and a half, and then giving way to the opposite sex teams. Since the opposed teams represent the two village sides, rivalry between them can be quite heated, particularly during the latter part of the festival season when ano has been played daily for several weeks. As noon approaches, those in the hall become alert for the signal that it is time for the midday meal to begin. If the Island Council officers have not been present, they soon take their places at posts along the playing field side of the building. The groups of card players disperse, the older men to their posts, others to

seats behind. At an appropriate pause in play, the signal is given that the meal is to begin. Players file into the hall and take seats to the rear of the rows of posts. It is time for the formal part of the day's events to start.

When all are seated, trays laden with food are brought out and placed before each man seated in "front" of the hall, that is, those sitting at one of the pillars or in the front area in line with the pillars. The Council president then stands, thanks the people for coming and asks the pastor, who is seated at the center post on the ocean side of the hall directly opposite the president, to say grace. The pastor stands, removes his head wreath and other garlands if he is wearing any, and all bow heads in prayer. At a signal from the Council president or another councillor, usually a few words such as "Well, let's begin," the meal starts. From the family areas behind each elder, drinking nuts or mugs for sweetened tea or coffee are brought out and usually a young female relative of each elder sits by his platter to whisk flies away. During the meal, there is little or no conversation by those in front and talk from those behind is hushed.

Family members now come to remove the trays of those elders who have finished eating and bowls of water and a hand towel are brought for washing hands. It is now time for the period of formal speechmaking and for those seated behind to eat. While they gather around the food on the tray, a member of the Council rises to make a few brief remarks of thanks for the opportunity thus presented to gather together. He also formally announces that the house is "open" (koa ttala te fale), that anyone who has anything to say is welcome to stand and do so. Speechmaking follows a recognizable pattern. The pastor may stand to say a

few words of thanks and to comment in his pastoral capacity on the continuing protection of God. Usually this is followed by speeches from several of the leading elders in turn, commenting on the quality of the day's play, on the hard work of the women in preparing food and on the diligence (or possibly lack of it) of the young men in supplying fish for the meal. But speech topics are not limited to the festivities and soon other topics of general concern are introduced too. One elder might upbraid the young men for drinking the previous evening or for unruly behavior, appending an appeal to them to mend their ways and think of the good of the island. Someone might entertain the gathering with a funny anecdote, usually poking fun at a distant cousin from the opposite village side.

To enliven the proceedings, a member of the Council, possibly at the suggestion of one of the elders present, may "fine" several people for minor breaches of accepted etiquette. Breaches might include arriving late for the meal, sitting with one's legs outstretched (instead of in the decorous crossed-leg position), allowing one's child to run and play in the building, and so on. Fines vary considerably but are always intended to add to the humor and fun of the occasion: one might have to go around the hall sprinkling talcum powder or cologne on those assembled, or perhaps to move to the center of the building and perform a song or dance. Laughter is an integral part of this afternoon gathering for, after all, this is the festive season and the island is on holiday. Speechmaking goes on until all who wish to have had their say, generally lasting anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour.

By 2 p.m., it is time to return to the ano game and, with a final short remark from a member of the Council, the ahiga is considered

to be open (ttala), the speeches are ended and the ano game resumes. Once more, the elders turn to the making of sennit or move to watch the game or to play cards in small groups. The remains of the food trays are packed into baskets and taken home through the village. The ball game continues through the afternoon until approximately 6 p.m. At this time, one of the scorekeepers stands on the steps of the ahiga and reads out to the players sitting in groups on the field the results of the day's play. The scores announced are those for each village side and are also divided according to men's and women's play. A few more speeches follow, with one or two older members of the ano teams remarking on some event in the play or asking for permission to hold a dance that evening. A representative of the Island Council replies and makes the closing speech of the day. By this time, it is nearing dusk and players and spectators disperse home. There are pigs and chickens to be fed before dark, coconut sap "toddy" must be "cut" and most will want to bathe in the lagoon or at the ocean shore. If there is to be a dance or faatele that evening, young women may quickly gather flowers and other leaves for braiding head wreaths and other garlands. The dance, too, will take place in the ahiga and it is customary for a member of the Island Council to be present. On festive days such as this, the building may be in use from dawn to midnight.

Although there are many other uses of the ahiga than the sort of day just described,<sup>4</sup> the account here illustrates the most important function of the hall, its use for formal social events which draw together the entire community. Using this description as a base, I want now to discuss aspects of customary etiquette associated with the ahiga.

## Use Zones and Seating Places

One thing any frequent visitor to ahiga functions notices is that there are regular seating places for everyone who comes to the hall. Some flexibility exists, and from time to time someone will sit in a place which is not his or her "normal" place, but this is rare. The hall can be thought of as having three general zones.<sup>5</sup> The central area inside the perimeter of the rectangle described by the building's pillars is a restricted zone where no one sits or walks and where one ventures only in very special circumstances. One such occasion is when someone has been "fined" and must perform a dance or song for the amusement of the assembled crowd. A speaker might also venture out a few feet into this highly visible area in the midst of a speech if the occasion is one of excitement and he is clowning and carried away or, as people say, he has "caught the wind" (poko te matagi). Generally, however, this area is forbidden and people find it embarrassing when the zone is violated during formal events in the hall, either by small children who unwittingly venture into it when playing or by a wandering dog hoping to find a scrap of food. Children are quickly coaxed out; dogs are treated less gently.

The second zone is the "front" seating and speaking area for male elders (taumatua; toeaina), members of the Island Council, the pastor and any visitors who are accorded dignitary status. Here the ranking elders sit cross-legged at the pillars of the hall, while others occupy areas in line with them but in the intervals between the posts. All sit facing inward to the center of the building. With the exception of visitors, this front seating zone is one reserved for those who are considered old enough (generally over 60) and who have respected positions in the

community. These are the leaders and speakers of Nanumea. Each extended family is expected to be represented by an elder sitting in the front area during the formal ahiga proceedings. Occasionally, if a family has no older member living or well enough to attend island functions, the assembled elders will call to a younger male member of the family to move out from the back area and sit at a post. One man, T., who was nearly 60 when he discussed this with me in 1984, told me how after his father died a few years before an elder had called to him to come sit in the front, as the post where his father had customarily sat was now vacant. T. replied, "No, as long as you older people are there I'll be back here--we [younger men] back here are the group that supports you from behind (te kau lagolago atu mai tua)."

In this case, T. refused to move to the front and even years later he sometimes did not sit there.

The transition from the back area to the front ranks is a gradual one, for it marks a change from a supportive status to one in which one is expected to lead. As T.'s case illustrates, even when called to the front by other elders, one may feel uncomfortable in making the move. During one annual festive season of the type described above I noticed that a relatively young man, F., was sitting each day in the front rank. When I asked about this people said that he had been urged repeatedly by the elders of his village side to take a post in the front row since he was the only male in his family resident in Nanumea. F. expressed embarrassment at sitting there, remarking that he felt only "big people" (tino lahi), elders, should normally take those seats. Once the festive season with its daily feasts had ended, he moved back to sit in the rear area again.



One reason that younger men find it uncomfortable to sit in the front area is that this is the zone for speechmaking. Those who sit here are deemed to be toeaina (elders), and a valued characteristic of "real" elders (tinaa toeaina) is their ability to speak well in public. Younger men approaching the time when they will sit in front must overcome a lifetime of training in which keeping one's peace has been strongly ingrained and considered a virtue. T., from the example cited above, reported that his father had repeatedly told him never to sit at the posts in front as long as there were any of his older kinsmen alive. Young men are expected to be deferential to age and to be willing to express an opinion when asked, but to be too assertive and ready to speak one's mind in the ahiga is disapproved of.

The third zone is the "back" of the building, the area around the outer perimeter of the hall between the row of pillars and the low outer wall. This "off-stage" area is where the families of the elders sit, where the baskets of food are brought and kept when the meal is not in progress, and where children can play quietly. It is the domain of women and of the younger men in the household. There is greater freedom of movement in this zone than in the other two and people will occasionally walk from one part of the hall to another in this outer perimeter. It is here that the food is carefully laid out on the tray from which the family elder will eat during formal meals, and it is here that the rest of the family eats once the elders have finished and all the trays are removed to the back.

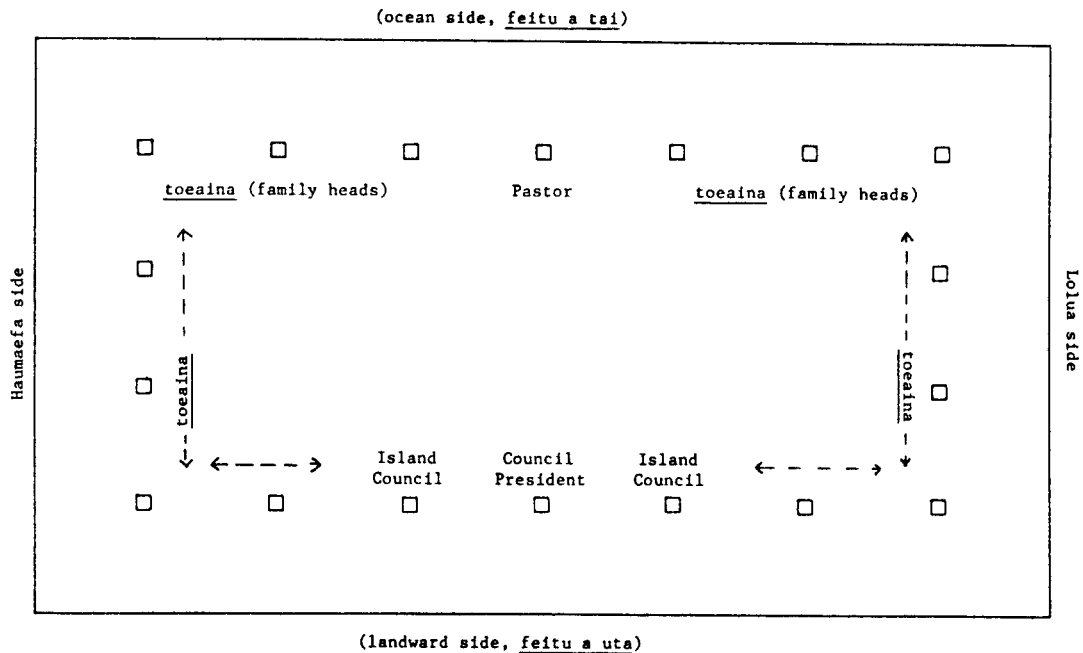
In addition to these broad use zones, the ahiga is further subdivided spatially by other social conventions. The long axis of the hall parallels the long axis of the island. And just as the village is

divided into two halves along a line perpendicular to this axis, so too is the ahiga conceived as having two corresponding parts. The southeastern half of the building is for the use of people who affiliate with that portion of the village, Haumaefa. The northwestern end of the hall is used by people who are members of the Lolua side. This demarcation is recognized in seating in the hall. Haumaefa elders all sit at posts toward the Haumaefa end, while Lolua elders sit at their posts at the opposite end of the hall. (See Figure 6-1.) Their families sit in areas behind them. Each of the two village sides has a small thatched building close to its end of the ahiga which it uses whenever the side prepares food for ahiga functions. It is common in feasts to see a line of young women stream in simultaneously from the Lolua and Haumaefa ends of the building carrying trays of food or pots of tea to feed elders on their side or the visitors who have been apportioned out for the occasion, some to each end of the building.

The division of the hall into two halves is both recognized, and ignored, in the seating of Nanumea's elected leaders, the Island Council and its religious leader, the island pastor. The Council president sits at the center post on the inland side of the building, while directly opposite him at the center post on the seaward side sits the pastor. The remaining members of the Island Council sit to either side of the president at posts or in the intervals between. Usually, councillors whose village affiliation is Haumaefa sit toward that end of the hall, while those who affiliate with Lolua sit toward the Lolua end.

Finally, in this consideration of seating patterns, there are smaller divisions within each half of the hall. These seating areas for each elder and his extended family are not marked out, nor are they

Figure 6-1

Contemporary Ahiga Seating Patterns

## Notes

Toeaina ("male elder," "family head") sit at all of the posts and in the intervals between posts, with two exceptions. The center post on the landward side is occupied by the elected head of the Island Council, the President. He is flanked on both sides by the other members of the Council, who usually sit on the side of the hall they are affiliated with, i.e., either Haumaefa or Lolua. The other exception is the island pastor, who sits at the center pillar on the ocean side of the hall, opposite the Council President.

Families of male elders, Councillors, and the pastor sit in the outer perimeter of the hall behind the area occupied by the family head.

named. They are established by long usage and convention and are recognized by all Nanumeans. During many feasts and other island occasions in the ahiga on both my visits to Nanumea, I mapped out the seating patterns I observed. I also talked to people about their usual seating areas in an effort to understand the rationale for contemporary patterns and hopefully to shed light on how these related to patterns of the past. I found, though, that most people were unable to offer much insight into the "reasons" for today's pattern. Most remarked that they have simply continued to sit where their father (or another male family member) sat before them. Most also added that as far as they knew, their current seats in the hall were those of their individual family, not of an extended corporate kin group.<sup>6</sup> Seating by descent groups is a thing of the past (and is discussed later in this chapter).

#### Ahiga Behavior and Values

Just as seating places are patterned in the hall, so too are there expected patterns of behavior during formal island events which take place there. These patterns are the visible expressions of a constellation of values associated with the use of ahiga.

#### Fenua (Community)

Each extended family is expected to attend ahiga events. While all members need not be present in the hall, several representatives should be there, including the male elder to sit in the front ranks. At least one other person needs to be present at the rear to lay out and serve that elder's food tray during the formal meal. To consistently turn out for ahiga functions and to participate in the spirit of the event, making speeches (if one is an elder), enlivening the day's

activities with one's humor and presence, is to be loto fenua ("community hearted"). People who are possessed of this characteristic place the good of the community, the strength of the community, high on their list of priorities. In keeping with the value, a frequent topic raised during ahiga speeches is the presence or absence of large numbers of family heads. If the gathering is of considerable size and most families are present, there is an air of self-congratulation evident in comments on how pleasantly crowded the hall is. If the event is sparsely attended, there are often negative remarks about people not participating. There may be conciliatory statements, too, about how difficult it is to take away time from one's work and family concerns, effectively softening the criticism directed at those not present.

#### Mmalu ("Dignity, Honor")

As we saw in considering the use zones of the ahiga, there are areas of greater and lesser formality within the hall. A characteristic of all island gatherings, however, is that the presence of the assembled family heads of the community imbues the occasion with mmalu, with dignity and with honor. Those gathered in the hall are reminded of this by an honorific phrase frequently used to begin a speech: e tuu atu au i te mmalu o te fale, "I stand here in the dignity of the house." Often this is shortened to simply te mmalu o te fale, "the dignity of the house." When used this way the phrase serves as a polite method of interjecting a remark which might otherwise appear too abrupt or perhaps too divisive. Sometimes the phrase is elaborated to include reference to what it is about the house that brings dignity or honor to its gatherings, as in te mmalu o te fale mo ona feitu e lua, "the dignity of the

house and its two sides" (referring to the village sides Haumaefa and Lolua).

Lahi ("Largeness")

An important criterion which ahiga speakers have traditionally had to meet is that of age. We have already encountered the idea that it is primarily elders who speak. This is interestingly phrased in Nanumean. Those who have a right to talk publicly are tino lahi, literally "large people." The reference is not to physical size, though, but to age. Tino lahi are the elders, the taumatua, of Nanumea. Younger men are generally afraid to speak and, according to many informants, fear that if they stand to talk in the ahiga they might be told to sit down by one or more elders. Such a challenge to their right to speak would, informants say, be framed in a demeaning remark about their size (i.e., age): "Sit down and be quiet, you are just a tiny child!" (Noho ki lalo, hee tavili, a koe laa he tamaliki foinini kkii). The community of speakers is thus comprised of the "large people," the elders of Nanumea; the smaller people are more commonly the onlookers.

Some informants say that things are changing today, however, and that the dominant position of the hina o te fenua, "gray hairs of the community," may have lessened in the last generation. There are several reasons for this. For one thing, this is now the "enlightenment" (mainaga) brought about by changes due to Christianity and contact with western institutions. People have more education now, it is noted, and with it comes greater confidence to air one's opinions. Sosemea, a man in his mid-40's, felt that some of the change in this attitude could be attributed to the actions of Nanumea's last Samoan pastor, Enoka. When

the thatched ahiga was replaced with the current cement and aluminum structure in the 1960's, Enoka had a big hand in the design and construction of the building. When he hung a sign with the name he had given the building in the interior of one end, he effectively "opened" (ttala) the traditional speech restrictions which had until then limited speaking in the hall to elders. As Sosemea recalls it, the name "Nameana" with which Enoka christened the hall derives from the question Ni aa mea naa i lua loto? ("What are those things in your hearts"). This question put to those assembled in the ahiga invites all to "make known their valuable opinions" (fakaali llou manatu taaua), particularly those which are of use to the community. Although this act by Enoka had "destroyed the ancient custom" (ofa te tuu mua), Sosemea felt that the customary age restrictions in the hall persist and are "still hanging on" (koi pateletele).

In my experience, they are "still hanging on" quite strongly. Many younger men, Sosemea among them, find it difficult or impossible to take the floor in island gatherings under the watchful gaze and alert ears of the experienced "gray hairs." When questioned about this reticence, most young men say they are maa, "ashamed."<sup>7</sup> One western practice now common in some ahiga functions, though, helps younger people participate. Votes taken by a show of hands allow those who feel unable to speak, either because they are not "large" enough or because they are reluctant to disagree with the majority, nonetheless to express an opinion. During an all-day meeting the elected leader of one village side remarked to the gathering that this practice is important because "we are not all equal in our 'bigness' (i.e., seniority)" (taatou e hee ppau ttou lahi). Those who sit quietly, keeping an opinion to themselves as

is traditional Nanumean custom for younger people, can thus still have a say in the outcome of the discussion, assisting, people say, in the quest to achieve consensus, loto tahi.<sup>8</sup>

#### The House of Words

The way people talk about the ahiga provides further insight into how it is conceptualized. In one of my early conversations on this topic, illustrated by the excerpt at the head of this chapter, several elders explained some of the building's functions by referring to an etymology of the name. The word ahiga, they pointed out, was actually a shortening of the phrase te ahiga o muna, which one might gloss "the house of words" or "the display place of words." We spent some time trying to arrive at a satisfactory meaning for the verb aahi, which seems to lie at the core of the word ahiga, but met with only partial success. To aahi can mean to visit or to call on someone, in the sense that one goes to aahi to a sick relative or friend living across the village. But in our discussion Kauani, Petaia and Haleti felt that the real core of the word was related to another use of aahi, which I take to mean "display" or "comparison."<sup>9</sup>

An example of this can be seen in ahiga feasts of an especially festive nature, such as those which take place on New Year's Day or on the annual holiday Po o Tefolaha. On these holidays it is announced in advance that each family<sup>10</sup> must have in its food basket in the hall a specified amount of major feast foods: for example five whole cooked taro, either three chickens or one large ocean fish, and ten drinking coconuts. Before the noon meal two or three representatives of the Council move around the hall to make a visit (aahi) to each family's



seating place and to inspect its provisions. To the accompaniment of much laughter the chickens, taro or fish are held high for all in the hall to see and the verdict is called out loudly: one either "escapes" (hao) by having the proper foods in adequate number or one "falls" (too). Joking remarks are directed to those who have puny taro or other produce and there is considerable embarrassment (or feigned embarrassment) as well as fun in this proceeding.

There is also, however, an element of serious competition in this inspection (akiliga) or visiting (aahiga or ahiahiga) of each of the assembled family groups. Despite the joking and merriment, one is expected to uphold the tradition that for island feasts one comes prepared. The display of taro and fish and other subsistence products demonstrates to all that one's family can and does provide these things, that an individual (the family elder) and his wife, daughters, sons, and other resident kinsmen are diligent and not lazy. The remarks that the inspectors make about the size and quality of the product add to a competitive air, in which one's abilities at providing the essentials of life are held up for all to see. Those whose contributions fall short are subject to the scrutiny of their fellow community members. And, one elder pointed out, if their efforts are deemed inadequate, the Island Councillors will use persuasive words (muna) to encourage the person to be strong (maalosi) and diligent in planting taro and raising chickens and other local produce. As another elder and his wife phrased it, these events ensure that "people keep active" (ke galuelue tino). These "visits" by island officials on such festive occasions thus encourage comparison, competition and diligence.

But my informants had referred to the hall as being the "house of words." I pursued this with other Nanumeans. Samuelu, a leading elder and the head of the Tuinanumea chiefly lineage, remarked that one can conceive of the ahiga as the "house of words" (fale o muna) because it is where people gather to hear the words of the island's leaders, to listen to discussion and speeches. Such words are valuable and an important part of life. There is, he added, a competitive aspect to the use of words in the ahiga because as an elder and spokesman for his kin group his words were being weighed and judged by the listeners, and particularly by those elders from the other village side across the hall who would reply to his speech.

Laiti, another elder and a former member of the Chief's Council (Kau Aliki), ventured onto the topic of the name of the hall and the etymology of the word ahiga in the midst of relating a narrative about Tongan invaders to Nanumea. The lone Tongan warrior Lupo had been killed while attempting to come ashore at Nanumea. His body, with the spear still protruding from the eye socket where he had been stabbed, drifted back magically to his native Tonga, where attempts were made to pull out the spear. As Lupo's father named in turn each of the known islands of the Pacific, he pulled on the spear. Finally, uttering the archaic name for Nanumea, "Namea," by which the island was still known, the spear came loose and the Tongans knew where Lupo had met his end. Laiti digressed at this juncture to point out that the ahiga bore the name "Nameana," as attested by a sign attached high in the interior of the Lolua gable end. Laiti's explanation of the meaning of this name differs somewhat from Sosemea's which was considered above.

According to Laiti, pastor Enoka chose the name for two reasons. Although Enoka was Samoan, he was familiar with Nanumean tradition and he selected the name because it evoked the poetic and archaic name of Nanumea. But he also chose the name, Laiti said, because of the multiple ways in which the building serves the community. One might be passing by on the road which runs beside the hall, see something going on and wonder: Ni aa mea naa? (What are those things [going on]). This hypothetical phrase is evoked in the name "Nameana." Laiti added that before the construction of the current ahiga, Nanumea's hall did not have a particularized name but was simply the ahiga.

Discussing the word ahiga itself, Laiti went on to provide an etymology for this "building where men create words" (fale e fai ai a muna a taagata). The name comes, he said, from the verb aahi atu, "to visit (in order to observe)." Thus, men gather in the hall and in their gatherings create words. Others come to observe (aahi) the proceedings.

#### The House of Men

If the community hall is preeminently the house of words it is also, in important ways, the special domain of men. They make most of the words at community gatherings, for one thing. But beyond this, Nanumeans seem to conceive of the ahiga as closely associated with men and with male aspects of social organization. This perception is highlighted by a phrase in an ahiga speech I recorded in 1984, where a member of the Island Council remarked bluntly "this is the house of men" (mea nei ko te fale o taagata). He went on to add that it was here that men gathered (e aahi ai a taagata). But it is not just direct statements such as this which lead me to conclude that the ahiga is seen as linked with the male

sphere. A frequent reference in speechmaking is to the posts (pou) of the building. We have already mentioned the honorific phrase which is used to begin some speeches, te mmalu o te fale, "the dignity of the house." Occasionally this is elaborated to te mmalu o te fale mo ona pou, "the dignity of the house and its pillars," or to yet a fuller form, te mmalu o te fale mo ona pou mo ona nohoaga, "the dignity of the house and its pillars and its positions." And in one gathering I attended, Nanumeans returning from work contracts overseas were welcomed at an island feast, thanked for their speeches full of "pretty words" (muna gali), and reminded that in returning they had once again "entered between the pillars of 'Nameana' (i.e., the ahiga)" (faaulu koe ki loto o pou o Nameana).

Why this stress on the posts of the building? The pillars are significant in a pragmatic way, of course, since not only do they support the roof but important elders sit at them and use them as back supports. The posts, then, are both seats and markers of status. But they are more than this. To explore this concept we need to digress briefly to consider other ways in which the concepts of pou, "pillar," and of fale, the "house" of which pillars are a part, are used.

While the primary meaning of fale is "house" or "building," the word can also refer, by extension, to a kin group. This usage is encountered most commonly in contexts which involve land. Thus, one finds in wills or family ledger books the idea of the patrilineage as the fale, "house." A written or verbal will might specify, for instance, that lands received from one's father's father not be divided, but be kept intact and within the "house." One ledger book that I was allowed to read referred to the lands of a male ancestor in this way: "The

decision [is that] lands of the family may not be divided, [they are] to be kept and remain within the house" (Te ikuga o manafa o te kaiga e he mafai o vaevae e tuku ailoa ke momoe i loto i te fale). The elder whose book this was explained to me that this meant that his lands are not to be distributed equally among all of his children, as current Nanumean land law prescribes, but retained for sons only. For the "house" referred to is not the physical structure but the patrilineage, the social unit created by a male and inherited by his male offspring.

Sons, the "true people of the family" (tino tonu o te kaaiga), are in (too ki loto) the "house" while daughters marry out and thus join the fale of their husbands. To distribute an equal portion of lands to them, the elder and his wife explained, would soon mean that there were none or inadequate lands left within the core of the patrilineage (the "house") since the daughters' lands would eventually pass to their children, who would have become members of their fathers' fale.<sup>11</sup> In practice, though, children of both sexes receive the lands from which they ultimately make a living from a variety of sources. Some come from the mother's inheritance, others from the father (and these might well include lands received from his mother), while yet others may come from distant kin, adoptive parents or even, in special circumstances, from non-kinsmen. Of all of these potential sources of land, it is only the core lands in one's patrilineage, those lands which have come down through generations in one's father's lineage, that are considered manafa o te fale, "lands of the house."

Another expression in which the house is equated with the patrilineage occurs in reference to children. One day I was discussing the kopiti Faletolu with T., a man who took obvious delight in his infant

granddaughter who was playing near us. He digressed to remark that, yes, she was his favorite and that he had custody of the child because she was a tama o te fale, "child of the house." T. went on to explain that when his first son had a first child it belonged, by customary right, to the fale, i.e., to the patrilineage. Thus, T. and his wife had taken this child and were rearing her as their own. Their son and wife lived just a house or two away. Even if they had lived with T., as is common, the child would belong to the "house," of which T. was the head. If the second grandchild were a boy, it too would belong to the fale. The next son, however, would belong to the feitu o te fafine, the "side of the woman [wife]," and could be taken and reared by the parents of the wife of T.'s son.

While I was talking with T. about these concepts, I knocked my knuckles against the wooden house post against which I was leaning, to emphasize the point I just learned, that "house" can mean both the physical structure one lives in and one's patrilineage. Having his attention drawn to the post caused T. to remark on a further extension of the metaphor. Sons, he added, are referred to as pou loa o te kaaiga, "the very posts of the family." They are, in other words, the supports of the structure. This is apt, he noted, because just as one selects a type of tree that is as durable and long-lasting as possible from which to make house pillars, so too are men, the pillars of the patrilineage, physically strong (mafi). A family which has only sons, he added, is referred to as a fale-pou-ki-taagata, a "house pillared with men." T. remarked that he knew of at least one boy who had been named Fale-pou-ki-taagata after his parents had reared a large family of only male children. I know from reading through Nanumea's land registers

that there is also a land parcel in Nanumea named Falepoukitaagata, probably in commemoration of an ancestor who, likewise, had no daughters.

Let's return now to consider how these concepts of "house" and "pillar" are used in reference to the ahiga. Once I had encountered the expression in which speechmakers paid homage to the "house and its posts and its positions," I began to enquire about what this meant. Samuelu, mentioned above, had been active in island affairs over a long lifetime, but had withdrawn from most ahiga participation in 1984 due to his frail health. He explained to me that the phrase te mmalu o te fale mo ona pou mo ona nohoaga refers not to the pillars of the hall, but to people. It is the elders of the house, the toaina who sit at the pillars, whose honor and dignity (mmalu) is being evoked in these "deferential expressions" (muna fakaaloalo). These honored elders are not merely men who have reached old age, they are also those who have achieved positions (tulaga) of importance in Nanumea. They not only sit at the posts but they are thought of as having seats (nohoaga) in the hall.

I believe that the phrase, "house of men," which rings through the hall on occasion in speeches made there, reminds those assembled of a complex of metaphors which are present in Nanumean conceptions of the ahiga and its place in the social life of the community. For, while women use the hall, sometimes taking it over for festive occasions of their own, and are usually present in it during community-wide events, they are seldom seated at the posts or the "seats" of the house. They are, on these occasions, seldom the speechmakers. It is the male elders who head most of the kaaiga of Nanumea, who represent the chiefly lineages and (formerly) the non-chiefly corporate descent groups, who are

conceived as the supports of the ahiga, who provide its strength. It is the male elders who are the pou, the "pillars of the house," and, fittingly, it is they who occupy the seating positions of those pillars. Thus, when speakers repeatedly invoke the dignity and honor of the "house and its pillars and its positions," they are remarking on the social structure underlying the institution of the community hall. This "house," this edifice, exists because of the structure of the pillars which support it. That structure is the chiefly and non-chiefly lineages which make up Nanumean society. Nanumea's ahiga reflects, both in its physical structure and more importantly in the metaphors by which Nanumeans conceptualize it, the patrilineal male-dominated society which created it.

Women themselves often comment on the dominance men exert in both practical affairs and in Nanumean ideology. Susana's remarks (Chapter 5) on the "strength" of males in engendering children echo comments of many others, both men and women, regarding male strength and corresponding female "weakness." These references are not to physical or moral qualities, but to control of land and the male role in transmitting descent group membership. In terms of access to formal political office or even de facto power, women, are, likewise, usually subordinate. As Eseta, a middle aged woman, once remarked in commenting on seating and speaking rights in the ahiga, "this community favors men" (te fenua nei e fakahilihili taagata). As noted briefly in Chapter 2, there are several very active women's groups which provide women with opportunities for demanding and relatively influential leadership roles, and which serve the community in significant ways.

While I have not dwelt on this important issue of male-female relationships, nor explored the organization and importance of women's



groups in this "man's world" (A. Chambers, n.d.), it would be useful here to draw attention to aspects of these relationships which are present in the charter histories. Recall (Chapter 2) that it was two women who created Nanumea initially and who possessed and ruled the island at the time Tefolaha arrived. His trick deprived them of what was theirs and they departed. Henceforward, men would own and govern Nanumea (Koli, in Tepous's narrative, is the only female said to have ever exercised formal political leadership.) Corporate patrilineages controlled land, with women moving out of their natal group to affiliate with the patrilineages of their husbands. Aspects of this de facto male dominance are reflected in metaphors we have just considered. Men, "true" members of the family, are likened to posts and pillars, in apparent overt (though un-remarked upon) phallic symbolism. They are strong, while women are weak. Men, particularly sets of brothers, make up the "house," from which their sisters must depart, much as Pai and Vau, in the foundation narrative, departed from the house and the land they had been closely associated with.

#### Traditional Seating Places

In my discussions about the use of the ahiga, people frequently commented that today's seating patterns only partially reflect traditional seating places of the past. During the periodic gatherings of kopiti descent groups in the hall, each group had its assigned place. And at all regular island functions, the island's high chief sat at the inland center post where the Council president now sits, flanked by other members of the island government and chiefly descent groups. While the pastor has occupied the center position opposite the chief for

longer than anyone today can remember, reflective informants acknowledge that this pattern can only have begun a little over a century ago. What, then, were the traditional seating patterns in the ahiga and what was the rationale behind them?

I spent hours attempting to arrive at answers to these questions, which proved to be extremely difficult ones for people to answer. As we saw in Chapter 5, the periodic gatherings where people sat in their kopiti descent groups in the ahiga probably stopped about 1920, to be followed in the early 1950's by a single unsuccessful attempt to revive this customary feast. Most people, then, have had but one opportunity to witness kopiti gatherings.

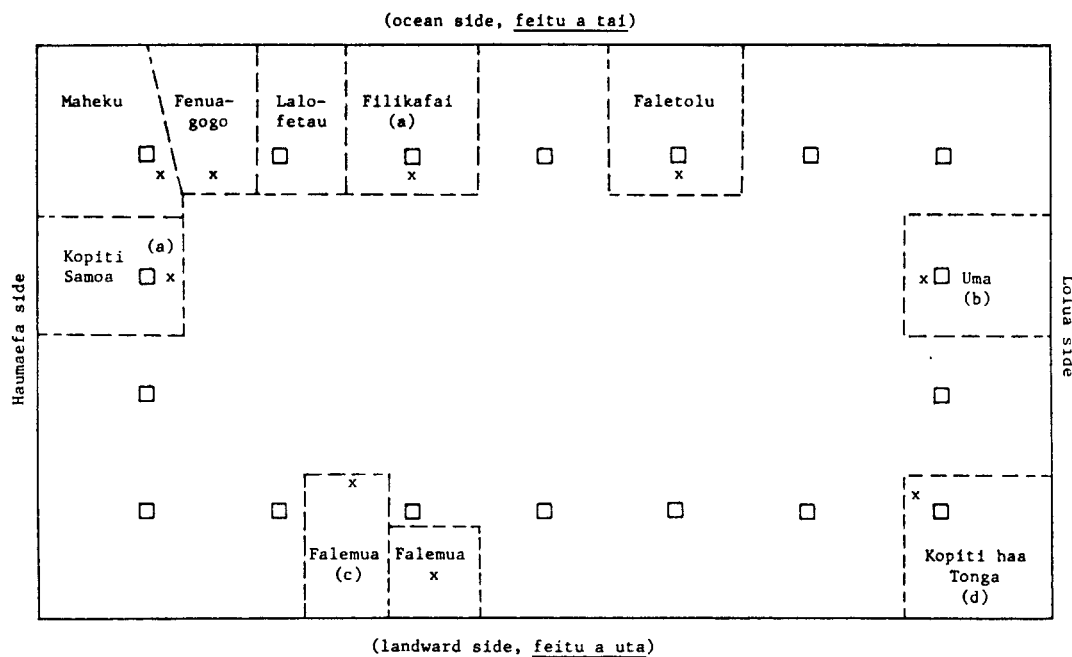
There seem to be several other reasons for the confusion which exists today regarding ahiga seating in the past. For one thing, although the chiefly system continued to operate, with a titular island chief sitting in the hall until the mid-1960's, there seem to have been major changes in the traditional seating places of the chiefly descent groups by early in this century. Some of these were the result of contact with western powers, but it is likely also that some alterations resulting from internal power politics were in progress before the introduction of Christianity. The coming of a new religion also changed seating in the ahiga to some extent, with the introduction of a new honored position (the pastor's) into the pre-Christian seating pattern.

Still, despite radical alterations in ahiga seating in the past century, it became apparent that some people could recall where their own kopiti or chiefly group had sat. So I mapped out responses of a number of informants and also talked with groups of elders as they sat making sennit cord or handicrafts on communal work days. Having

proposed this topic for discussion, I gave them time to confer together and then returned and tried to correlate their responses with information others had provided. Although no single individual could recall more than two or three seating places for the traditional corporate groups of Nanumea, and some of the elders felt it was an impossible task to reconstruct these patterns at all, it was possible to put together a composite mapping based on information from many individuals. Because people said that kopiti gatherings were separate occasions from the normal community use of the hall, I have mapped these separately (Figure 6-2). There are two kopiti for which I did not succeed in determining a seating place. These are indicated in the figure. For another kopiti I have indicated my own conjectured place based on current seating patterns of elders of the lineage involved.

The results of my enquiries into seating of the seven chiefly groups are presented in Figure 6-3. Again, there are two groups for which I was unable to obtain seating information. Representatives of the maga Polonga and of the maga Taualepuku were not able to recall their group's seating in the hall, nor was anyone else I spoke to. If Figures 6-2 and 6-3 are compared, an interesting phenomenon is apparent: the mappings are essentially complementary. Kopiti groups can be seen to occupy the ocean side of the community hall, while chiefly groups take up both ends of the building and its landward side. With this overall pattern in mind, it is now possible to return to the question posed at the beginning of this section and to consider what the rationale of these archaic seating patterns might be.

Figure 6-2

Kopiti Seating Places

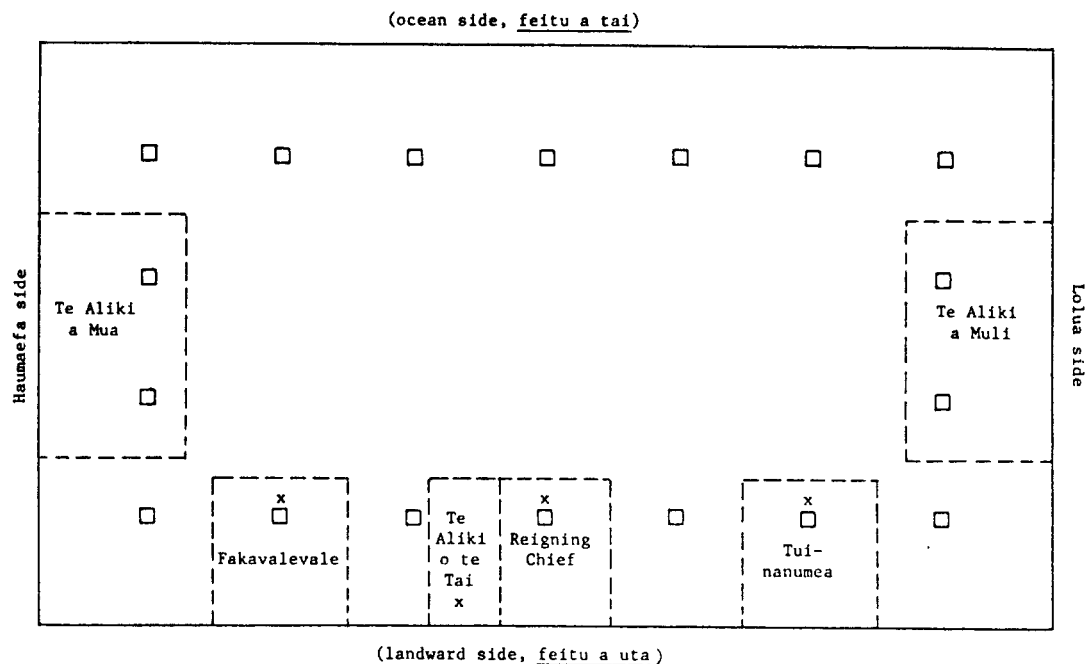
Seats of leading elders of each group are marked by "x."

## Notes

- (a) As we saw in Chapter 5, Filikafai and Kopiti Samoa are synonyms for the same group. The two seating positions marked here were supplied by different informants, based on their memories of kopiti gatherings in the past. In my opinion, the position at the ocean side indicated for Filikafai is probably the original seating place of the kopiti.
- (b) Conjectural seating place of this group, based on my observation of current seating patterns of elders.
- (c) Tepou, leading member of Falemua, told me that his kopiti's traditional seating place was the smaller of the two areas marked here, and that elders of his group did not traditionally sit in the front rank but sat behind as shown by the "x." This was in keeping with their role of "sitting and watching [over] the island." Another informant recalled the Falemua group as sitting one post further to the left, as shown by the larger of the two areas marked. He felt that an elder of the group usually sat at the front as indicated by the "x."
- (d) I obtained information on the seating place for this group from just a single informant who was 13 or 14 years old at the time of the last kopiti gathering in the early 1950's.

Kopiti for which no seating place is known: Mahikava, Te Malie.

Figure 6-3

Seating Places of Chiefly Groups

Seats of leading elders of each group are marked by "x."

## Notes

I received contradictory information on the seating places of the two groups Alikia a Mua and Alikia a Muli. Tualialia, a peripheral member of the former group through a female link several generations ago, placed these groups at the two ends of the ahiga, as here, but with the order as diagrammed here reversed. Malulu, the leading member of the Te Alikia a Mua group, provided the seating pattern for his group as shown here and for Te Alikia a Muli.

Chiefly groups for which traditional seating places are not known:  
Pologa, Taualepuku.

### The Ahiga as a Social Map

Out of these separate mappings, and from information gathered in conversations with many individuals over the course of the two periods of fieldwork, a composite image of the ahiga as a social map can be constructed. I say "can be" constructed because, to my knowledge, no individual Nanumean conceptualizes the building, or what the building stands for, in precisely this way. No one ever discussed the ahiga in these terms with me. Many people, however, contributed parts of this composite picture. I am convinced that this representation of the hall and of the myriad social relationships and key concepts it embodies is faithful to Nanumean thinking and to Nanumean conceptions of social reality.

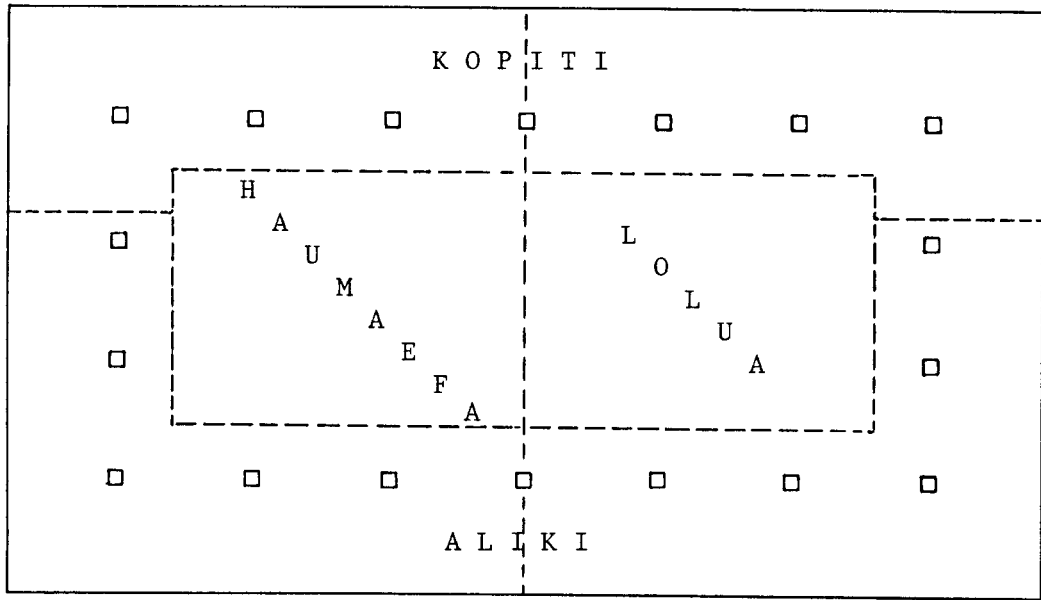
Let's begin by considering major spatial divisions represented in the hall. As we have just seen, mappings of the seating places of the major corporate groups in traditional society yield a pattern in which the kopiti, the land holding but non-chiefly patrilineages, occupy positions along the side of the ahiga closest to the sea. Opposite them (Figure 6-4, section a), taking up the inland side of the hall as well as most of the two ends, are the seating places of the chiefly lineages, the maga o aliki ("branches of chiefs"). This effectively divides the hall into two parts along its long axis, parts which are associated respectively with the major dichotomy between the sea (tai) and the land (uta).<sup>12</sup>

This distinction is a simple one and is also quite natural, one might reason, given that the hall is close to the sea on its southwestern side, while it is somewhat further from the landward side to the

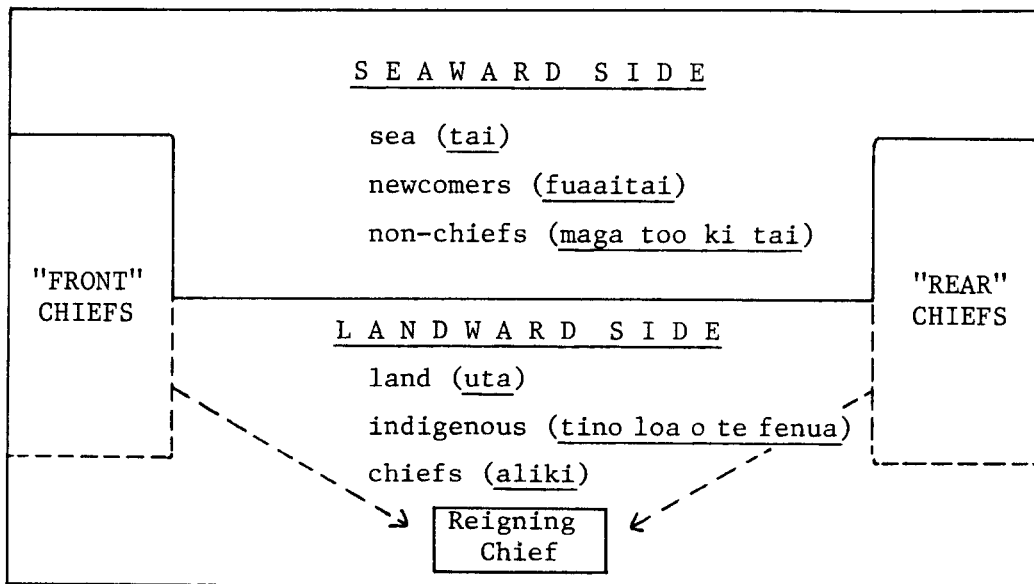
Figure 6-4

The Ahiga as Social Map

a) Spatial Divisions



b) Associations



lagoon (Map 2-3). But the sea/land distinction is more complex and meaningful than that. From time to time in talking to people about the two types of corporate groups, kopiti and aliki, I heard references to the "sea" in relation to the former type of group. Gradually it dawned on me that the association of kopiti groups with the seaward side of the hall was not likely to be accidental. Several remarks in particular strengthened this view, which is confirmed, I feel, in the mapping presented in Figure 6-2. The association of the non-chiefly descent groups with the sea is emphasized, for instance, in a distinction drawn by an elderly woman whose father had long ago held the position of high chief of Nanumea. Iulia, discussing with me the procedure she recalled during her father's installation as aliki, pointed out that the members of the various chiefly groups were required to supply food for the ceremony in the ahiga. But the other corporate descent groups supplied no food. They were conceived as te kau fakaalofa, "the pitiful [because landless] ones." While the chiefly groups were the maga o aliki, "branches of chiefs," these other descent groups were maga ki tai, "branches from the sea." This epithet emphasizes the foreign origins of some kopiti, particularly, Iulia said, the groups which claim descent from Samoa and from Tonga.

The sea and its association with foreigners is also invoked in a retort which is always available to "real" Nanumeans, i.e., those who descend from a line of Nanumean males. Thus, if a person who had in his (or her) descent line a male from another place who was voicing opinions that you found objectionable or was behaving in an unpleasant manner, the ultimate insult would be to bring up this ancestry. As a



"real" Nanumean, one could tell the person "Shut up, you are [just a person] from the sea!" (A koe hee tavili, koe laa e too i tai).

An elder, a member of a leading chiefly group, elaborated on this point. Noting that in ahiga gatherings he felt that his aliki position carried with it a responsibility to stand and speak, even when he might personally prefer not to, he commented on the unchallengeable and valuable (taaua) right to speak entailed in this same position. Should anyone dare to challenge him and tell him to sit down, or "close his mouth," he had available a powerful response, a sort of ultimate trump card:

Hey, return to the sea! You are just a person who drifted [here] from the sea. [You were] brought to shore by the community. Here is a [real] person of the island, me. You are just someone who drifted here, I brought you ashore [and said], "Come this way, look at your lands."<sup>13</sup>

Yet another phrase characterizing the kopiti descent groups and linking them with the sea came up in the elder Taulialia's explanation to me of his recollection of the ahiga seating in the past. Taulialia placed the chiefly groups along the landward side of the hall and at the two ends. This left a blank space on my map along the entire seaward side of the building. Here, he said, sat all of the other groups, which included his own and which he characterized as te fuaaaitai ("the conceived at sea") or tino fuaaaitai ("people conceived at sea"). In contrast to the chiefly lineages, these descent groups ultimately stem from some place other than Nanumea (Taulialia used the example of the nearby Tuvalu islands of Niutao and Nanumaga): they "do not belong to the island" (hee kau i te fenua).

In order to fully appreciate this distinction between "real" Nanumeans and those who have in their (male) ancestry individuals who have come from elsewhere, it is necessary to explore some of the meanings inherent in the term fenua ("community," "island," "land"). We have seen throughout this discussion of the ahiga that the hall is where the community (te fenua) meets when it interacts as a body. Besides designating the social aspects of Nanumean life, the word fenua can also refer to the physical nature of Nanumea, to the island itself. In this sense one can speak of "the island" (te fenua) as something made up of reefs, sand and rock, trees and so on. Both senses of the word are invoked, I believe, when people discuss the chiefly and non-chiefly descent groups.

Thus, some informants contrast te kau aliki (the chiefly groups) with tino o te fenua (people of the community). This manner of speaking is similar to distinguishing between "chiefs" and "ordinary people of the community." But I was intrigued to find that on a number of occasions, the phrase "people of the community" (i.e., te fenua) was used in an emphatic sense to refer not to the "ordinary people," but to the "real" people of the community, the chiefs. Thus, tino loa o te fenua (which adds the emphatic particle loa to give the meaning "real/true people of the island [community]") can be equivalent to the phrase tino o te aliki ("people of the chiefs," i.e., "the chiefs") and thus, contrasts with tino mai fenua fakaatea, "people from other lands," i.e., those descent groups which have a non-Nanumean male ancestor from off Nanumea.

The chiefly groups of Nanumea, which descend from the founder, are thus the "real" Nanumeans, the real people of the island (fenua) and

of the community (fenua).<sup>14</sup> They are, as one informant put it, "true kinsmen of Tefolaha" (kaaiga tonu o Tefolaha). As we have seen, they have the only unassailable rights to speak in the ahiga. I believe that their seating positions in the community hall reflected this priority in Nanumean thinking. The chiefs of Nanumea were seated on the inland side of the hall, and at the central pillar (which Taulialia once described to me as te gaaloto matua ailoa o te fale, "the very center of the building") sat the reigning chief of Nanumea. This man was, traditionally, a representative of either the lineage of the "front" chiefs or the "back" chiefs, and was the preeminent heir of Tefolaha during his tenure in office. The portion of the hall reserved for the chiefs is not only physically closer to the center of the island, to the land (uta), but it is also associated most closely with the autochthonous aspects of Nanumean society. Some of these associations are shown in Figure 6-4, part b, and in Table 6-1.

Finally, to close this discussion of the place of the ahiga in Nanumean life, I want to consider again the central concept of fenua. One frequently hears this term used in reference to the physical location of the meeting hall, particularly in the words i uta i te fenua. This difficult to translate phrase can be glossed "inland at the island." It is an appropriate answer for a question of the sort "Where is so-and-so?", if the person is in fact at the ahiga. Granted, the hall is located toward the center part of the islet of Nanumea, but the question still arises: why should references to the location of the ahiga refer to it as being "at the island"? It is no more central, in terms of its positioning between the two shores of the islet, than are a great number of village houses. And yet houses are never said to be located i uta i

Table 6-1      Conceptual Contrasts Embodied in the Ahiga

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Land ( <u>uta</u> , <u>fenua</u> )                                     | Sea ( <u>tai</u> , <u>moana</u> )  |
| Society ( <u>fenua</u> )   | Outside Society  |
| Indigenous ( <u>tino loa o te fenua</u> , "true people of the island") | Newcomers ( <u>te fuaaitai</u> , "conceived at sea")                         |
| People of Tefolaha ( <u>tino o Tefolaha</u> )                          | Not from Tefolaha ( <u>hee kau i te fenua</u> , "not part of the community") |
| Ancient  | Recent   |
| <u>Aliki</u> ("chiefs," "lords")                                       | <u>Tino o te fenua</u> ("people of the island")                              |
| Chiefly descent groups, ( <u>maga o aliki</u> )                        | Non-chiefly descent groups, ( <u>kopiti</u> )                                |
| Primary rights to speak  | Lesser rights to speak   |

te fenua, only the ahiga is. In my view, this unique way of referring to the position of the hall reveals a conceptualization of it which sums up much of the preceding discussion. The ahiga is not just sited centrally on the island (fenua).<sup>15</sup> It is not just the place where the community (fenua) gathers. As we have seen, it is both of these, and more. The hall is, in a way of speaking, the fenua, the community of Nanumea. It is the island, in one mode of thinking. To be in the ahiga, (to be i uta i te fenua), is to be at the center of Nanumea, in the structure which, in its physical centrality as well as in its rich tapestry of meanings, is the salient embodiment of Nanumean society.

## NOTES

1. Interestingly, traditional history in the southern Kiribati islands, particularly in Beru, attributes the maneaba complex to Samoa, from where it was introduced to Kiribati about four centuries ago (cf. Maude 1963).
2. The small village at Lakena has probably also served, as it does today, as an "overflow" community where people could go when they wished to be apart from the intense social interaction of the main village. Since all of the pulaka and taro pits are located on Lakena, the village is also used by people who wish to work on a more regular basis in their pits than is possible when living in Nanumea village. Finally, until recently, all or part of the population of Nanumea periodically moved to Lakena to reside for a time there. On their annual visits, London Missionary Society missionaries sometimes found, to their surprise, that the entire community was at Lakena and the main village deserted (e.g., Henry Nisbet's visit to Nanumea in September, 1875 [Nisbet 1875]). Another type of mass movement involved just half of the population and was undertaken when severe drought threatened the resources of the atoll. In this case, the island leaders would call for a vaelua "division in two" of the community. By strictly adhering to this enforced division, people say, the community could lessen the strain on the overall resources of the island, so that survival of the community became more likely.
3. Today, the "trumpet" puu is a long megaphone-like horn made overseas. Traditionally, it was a conch or other large shell (also known as puu).
4. For example: dances or parties held by village sides, groups or clubs; meetings of organizations; gatherings by the old men of one side; movies; medical clinics by teams visiting the outer islands; voting; choir competitions; annual holidays of specialized groups such as the scouts, pre-school mothers, women's clubs; and so on.
5. The discussion of ahiga seating and use zones which follows here refers to community-wide functions in the hall in which the island as a polity (that is, te fenua) is expected to be involved. These functions include a meal where elders of the community eat together and always involve formal speechmaking. Seating, use zones, and etiquette may differ when the hall is used for other types of events. Thus, when just one village side uses the building, seating will differ from that described here for island events. If a dance or faatele is held in the evening, some elders may take their regular places at posts and any members of the Council who are present will sit at their customary places, but most other people will not. If a film is being shown, seating totally disregards the formal patterns discussed here.

6. A few informants referred to family seating positions in the hall by noting that in the past each kaaiga, "family," had its own customary seating position under a specific row of thatch (inaki) in the building. The ahiga has not had a thatched roof since it was last rebuilt in the mid-1960's and since it now has a ceiling, rows of thatch or of roofing metal are no longer visible. This usage presents an interesting parallel to customary seating reported (Maude 1963) in community halls in the Micronesian islands of Kiribati to the north, where designated seating positions (boti) exist for each extended kin group and are also conceived as associated with particular rows of thatch (inaki). Since most Nanumean men have had work experience in close association with people from Kiribati, I am not certain that my informants were not simply using their knowledge of Kiribati custom to amplify and explain Nanumean usage for this outsider. The links between Nanumea and Kiribati remain elusive and require further research.
7. Not everyone feels that the gradual relaxation of customary rules governing speaking in the ahiga is beneficial. A number of people remarked ruefully to me that today's young people have no respect (aava) and that the ancient traditions of the house are no longer strictly upheld. As one elder (who is himself quite shy and seldom speaks in community gatherings) put it to me: "Before, not just anyone could stand up and speak. But today it is very bad, any child who wants to speak does so. Some are even drunk when they speak. This is disgraceful."

His reference to drunkenness is, in my experience, exaggerated. Inebriated speakers are extremely rare and not readily tolerated. Younger men might, however, be more likely to take the floor after having had something to drink.

8. There are a host of other patterned behaviors that characterize interaction in the ahiga and which would need to be considered in a full discussion of the use of the hall and its place in Nanumea. Thus:
- When a speaker rises to begin his discourse, he must address himself to someone. Most frequently, he will do this by calling to an elder sitting on the side of the hall opposite his own. The bipolar nature of Nanumean society is both indicated and bridged in this customary gesture.
  - Proper speech etiquette requires that the speaker pause from time to time and call for continuing assent from those present. An interjection Ine, e Vaha? ("Isn't that right, Vaha?") is the common form. This type of call requires an immediate response from the person addressed. Aue ("Oh"), Koia ("That's it") or a similar expression is adequate here. Listeners may also express their continuing attention and support by spontaneously interjecting cries of Aue and Koia at appropriate pauses in the speaker's delivery.

-- Expert speakers are adept at juxtaposing humorous remarks, funny stories, proverbs or a bit of clowning behavior into what may otherwise be serious deliveries. This mixture of moods is highly valued as a part of ahiga proceedings.

These brief examples of some aspects of the "grammar" of ahiga etiquette are only a few of the many features of interaction in the hall that would need to be considered in a full discussion. I have omitted them here because they are not central to my focus on the ahiga's role in the socio-political organization of the community.

9. Verbs can be nominalized by the addition of the suffix -ga. Thus akili, "to inspect," becomes akiliga, "inspection." Similarly, I believe aahi, "to visit," "to compare," becomes aahiga, "(place of) visitation, comparison." Although I have written the word ahiga throughout this study with a single initial a, if written phonetically it would be aahiga.
10. "Family" here is gloss for fakaua, which has no exact English equivalent. There are (in 1984) 99 fakaua faka te fenua ("fakaua family groups of the community") in Nanumea. These are family units that are responsible for providing specified foods at island feasts in the ahiga. They are not equivalent to households because some households opt out of fakaua participation (usually due to small size, or few or no male workers), and because in some cases several households join together as a single fakaua.
11. I pressed the elder and his wife on their comment that daughters would receive no share of the lands, pointing out that the current Nanumea lands code in fact specified that all children should be provided for adequately from the family estate. They replied that in cases where it was requested, daughters would be given a minimum allotment, consisting of one land parcel and one pulaka/taro pit.
12. Technically speaking, uta is best glossed in this context as "landward," not "land." But the designation of the two long sides of the hall as, respectively, te feitu a tai ("the sea side") and te feitu a uta ("the land side") makes it clear that, here, tai (sea) and uta (land) stand in direct opposition. The related concept fenua ("land" and other meanings) is discussed later in this chapter.
13. What is being stressed in this insult is the fact that those who have "drifted ashore," that is, those who arrived in Nanumea after the original settlement by Tefolaha, initially had no rights to land and hence had no way to survive. If they were deemed acceptable by the community, they were allowed to stay and were eventually given lands. This elder maintains, as do many others, that Nanumea's aliki originally had many more lands than they do at present and that through the generations they depleted them by giving them to landless (fakaalofa) strangers. This retort reminds the recipient of how he originally came by his lands.



14. This distinction I have identified between "real" people of the island, (i.e., chiefs) and those of the non-chiefly groups is not usually emphasized by Nanumeans in daily life. In fact, an egalitarian ethos declares that "we are all equal here" (cf. Anne Chambers 1983). Nevertheless, in my many conversations with people on this topic I repeatedly encountered this subtle distinction being drawn, both by those who counted themselves among the "real" people and those who did not put much stock in such things. The subtlety of the contrast varies with context, too, and the phrase which I have glossed "real people of the island" (tino loa o te fenua) can also be used to mean non-chiefs. The emphatic "loa" then operates, I feel, to signify "just": tino loa o te fenua, "just [ordinary] people of the island," which contrasts with te kau aliki, "the chiefs."
15. If the locative phrase were shortened to simply i uta, "inland," there would be little subtlety in it, since the ahiga is indeed inland. But people frequently shorten this response to i te fenua, omitting references to "inland" altogether. This usage makes it clearer, I think, that there is a cluster of ideas entailed in referring to the community hall in this manner.

## Chapter 7

ELDERS, LEADERS AND CHIEFS: THE USES OF KNOWLEDGE

"I'm not sure if our ancestor was counted in the aliki, but through his actions Nanumea was saved. He was a warrior. In a sense he should be considered a chief, because the chiefs are those who succour this land, who allow it to live in times of difficulty. And he did that."

Venu, at Nanumea, February 1984<sup>1</sup>

"Where are all the horticulturalists,  
Who donate their coconuts when there is plenty?  
I am not afraid during a drought,  
I emptied my house and taro pits,  
And let the lands be stripped completely."

Song commemorating an ancestor who succoured Nanumea

We saw in the last chapter the importance of Nanumea's ahiga in the life of the community. As the focus of much of the island's social life, and particularly as its public forum, the hall is an arena in which those who aspire to positions of influence in Nanumea must contend. Despite some change in recent decades, it is primarily the hina o te fenua, "gray hairs of the community," who dominate interaction in this gathering place. But age alone does not ensure respect, and if one wishes to be someone who is "useful" (aogaa) it is necessary to demonstrate this to the community.

This chapter explores this theme, the continuing quest by Nanumea's leaders or potential leaders for legitimacy in Nanumea's public speaking place and influence in the community. To be someone

of influence and value<sup>2</sup> in Nanumea one should, ideally, work hard, participate actively in community affairs, be reasonably upright in moral standing and establish a reputable family. In this way, gradually over a lifetime, it is possible to build a solid reputation and a strong position in public affairs. Nevertheless, many people seek to enhance their position by going beyond these pragmatic adjuncts to "success." There are several ways to do this.

One is to emphasize the founder. People want to be "true descendants of Tefolaha," for in establishing their rights to make this claim they mark out for themselves an inalienable position in a social system that is at once egalitarian and hierarchically oriented. To be a kinsman of the founder is to be associated with those who are autochthonous in Nanumea, with the land instead of the sea, with a venerable ancient heritage instead of a recent event, and with the powers of the universe instead of uncertain affiliations. Those who are members of the chiefly lineages claim not only a primacy derived from stressing their descent from the founder, but also a secure position within the social fabric through the special prerogative in traditional social organization (the pologa, "duty" or "responsibility") most lineages had.<sup>3</sup> But the facts of one's ancestry are subject to debate, as is the very constitution of society. These claims can be and are challenged, sometimes making it necessary for those who make them to defend their positions publicly.

While some choose to contend over these issues, others opt for different strategies in an effort to establish themselves. People who cannot stake out a strong position in a chiefly lineage, or who wish to augment their standing, have other means available. These means share

a common pattern: they require knowledge and expertise in the traditional skills upon which Nanumeans have always depended for their survival, coupled with a willingness to make these available for the good of the community as a whole. Let's consider first this strategy of making a "gift to the island" in building prestige and influence, before going on to consider the broader question of how knowledge in general is used in the process of seeking position in Nanumean society.

#### Gifts to the Island

Perhaps the most dramatic way to prove one's usefulness is to "feed" the entire community by contributing, in a munificent gesture, a vast quantity of one of the main subsistence foods to a feast in the ahiga. Nanumea's master fishermen (tautai) regularly do this. Those who are able to donate an entire canoe catch of large ocean-going fish for a feast in the ahiga on several occasions win for themselves prestige and fame, they are takutakua, "famous" (literally, "talked-about"). To be considered a master fisherman, Nanumean men traditionally have had to catch at least 100 skipjack tuna (atu) in one expedition in which they captain a four-man fishing canoe, or 10 larger ocean fish such as "king fish" (paala) or yellow-fin tuna (takuo). "Real" tautai, however, have not only caught both limits several times, informants say, but have gone further than this. To demonstrate their largess after such a catch they should approach the community's leader with words to the effect that "I am giving my canoe to the community to eat." Once he has done this several times, a tautai can stand to speak in the ahiga without fear of challenge. If he has not, he would be ashamed, maa, to speak publicly.

Produce of the land can also be given to the community in a similar gesture, with the comparable result that one's name is "talked about," and one gains for himself, and also for future descendants, the right to speak in ahiga gatherings. One famous instance of such a gift being made is widely recalled today even though it happened in the 1890's. During a severe drought, probably the one associated with the chief Vaetolo (cf. Chapter 4), the island suffered unusual deprivation and food resources were virtually depleted. Few had enough to eat, let alone extra food to contribute to others. An elder named Matakea, however, decided that he had the resources on his lands to "feed" the island. He and his kinsmen collected a huge quantity of coconuts and donated them as the basis of a community feast in the island's hall. In doing this, Matakea was said to lafo tona kaafaga, "donate his tree-climbing loop" (a fibre loop which ties the ankles together and makes it possible to climb a coconut tree) to the community, which enabled it to survive the drought. Informants today say that Matakea's sons and grandsons subsequently were able to derive a measure of their authority in island affairs from their ancestor's memorable act.<sup>4</sup> One man, discussing this incident with me, used it as an example of the customary rule that only those community elders "who had done something beneficial" (e i ai ni llou mea llei ni fai) could speak in the hall. He also recalled an instance where one of Matakea's descendants had become angered during an ahiga gathering and had challenged several speakers, referring obliquely to his own family's largess in the past: "Why have you come to speak in the ahiga, what is your usefulness?"<sup>5</sup>

These examples demonstrate one way that it is possible to be "useful" in Nanumea, and to establish in the process a foundation from

which to speak in the ahiga. In my view this quest for legitimacy is of fundamental importance in Nanumean public behavior. It lies behind much of the contention over who has the "true" version of the tale of Tefolaha. It animates high achievers such as Matakea and others like him who have built solid reputations upon their demonstrations of "community heartedness" (loto fenua). And it is responsible for much of the continuing interest people have in claiming a position in one or another chiefly lineage, or one of the valued "jobs" given his descendants by Tefolaha.

One of the chief commodities sought after, secreted, boasted about, and called on in support of claims to legitimacy is knowledge. Nanumeans value expert knowledge and respect those who have it, while also professing skepticism about ultimate truth. For they know well that knowledge is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Knowledge (and skills such as those demonstrated by Matakea and the canoe captains who give the labors of their hands to the island) is valued for its pragmatic uses.

#### Conceptualizing Knowledge

There are many spheres of knowledge and expertise which people are familiar with and value, including herbal remedies, massage therapy, magical skills, carpentry and canoe construction and the many subsistence pursuits important to atoll life. Knowledge relating to fishing and gardening is particularly stressed, and is regarded as a family resource to be guarded and passed on to future generations. Most men and some women engage in these important occupations on a regular basis for at least a portion of their lives. Having learned from parents and ancestors, as well as from experience, people have at their disposal at least enough practical information to survive and to feed their families. But

while many are content simply to get by, a few individuals achieve renown in one (or, rarely, several) of these fields through their repeated achievements in landing large catches, growing large and numerous taro or pulaka, or harvesting huge quantities of coconuts. Knowledge in these areas is conceived as cohering in "traditions" or bodies of information which are known as muna, literally "words." Thus, Matakea, in the example in the previous section, possessed muna o te kaafaga, "words of the climbing loop," a body of knowledge relating to coconut production.

In 1974 a noted canoe captain, a tautai, described to me some of the ways such bodies of knowledge are talked about. Families in Nanumea differ greatly in their skills and expertise, Petio said. Since all must fish, "each family has its fishing skills, its 'words' " (e tahi noho te kaaiga mo llou mulivaka, mo llou muna). Some kin groups are particularly noted for their skills in this field, and one might refer to someone who had inherited family knowledge in fishing as "that group with a fishing descent line" (kau e i ai telega mulivaka). Abilities like these are important to survival because "one eats from them." As important family possessions passed down to one's children and grandchildren, they are not readily given to outsiders.

If muna, "words," are bodies of information, the term logo refers to any discrete bit of knowledge. Like muna, the term logo (literally "to hear," "hearing") reflects the strong oral/aural basis of traditional Nanumean society. But logo are more than just what one has heard, they are conceived as specific pieces of knowledge one possesses and which have been verified. This might be something simple such as a recipe for making bread, or something more complex such as a specific method for producing large taro, or a therapeutic remedy. The

difference between the concepts muna, "words," and logo, "hearing," is one of scale. Muna seems to be used only to refer to complex bodies of information which one might characterize as having a particular flavor or style, in the way that one might remark on so-and-so's style of fishing, implying that the person possessed a coherent body of knowledge rather than a single piece of information. On the other hand, virtually any bit of information can be conceived as a logo. The question, "Do you have knowledge of [such and such a topic]?" is usually phrased in terms of whether one has a logo about the topic.

While both of these categories of knowledge are usually considered family information and efforts are made to keep them within the general kin group, there are differences in the way they are treated. Muna represent the greater resource and are seldom disclosed to outsiders. Petio, the master fisherman mentioned previously, described to me how as a young man he had approached his father's uncle, a noted tautai, asking to be taken on as an apprentice. His kinsman agreed and for two weeks Petio went to his house for formal instruction in the older man's muna o te mulivaka, "words of the canoe stern,"<sup>6</sup> his body of knowledge dealing with fishing. Thereafter he practiced what he had learned and returned to be instructed in fine points from time to time. While formal and informal teaching as described here is the usual method for passing on bodies of subsistence skills, there are occasions when this is not possible. Informants say that if need be an aged expert could transmit his or her skills while on his deathbed by spitting into the mouth of a younger son or daughter (or grandson or granddaughter). Though the younger person may have known nothing whatever of the skill before that



time, this act transmitted the knowledge, and one found that with it came power from the elder.

Less substantial bits of knowledge (logo) are usually also taught to one's children or other close kin, but unlike muna they may also be passed outside the family. This most frequently takes place at formal events such as weddings, funerals, or other solemn occasions marking life crisis events. In these "information flow events" (K. Chambers, n.d.), one or more people present will explain to the audience some valuable piece of information he or she possesses. In thus "disclosing knowledge" (fakatuu logo, literally "causing logo to stand"), the speaker honors the person who is the focus of the occasion, whether a deceased elder, a child who was subject to a near-death experience, or a newlywed. The quality of logo disclosed in this manner varies greatly, but, particularly when death strikes suddenly, kinsmen may be moved to present as gifts some knowledge of great value (e.g., secret family methods for growing taro). Funerals may be attended by some who otherwise might not go, in the expectation that leading elders may disclose useful information. In this way, knowledge passes from the control of one family into the public domain.

#### Tales, Genealogies and Ledger Books

Not all knowledge is conceptualized as "words" or "hearing," as either coherent bodies of information which can be learned in apprenticeships, or as discrete "items" such as logo which can be given as gifts or otherwise alienated. A good deal of tradition handed down from the ancestors is regarded as a more personal heritage. Like muna and logo this heritage has pragmatic value, and is conserved and utilized

as needed. But where the former sorts of knowledge define a realm of subsistence and other direct means of action, traditional family knowledge finds its usefulness in establishing or supporting the family position in society. When Tepou or Takitua (or any other elders) contend in the public arena for acceptance of a particular view of society, it is expected that they are prepared to cite the sources of their expertise. These are generally of two sorts and many elders draw on both of them. Most commonly, and formerly the only authoritative voice from the past, people recount a narrative and/or a genealogy, naming the person or persons from whom they learned the information they are conveying. They may add supporting details such as when and where they learned the story or genealogy, or name others who can corroborate their information.

The other increasingly important source is family ledger books in which tales, genealogies and other valued family information is recorded. These, too, have a pedigree of sorts and people whose claims are most authoritative give details of the origin and history of their books. Both of these types of source material can be challenged, their accuracy or relevance called into question. Let's consider each of them in turn before moving to look at examples of how people draw on them for support.

### Ledger Books

When Takitua came to talk about Tefolaha early in my stay on Nanumea, he came, he said, to tell a story about the founder. Although he did not bring his family ledger book with him on that first visit, in later conversations he did and from it checked to be sure the genealogies he recited were correct. In conversations about Tefolaha and

related issues with Tepou, the old man would sometimes preface his remarks with the phrase "so the story goes..." (fai mai te tala). He also lent me his ledger book, which contains numerous narratives, genealogical lists, and much other material of value to Tepou and his family. And so it is, too, with many other elders in Nanumea. To be knowledgeable in Nanumean terms, one has to know many tales, tala, which have come down from one's ancestors. And, ideally, one should either have, or have ready access to, a ledger book with one's genealogy and other family information in it.

Family ledger books (faoao) have been in use since the latter part of the 19th century as an important means of storing valuable information. Not all households have one, by any means, but many do, and leading elders are more likely to have a family "book" than not. These books come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from insubstantial paper-bound school notebooks to massive folio-sizes tomes. What is written in them varies considerably, but usually includes at least two basic sorts of information: genealogy of the family, tracing descent from Tefolaha or an early ancestor, and a version of the narrative of Tefolaha's founding of Nanumea. The most complete books have a variety of other material, including other genealogies which might show descent in various chiefly groups, lists of lands owned and pedigrees of how these came into the family, narratives about important figures in the family history, and contemporary concerns such as dates of birth and death of members of the family. Many books also record logo of various sorts, particularly those concerned with healing.

The use of ledger books probably began soon after the introduction of Christianity. People were quick to appreciate the value of

the new arts of reading and writing taught by the pastor, and some adults apparently attended school along with the children.<sup>7</sup> An example of the usefulness of bookkeeping was provided by a series of resident European traders on Nanumea during the two decades before Britain imposed its protectorate. The traders used ledger books for recording accounts and stocks of goods and also entered in them notable events such as the arrival of ships. Moreover, traders sold these new items, along with pens, pencils and slates.<sup>8</sup> It was not long before elders began to keep (or to have a younger member of the family keep for them, most likely) records of their own. Several family heads told me that their books originated in the late 19th century when members of the chiefly lineages elected a secretary to record information that the Council of Chiefs considered important. This included extensive genealogies of the various chiefly "branches" and lists of members.<sup>9</sup> Elderly experts in genealogical material would recite while the secretary wrote down the information. This early use of ledger books primarily as a vehicle for recording genealogy is reflected, I believe, in the form in which some genealogies are still written today. These lists (cf. Figure 7-1) appear to have been taken down directly from dictation in a form that demonstrates their oral source.

The two-column format of this genealogy illustrates the oral mnemonic device of repetition of each name twice, first as the offspring of the previous name on the list, then as the parent of the next name. Although, to my knowledge, people today do not memorize genealogies in this fashion, some older informants know segments of approximately ten generations and recite them in this way. The repetition allows a cadence to be kept and is a check on inadvertent error. It also allows hearers

Figure 7-1 Portion of a Ledger Book Genealogy of the Oldest Form

|     |                     |             |                 |                    |            |        |
|-----|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|--------|
| 1.  | Tefolaha and Tauaho | his spouse. | People of Tonga |                    |            |        |
|     | his offspring       | [is]        | Lavega          |                    |            | a male |
| 2.  | "                   | "           | Lavega          | [his offspring is] | Logotau    | " "    |
| 3.  | "                   | "           | Logotau         | " "                | Taka       | " "    |
| 4.  | "                   | "           | Taka            | " "                | Patuki     | " "    |
| 5.  | "                   | "           | Patuki          | " "                | Poke       | " "    |
| 6.  | "                   | "           | Poke            | " "                | Patuki     | " "    |
| 7.  | "                   | "           | Patuki          | " "                | Poke       | " "    |
| 8.  | "                   | "           | Poke            | " "                | Patuki     | " "    |
| 9.  | "                   | "           | Patuki          | " "                | Poke       | " "    |
| 10. | "                   | "           | Poke            | " "                | Telefulefu | " "    |

Source: Venu and his family ledger book. Words in English are translations of Nanumean equivalents. This genealogy is particularly repetitive in its early portion, something even members of this lineage comment on. Generations 11-23 are omitted here.

(when genealogies were recited aloud) to follow easily. Noteworthy here, too, is the numbering of generations from the founder, a practice that apparently pre-dates contact with the west. Captain Pease was told in 1853, for instance, that the island's chief was the 66th to reign since the founding (Pease 1854), and early missionaries were given counts of generations since the founding. Today, as ledger books continue to be copied, people are less likely to use this two-column format. Most books show a single vertical column of names, while a few genealogies are drawn out almost in the format anthropologists use, even to the extent of using a triangle to stand for males and a circle for females.<sup>10</sup>

Ledger books are generally treated as private family information and are not shown readily to outsiders. Elders who keep the books may regard them as a resource to be shared with adult sons--in one case I know of, a man's sons occasionally add entries to his book, describing notable events which take place in the community. But this seems rare.

At the opposite extreme are books which are treated with great secrecy, kept under lock and key in an elder's wooden chest, seldom shown to anyone. People say that some elders keep material from the old "days of darkness" (poouliuli), the pre-Christian past, recorded in their books. This might include instruction in using magic (vailaakau) in subsistence work such as fishing, pulaka and taro growing, or coconut sap production. Other types of knowledge (logo) which might be recorded include magical means of foretelling the future, controlling winds or clouds, seeing events that are happening in some distant place, or locating lost objects. Healing lore, some of it magical or involving the use of quasi-magical methods, is also sometimes recorded in ledger books. Peoples' reticence to disclose knowledge of this type of information is understandable, since the use of magic and means of dealing with spirits has been strongly condemned by the church for the last century, and the island pastor continues to address this topic in sermons from time to time. The force of public opinion is also against keeping such knowledge alive. It is characterized as "evil things" (mea maahhei) and many feel it is dangerous or associated with the powers of the devil (taipolo).

But whether someone has logo of this sort recorded in his book or not, there are other reasons for treating the contents with respect and as a family resource. The books almost always record genealogy and pedigrees of lands that the family owns. Land is livelihood, and these records ensure that an elder's offspring will learn not only the names but also, by repeated use, the locations of the family lands and how they came down in time to the family. This latter information can be important because one's lands are always potentially liable to be claimed by someone else in litigation brought before the lands court. By keeping

records of land pedigrees, where these are known, one can present a more forceful court case should the need arise. One middle aged man who showed me his family book explained the several pages of land pedigrees in it. His father had copied them into the book, he said, for possible future use should the land court ever reverse the ruling that long ago allowed lands to be given in wills to those outside the family.<sup>11</sup> By keeping a record of lands once theirs but now belonging to others, it was felt that there would be a chance of claiming them back in the future.

Ledger books are treated as a private resource for the compelling reason that knowledge is often of value in day-to-day affairs in Nanumea. There are numerous occasions where one should be able to call on family knowledge, on information that is not publicly known. Knowledge is potential power and to make the contents of one's book too readily available would be to eliminate or greatly devalue this resource.

### Tales

Although there is widespread interest in, and use of, ledger books, most valued knowledge is transmitted orally and oral narratives are another major resource in Nanumea. The general term for story or narrative (tala) has a variety of other meanings, including "news," "gossip," "report," "account" and even "novel" and "play." At its most general, the word tala can probably be considered a concept as broad as English "discourse." But people conceptualize narratives as a discrete sub-set within this wider usage and restrict the range of the term further when considering the most important categories of oral narrative. Though there is some variability in the terminology people apply to

these main types, informants generally agree that Nanumean narratives fall into one of three major genres.

The first of these is what we might call fictional tales or folktales (tala kkai). All Nanumeans have heard and enjoyed these fanciful traditional stories which older adults tell in the evenings when people are relaxing in the house before bedtime. They are valued as a part of Nanumea's repertoire of traditional lore. But folktales are fictional. Their standard opening format signals to listeners that what follows is not to be taken as true, nor to have taken place at any given locale or time. As one woman teller of tala kkai characterized these stories: "These are old stories, but they have no 'proofs,' nothing one has seen with one's eyes. They are stories one doesn't know for sure about." Many tala kkai<sup>12</sup> have short ditties or songs (tagi) in them and skilled tellers often add an end frame incorporating themselves into the final few moments of the plot, which serves, as the informant above put it, "to add style to the story."

Fictional tales are distinguished sharply from the two other main genres which recount actual events thought to have taken place in the past. "True tales" (tala tonu) are, for most people, accounts of recent events that they have seen themselves or that were witnessed by the original teller (e.g., a parent or grandparent). This is anecdotal material and, since the events told about are relatively recent, the narratives are variable and not always widely known. Stories about the establishment of Christianity or of doings in early colonial days are tala tonu. A more venerable type of narrative is "ancient tales," tala mua. No one living today has witnessed the events they recount or talked to anyone who has. Ancient tales are stories of the distant past which



tell of events which were significant in the development of Nanumean society. The story of Tefolaha is a tale of this genre, as is the tale of the Kiribati warriors Taitai and Temotu recounted in Chapter 3. Narratives of this sort are sometimes characterized as having the function of "chronicling the island" (fakaholo te fenua).<sup>13</sup>

For most Nanumeans the distinction between these latter two types of narrative and fictional tales is absolute and important and there is little or no tendency to blur the boundary between them. On the one side are stories which are said to be either untrue (hee tonu) or uncertain (hee mautinoa) and which are often characterized as imaginary or invented stories. One informant even refused to tell me folktales, asking why I wanted to waste my time on imaginary things. On the other side of the boundary lies a body of true material whose main value lies in its ability to link the past with the present and to set out the Nanumean view of the significant points in Nanumean experience. This traditional material is the basis for explaining and defining just what Nanumea is, and in a restricted sense we might consider some of it as falling within the sphere of the sacred.

While both ledger books and narratives are valued by most Nanumeans as potential sources of authoritative information, as repositories of traditional lore, people note that both types of knowledge can be manipulated. In discussing narratives with me, for instance, one elder smiled and then told me:

I don't know many stories since I never used to listen to people tell about their family and chiefly history. I thought they were all lies, since they told them because they wanted to be of high status (fia ke mau-luga). If it was a story of warriors, they were real warriors, and so on. Nobody wants to be of low status,

to have a low status descent line (hee ai he tino fia maulalo, tona telega ke maulalo).

On another occasion, when I was discussing the fact that there are several versions of the story of Tefolaha, another informant remarked that he felt that the stories had been more uniform when he was young. I asked him why he thought such differences had come to exist. In his view this was because,

People want to be aliki, want to be people of Tefolaha. So they change the story so that they are the true descendants of Tefolaha. They want to be chiefs, to be of high status.

It is not just oral narratives which people say may be altered. Another informant expressed cynicism about the authenticity of some elders' ledger books. Of one elder he said,

I don't believe that what is in his [the elder's] ledger book is true. I could also write stories like that and put them in a book and say that they are old. I could write down my genealogy too to show that I was in a chiefly lineage.

I asked if this would not be difficult, since surely people would know that what he had written was false? He replied,

No, not today, because the people who really know [about such things] are gone. So I could even say that their genealogies were wrong and mine was right. People do lie about their genealogies.

With at least some people professing skepticism of this nature, those who wish to utilize narratives, genealogies and ledger book source material to support claims to status need to be forceful and persuasive in providing proof for their views.

#### The Importance of Proofs

If legitimacy is what is ultimately at stake in people's continuing efforts to achieve positions of influence, a key tool in the

quest is the importance which Nanumeans attach to the notion of proof. When it comes to believing someone, particularly someone from outside one's sphere of kinsmen, Nanumeans tend to be skeptics. While "show me" is not a motto I encountered here, it might well be. For people expect that reasonable assertions about the social order and one's position in it, about happenings in the distant past, or simply about how things ought to be done now, will be backed up with "verifications" (fakamaoniga) or with "proofs" (fakatalitonuga). Repeatedly, as narratives are recounted or genealogies recited, they are offered as testimony (molimau) to the correctness of what has been explained. When two people contend in public with competing versions of a narrative, each strives to provide the most convincing support for his position. Listeners may already have taken a stand on the issue, but many may be willing to place their trust with the most effective speaker. As one elder told me, when he encounters competing tales he listens to them both. "If there are many proofs (molimau) for one, that is the story [I accept]."

We have already seen in previous chapters numerous examples of people using proofs and verifications. These seem to fall into four major categories. Let's consider each in turn. The first sort is what we might call "physical remainders." Many of the "ancient tales," talamua, which explain major events in the past make reference to the origin of physical features which endure today. These "things for the eyes," mea ki mata, are continually pointed out or remarked on as evidence that the events described really happened. There are a great number of these remainders scattered across the Nanumean landscape and even under the sea. Children learn about them in the process of growing up and then tell their own children in later years. When the Tongan invader named

Lupo was speared (Chapter 3), his opponent, Kaimoko, stood upon an outcropping (utua) of coral which is said to have grown up magically at that time from the reef flat. This feature, "the outcropping of Kaimoko" (te utua a Kaimoko), still stands today near the passage into the lagoon, testimony to the factuality of this tale. A long line or crack along the ocean reef flat at Matagi is said to have been made by Pai and Vau's picking stick (Chapter 2), and a small islet in the lagoon, as well as Lakena islet, was created by sand spilled by the two women. A series of coral outcroppings in the lagoon named after members of Tefolaha's canoe crew in the original settling constitute one "verification" of that story's veracity. Many place names also commemorate past events and are considered to be a form of verification.

Most verifications of this nature seem to be widely known and accepted by all, serving as collective proofs of the general validity of the body of Nanumean tradition. In some cases, the same physical remainders may be called on to support differing versions of events. A case in point concerns the fish-mouthed women which Tepou's account (Chapter 3) says were Tefolaha's first offspring in Nanumea. Normal looking in all respects except for their jaws, these descendants of Tefolaha and his spirit wife were cannibalistic and Tefolaha killed them (or drove them off, in some versions). While Takitua's account denies that they were Tefolaha's offspring, it accepts that these women existed. Although there is some variation in the names given for these four women, the family traditions of Tepou and Takitua, and of other elders too, recall the locations of the land parcels where their bodies were ultimately buried. This information is also recorded in several

family ledger books I examined, and is taken as one proof supporting the tale.

Two informants told me of an additional physical proof that these women had existed, as the stories say. In World War II, one said, Nanumea's Chief Kaupule, Malesa, was working one day with U.S. forces digging holes in Matagi. He came upon a grave in which was a huge skull, human-like, but with a large forward jutting jaw somewhat like that of a shark. Malesa, the account goes, recalled the story about the fish-mouthed cannibalistic women and thought that perhaps this was the grave of one of them. He re-buried the skull, noting the location carefully, and later told his family about this unusual find. Although Malesa died without, apparently, pointing out this site to others, many people have heard about his alleged find and those who know about it regard this as a likely additional verification for the ancient account.

A second type of proof could be termed "testimony from the ancestors." One form this takes is statements that particular information was learned from so-and-so (naming an ancestor) and hence is valid. Almost any narrative can be supported in this way and often listeners call for this verification, demanding "Who did you hear that from?" Tepou and Takitua argue for different conceptions of Nanumea's constitution, and then bolster their positions by citing ancestral tales handed down through the ages and learned from their parents or grandparents. Sometimes it is enough to remind listeners of a tale they have all heard before. Thus, in a gathering in the community hall early in 1984, after the noon meal had been served and speeches were in progress, Tepou took the occasion to upbraid members of the Council of Chiefs because, in his opinion, they were not overseeing satisfactorily the weekly food gifts

made to Nanumea's pastor. Cognizant, no doubt, of the need to bolster his position in publicly criticizing the chiefs, Tepou reminded those in the hall of his descent from Tefolaha and particularly of his "position" (tuulaga) as defined in that account as one who "sat and watched" over public affairs in Nanumea. In doing this, he recounted a brief version of his account of Tefolaha's children, including his ancestor Koli. On this occasion, at least one other elder present joined in confirming that, in his view, Tepou's narrative was "correct" and justified his actions. It is notable, in this regard, that the least reliable of information in Nanumea, gossip and hearsay, is critically referred to as ni tala logo, "just overheard stories." A story or tale which is unattributed has no verifications and hence is usually discounted.

Another sort of "testimony from the ancestors" consists of the ledger books with narratives and genealogies recorded in them. These books are not often shown to people outside the family, but they are talked about and cited as authoritative sources for the privileged information some elders claim. In some cases, these books are said to have been written down when there were "still people who knew things," referring in this way to the late 19th or early 20th century when there were many people alive who had lived in both the pagan Nanumea of days gone by and the post-missionary society of the present.<sup>14</sup>

"Customary behavior" is another type of proof which people cite. One elder, critical of Takitua's claims of a leading position for his large chiefly lineage, pointed out to me that in his opinion these claims were belied by the activities of this lineage at installations of chiefs. Far from being in charge of the chieftainship, he noted, members of Takitua's lineage had served the chiefs, bringing them food

and clothing, attending to small details of the installation proceedings, and even ensuring that the chief-to-be had a newly constructed house to live in. Similarly, Tepou refers to customary behavior in support of his own assertions about his family's traditional role. The seating position of his group near the reigning chief (cf. Figure 6-2, Chapter 6) is one such piece of evidence he points to. In addition to this, Tepou says that his group customarily had "first fruit" rights at ahiga functions when the chief was provided with food gifts and was entitled to select what it wished from the various platters of food before they were given to the chief.<sup>15</sup> Finally, he points to the customary provision to his lineage of a newly woven kapau mat at installations of chiefs as a marker of his line's traditional position.

The fourth type of verification commonly cited by people is land. We have already encountered the idea that originally the aliki of Nanumea controlled the seven tips of Nanumea's islets. Leading members of the chiefly lineages point to their retention of portions of these lands today as evidence of their status. In some cases people who have holdings in one of these matafenua are considered members of one of the chiefly lineages, even when no genealogical connection can be demonstrated. It is assumed that they are aliki because of their possession of the land. Having such "chiefly land" obligates them to contribute some of its produce to functions in which chiefly lineages provide food. Similarly, certain other lands in Nanumea are identified by informants as "lands of the chiefs" and those people who have portions of them are normally considered to belong to the chiefly lineage in question.

## Tangled Tales

Over the years most Nanumeans have heard a wide variety of arguments made for one or another view of the nature of their social system and have also heard explanations of most of the important "proofs" people draw on. As a result, they are keenly aware that there are competing views within Nanumea. In the course of my research, many people expressed sympathy for anyone (i.e., me) trying to make sense out of these conflicting opinions and often I would have people say to me things like, "There are many explanations" (e uke a fakamatalaga), "There is not a unified story" (e hee tahi te tala), "The stories differ" (e heke-heke a tala), or "The tale is tangled" (e ffifi te tala). However, almost everyone felt that the effort to understand these things was worthwhile. Reflecting on their comments, it seems to me that Nanumeans are basically of two opinions. Some, what we might think of as the "many explanations" school, express the view that there simply are conflicting explanations and that it is not possible to do much about this fact other than to accept it. This is a relativist position. But there are many others, the "tangled tale" school, who seem to feel that although the "tale" is not unified, it should be. For them, an important goal, and perhaps the hoped for outcome of my research, is to probe these matters in order to come up with the one true story (tala tonu) explaining Nanumea's origins and the basic features of traditional social organization. This would lay to rest all disputes.

While I cannot untangle the tales, nor do I feel it is something anyone could do, I would like to bring this chapter to an end by considering briefly an incident in which a Nanumean elder sought to



provide his own bridge between the opposed positions represented by Tepou's and Takitua's versions of the story of Tefolaha. For, while there are many individuals who contend in public for acceptance of their views and who seek to secure positions of influence, this remains the preeminent dispute at present<sup>16</sup> and the story over which these two elders contend is Nanumea's most fundamental statement of the proper order of society.

At an ahiga meeting of the elders of one village side early in May, 1984, the men were sitting in their half of the community hall making handicrafts which the side would sell on the next visit of the handicraft buyer from Funafuti. As always, the occasion was one for discussion. This morning, since I had joined them, the talk had turned to my own efforts to understand the differences between the several versions of the story of the founding of Nanumea. A main difference lies in how the two chiefly lineages of Tepaa and Teilo originated and people were commenting on this. Talk went back and forth, with first Tepou's and then Takitua's views being remarked upon. Neither elder was present and no one seemed quite certain of the details of their views. At this point one of the leading elders of this village side spoke up. "Listen to me," he called out, "I will tell a story." He then proceeded to narrate a brief version of the coming of Tefolaha, a story which, however, differed from any I had heard. For in it Tefolaha and his wife Puleala (cf. Chapter 3 and Appendix I) had not three children as both Tepou and Takitua (and most everyone else) agrees, but four. The last, in this story told by Vaha, was a female, Koli, whom Tepou claims as his ancestor.

Vaha continued. Tefolaha, he said, made a voyage to Samoa for the second time and before departing gave to each of his sons a vaega, "portion" of responsibility. Tutaki was to distribute (tufa) and Fiaola was to apportion (nifo) foods in the ahiga (as all versions of the founding agree). Lavega was given the chieftainship but he said to his father, "No, leave it to [my sister] Koli and leave me the mataili [a magical device for seeing afar]." Koli replied, "No, leave the mataili to me and you take the [role of] choosing (filifiliga) the chief." And so it was, down to this day. In this version, all of these lineages stem from Tefolaha and his wife Puleala, Koli's line leading to Tepou, Lavega's eventually branching (as Takitua's tale asserts) to give the two main branches of chiefs. Perhaps because I was sitting next to Vaha and we became engaged in conversation, there was little discussion among those present about this novel view, and gradually the talk moved to other topics.

Several days later I went to see Vaha at his house. He explained that he had told the story because he felt it offered a way out of the dilemma which Takitua's and Tepou's opposed stories led to. Tepou claimed a priority based on his descent from Koli, the founder's first child, while Takitua argued that Koli was a spirit, aitu, who never gave birth. But, Vaha noted, his grandmother, a distant relative of Tepou, had told him that in fact Koli was their ancestor. Vaha's solution was to conclude that the only reasonable line of descent was one which incorporated elements of both tales. Tepou's ancestor thus became a full sibling of Takitua's ancestor. Vaha noted that this compromise narrative also removed one problem some had with Tepou's tale, the supposed descent of this lineage from a spirit. In this version,

Koli presumably received the magical mataili she requested, but in Vaha's view this did not result in Tepou's lineage having any of the traditional responsibilities (tofi) given out by Tefolaha.

Ingenious as it is, Vaha's solution, his effort to "untangle" the two men's tales, is unlikely to meet with general acceptance in Nanumea while there remain strong proponents of the views of Tepou and Takitua. Takitua died little more than a week after this conversation and, though I did not discuss it with Tepou, I am certain that both men would view this compromise tale as heresy. But Vaha's proposal is important beyond its likelihood of becoming a third version of this key narrative. For it is indicative of a concern shared by a number of people, a concern at the potentially divisive competition represented by the two contending versions of the Tefolaha story. While Nanumea thrives on structured competition, and the division of the village into two competitive sides (Chapter 2) ensures that this theme pervades life, unity is important too and is a value that is repeatedly stressed in gatherings in the community hall. The next chapter considers some of the many ways in which Nanumea is united by its focus on the community's traditional founder, even when some of the details of the island's history are not fully agreed upon.

## NOTES

1. This passage is paraphrased from a discussion on this topic with Venu, who was Nanumea's Island Council President during my stay there in 1973-75. In the family tradition Venu refers to, a warrior named Poke was influential in ridding Nanumea of Kiribati invaders (cf. discussion of the same episode from another perspective in Chapter 3). Thus Poke had "saved" (fakaola) Nanumea.

According to some informants, a relic of Poke, his ketuketu (cane), survived and was handed down to his descendants until it was destroyed in a fire some years ago.

2. The notion of being "useful" is stressed in numerous contexts. At the funeral of an influential elder, for instance, one speaker (not a kinsman) eulogized the deceased as "an elder of great usefulness in our community," someone who was "valuable in our community," and upon whom the island "depended." Although this person had been a leading member of the aliki, this received less emphasis and was referred to only obliquely in the comment that he was a "true person of our community," i.e., a descendant of the founder.
3. It seems likely, in fact, that this concept of "duty" associated with the descent groups said to have been established by Tefolaha was one of the major ideological differences between chiefly and non-chiefly lineages. To have one's hereditary duty to perform was to "know one's place" in the positive sense of this phrase. One family ledger book I examined has an entry dating from 1909 listing key members of the chiefly lineages arranged, not according to lineages or "branches" of chiefs (maga), but according to the differing duties of each group (cf. Appendix IV).
4. Notable individuals such as Matakea are recalled in commemorative songs (fakanau, and another type known as mako fakatagitagi) such as that presented at the head of the chapter. The complete fakanau of Matakea was sung for me by Kalipa, an elderly woman well-known in Nanumea for her large repertoire of songs and other lore, and recorded in November 1974. Kalipa said that the song was the creation of Laua, a noted composer at the turn of the century. In the song Matakea, who is depicted singing about himself, chides his fellow household heads who, for all their pride in their abilities in growing coconuts and other produce of the land, only donate these things to feasts when times are plentiful. He boasts of his own gift and sings of his and his wife Liki's hard work:

"When I say something I do it,  
Because I do not go back [on my word].  
I take after my grandfather.  
My forehead is driven with the task.  
Continue ahead, continue until death,  
Onward until the head breaks.

4. (con't) Where are the real horticulturalists,  
Who donate their coconuts when there is plenty?  
I am not afraid during a drought,  
I emptied my house and taro pits,  
And let the lands be stripped completely.

Liki and I are of one heart,  
One thousand uto nuts from the bush,  
Two thousand taro or pulaka,  
Liki and I are of one heart."

---

Puhi taku muna kau moe akina,  
ia te au e hee tele ki tua.  
E afu au ki toku tupuna.  
E taa te lae ki te faiva.  
Moe ki mua, moe faka mate,  
E moe ke fatifati te piho.

Kohea tino o te maamafa,  
E lafo kaafaga i te mau?  
Hee ulika i te vaimao,  
Ne uu tafitafia fale mo talo,  
A manafa ke oti mai katoa.

E papau o maa loto mo Liki,  
E mano ttou loulou ki vao,  
E mata lua afe ttou fakaua,  
E papau o maa loto mo Liki.

5. "Fame" from these magnificent gestures in feeding the community spills over to descendants of the giver, perhaps partly because these acts are not those of individuals, but of kin groups. In order to donate an entire day's canoe catch, for instance, a canoe captain needs the acceptance of his extended family and the cooperation of his three-man crew (often kinsmen). Normally the crew would share equally in the catch, so the captain's gift requires their sacrifice as well. For a captain to be able to donate several large catches to the community requires persuasion and assistance from a number of people. Similarly, although in Matakea's case this household head assessed the family resources and made the decision to donate the coconuts (and other produce, to judge from the song above), doing so required the pooled labor of many family members. Thus the "reward" for such acts may spread beyond the individual who becomes "talked-about" because of them.
6. Just as a fisherman's skills are conceived as "words of the canoe stern" (the stern being where the captain sits), so each of the categories of knowledge and skill which are regarded as muna ("words") seem to take their names from the implements used in the practice of the skill. Mulivaka, "canoe stern," stands as a kind of shorthand for general fishing knowledge, kaafaga, "climbing

6. (con't) loop," for knowledge of coconut production, loulou, "picking stick," for knowledge of sweet-husked uto nuts, fakaua, "family unit that contributes root crops to feasts," for knowledge of taro or pulaka growing, and lou, "Ruvettus hook," for knowledge relating to deep sea fish. Each of these terms is a type of muna, a major category of knowledge.
7. Journals of L.M.S. missionaries comment on Nanumeans' eager acceptance of schooling. In 1874, eighteen months after the island's first pastor, Tuilouaa, had landed, a report notes that "schools are held morning and afternoon at which men, women and children attend" (G. A. Turner 1874). In 1876, there were 73 girls and 89 boys in school, and "of them 80 read well" (G. Turner 1876). In 1877, a mission visitor "examined the children...their knowledge of reading, writing, and figures was truly encouraging" (Powell 1878). Mission reports also regularly list the numbers of Samoan Bibles and hymn books sold. The first consignment for Nanumea consisted of 50 hymn books and 20 Bibles left by George Turner in 1874. As there was no resident trader at the time and hence no source of cash, Turner instructed the pastor to sell the books for braided kafa sennit cord: 5 lbs. for a hymn book and 20 lbs. for a Bible (G. A. Turner 1874).

Nanumean oral tradition memorializes the marvelous new skill in a well-known series of self-deprecatory tales of the numskull type. In one of these, Nanumeans are incredulous when their children bring home written work which they read aloud over and over, until they notice that the children can do this in total darkness! The paper, on inspection, turns out to be blank, the children having memorized some Samoan phrases. In another tale, a note is sent to Lakena asking for a climbing stick and a wooden mortar to be sent back to the village. Nothing is done, even when the messenger shows and explains the note. Nobody can believe that the small scratches on the paper could represent concrete things like climbing sticks or mortars.

Nanumeans' enthusiasm for the new art paralleled the eager response of other Polynesians to "the sheer magic of the written word" (Parsonson 1967).

8. A list of trade goods sold on the Tuvalu island of Nukufetau in 1884 includes pens, lead pencils, slates, "slate pencils," foolscap paper, "small account books" and "copy books." A year later the same trader moved to Nanumea. His diary list of trade goods in stock there omits the books, but includes pens, pencils and slates. One can presume that writing materials as well as copy books were available throughout Tuvalu by this time (cf. Munro 1982: 215-16, 186-190).
9. Appendix IV presents such a list, which was entered in a ledger book in 1909. It is the earliest entry of this sort I saw during my stays in Nanumea.

10. During my work in Nanumea in 1973-1975, I did not see any genealogies which used this charted format though my wife and I used it ourselves in drawing out the large newsprint sheets we used for our genealogies. We gave portions of these to friends who requested them. On our return in 1984, we found that a number of family ledger books had recent entries using the triangle and circle charting style and that a few people had drawn their family genealogy out on large paper sheets in the manner we had used a decade earlier. This new style seems to be gaining popularity, probably influenced at least partly by our presence and work in Nanumea.
11. There were a number of official "Land Commissions" or enquiries into land matters in Tuvalu during Britain's administration of the islands (cf. Macdonald 1982), but from a Nanumean perspective two were of major importance. The first was a tribunal held in about 1909-12, under British "Resident Magistrate" G. B. Smith-Rewse (recalled locally as Misi Lusi, "Mr. Rewse"). This court heard cases which had accumulated up to that time and established the principle that lands could only be inherited by those who shared "blood" (toto), i.e., consanguines. This ruling apparently resulted in massive redistribution of lands, as parcels received in wills by adoptees and others were returned.

In 1936 a major land commission under Administrative Officer D. G. Kennedy met for nearly four months at Nanumea (Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony 1936; cf. also Kennedy 1953) and ultimately reversed the earlier ruling by Smith-Rewse. Land owners could now alienate their land by will (togi) so long as their own offspring were also provided for. Nanumeans recall these as great shifts, one defining a land policy based on toto, blood, the other a policy based on togi, will. Some people hope for yet another swing in the future back to a policy of "blood."

12. The etymology of the qualifier kkai in the compound tala kkai is uncertain. The word kkai can mean "to eat" (plural form), as well as "sharp." But when it is coupled with tala, "story," the whole signifies "fictional tale." People considered my suggested glosses "sharp story" or "stories one eats" as interesting possibilities, but clearly neither construction is particularly salient. A cognate of the term tala kkai exists in other closely related Polynesian cultures, leading one to expect that it is of ancient derivation. In Tokelau (Huntsman 1977, 1980), kakai are tales similar to Nanumean fictional tales, as are Tikopian kai (Firth 1961). In Bellona culture heroes (kakai) have tales told about them (Elbert and Monberg 1965).
13. To fakaholo can mean to "go in turn," as the chiefly lineages of Tepaa and Teilo were said to do in years past in assuming the chieftainship. It can also mean, as in this usage, to recount or tell about something "in order."
14. Takitua, for instance, once asserted to me that his versions of the most important "ancient tales" including the coming of Tefolaha and

the defeat of the Tongan invaders to Nanumea were the only truly accurate ones available in Nanumea. This fact was previously recognized, he said, by European colonial officials who came from time to time in search of information on traditional matters. According to Takitua, many elders, some of them older than he, directed these people to him because he had a book with material of this sort in it and the book had come down to him from his ancestors.

15. Tepou explained this "right" with reference to his group's relationship to the two main lineages of chiefs stemming from the brothers Tepaa and Teilo. As their sister and a favorite of her father Tefolaha, Tepou's ancestor Koli had a right, in accord with Nanumean custom current today, to be "fed" from the produce of their lands. When either of these two lineages is fed today in public ahiga functions, Tepou says, his lineage has this continuing right.
16. While no one else has entered the public arena in Nanumea in the confident manner these two have done, there is every likelihood that this will happen soon. Toward the end of my fieldwork in 1984, for instance, it became apparent that an original and considerably different view of many of the issues that Tepou and Takitua have contended over is being forcefully argued by a Nanumean elder (and member of the chiefly lineages) resident in Funafuti. In 1983 he had visited Nanumea, discussing his own views, and helping chart out people's genealogies from his extensive ledger books. I met him only at the end of my stay, when we had some all too brief but fascinating conversations. The scope of his knowledge is impressive. Only time will tell, of course, whether or how this will be put to use in Nanumea.



## Chapter 8

THE BONES OF TEFOLAHA

"On one of the graves [was] placed a human skull, completely taken off at the neck, near to which [stood] the old chief, sprinkling it with water from a cocoanut shell, and talking very fast. The head was stained a deep black. I was informed that it was the head of the first king who ever ruled on this island."

Whaling Captain Henry Pease, at Nanumea, 1853

"They have a skull which they say belonged to one of their Samoan ancestors which they preserve with great care, and appear to regard as a very precious relic."

A. W. Murray, at Nanumea, 1866

We have explored some of the concerns people express over their ancestry, and the vehemence with which some press their particular rights to claim descent from Nanumea's founder. At stake for these people is legitimacy within an ancient hierarchy, and validation of their leading positions among the elders of society. But, important as these issues are in the process of village politics, they should not be allowed to overshadow other ways in which Tefolaha has been and continues to be important in Nanumea. His significance goes beyond questions of the political charter of the community or who the rightful leaders are. In this final chapter, I want to consider some of these other dimensions and to look more broadly at the significance, for Nanumeans, of the founder of this atoll society.

## Relics of the Founder

Tangible reminders of Tefolaha's establishment of Nanumean society and of his chiefly status have been important to Nanumeans throughout their history. Over a century ago, the first missionary visitor to the island remarked, for instance, that people preserved

the seat of one of the canoes in which their forefathers came...it is the seat on which the helmsman sits at the stern of the canoe (Murray 1866).

While Murray gave no indication of how, or whether, people used this object, a German naturalist who was ashore at the same time notes that it was used in the lengthy rites of incorporation which strangers had to undergo. The group of foreigners was led to a spot on the beach and made to wait. Finally,

an old priest accompanied by two natives came up, holding a stick horizontally between his hands, followed by another man carrying a plank from an old canoe and a bundle of coconuts (Graeffe 1867:1189).

The visitors were then led to a clearing in the coconut palms where invocations were made before shrines to the island gods. People today have no knowledge of this canoe seat and it is not mentioned again in any of the outside sources about Nanumea. Since, as we shall see, Tefolaha was venerated as a god, the seat from his voyaging canoe evidently played a role in ritual in which Tefolaha was invoked.

Another relic which, like the canoe seat, has been forgotten today but was important in the last century was presented as a gift to L.M.S. missionary George A. Turner on his visit to Nanumea in July 1874, just eighteen months after a mission teacher had been allowed to live on the island:

Moiono [a Nanumean leader, though not, apparently, a chief] also presented me with a great curiosity. It was the "tootoo" [orator's staff] of the father of the Nanumeans. According to their tradition they are sprung from a man called Folasa, a Samoan, who was drifted away from his home and reached Nanumea...They say the present generation is the 31st from Folasa. The said "tootoo" is like a regular Samoan tulafale's [orator's] tootoo, and is made of toa--a wood which does not exist on Nanumea. It is very much decayed and has been partially patched (G. A. Turner 1874).

Several years later, in a paper presented to the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (Ranken 1877), the staff was held to provide evidence of the origins of the Ellice Islanders (Tuvaluans):

A most decisive proof of [the Tuvaluans'] history was recently obtained by Dr. G. A. Turner while visiting the missions of the group. He was shown, and he ultimately obtained, a spear or staff, which their orators held while speaking, a Samoan custom indicating the holder's right to speak. This staff was very ancient, and the greatest treasure of their heralds and genealogists. They said they brought it with them from Samoa, and named the valley they came from thirty generations back. The staff was worm-eaten, and bound together by splints and sumit [sic]. Dr. Turner took it to Samoa, found that it was made of Samoan timber, visited the valley they named, and discovered a tradition there of a large party having gone to sea exploring, and never returning.

Turner himself, in a note penned at the end of his manuscript journal of his visit in 1874 (G. A. Turner 1874), adds:

Subsequently at Samoa I found that the name Folasa<sup>1</sup> is a family name at Falefa in Atua, that Moiono is also a Falefa name, & that the old men of the said family have a tradition of one of their family, by name Folasa, having been drifted away many generations ago, and never after heard of.

As valued as this "greatest treasure of their heralds and genealogists" must have been, it was apparently never seen again by Nanumeans once given away to Turner. It is mentioned briefly again in literature I have located (Whitmee 1879, Maudsley 1886), but then no more. Some of

the collections of the London Missionary Society were later deposited in the British Museum (Thorogood n.d.), but I have been unable to determine yet whether this staff was among them.

One possession said to have been Tefolaha's still remains in Nanumea today, the sole relic of the founder to have survived the tumult of the first few years of Christianity. Contemporary oral traditions say that the Kaumaile war spear was one of the things Tefolaha brought with him to Nanumea. He eventually passed it on to his son Tutaki and it then came down to Tutaki's descendant, Lapi. The lasting fame, in Nanumea, of the Kaumaile stems from an incident in traditional history second only to the coming of Tefolaha in its significance for Nanumeans. This is the defeat by Lapi of the Tongan warrior and giant Tulaapoupou. In Chapter 6, I summarized a portion of a narrative which an elder told me after discussing the ancient name for Nanumea, "Namea." In that story, a Tongan who attempted to attack Nanumea was killed and his body floated back to Tonga.

The well-known story continues with a retaliatory raid by a large fleet of Tongan warriors, whose champion was the giant Tulaapoupou. So tall was this man that, when he walked among the houses in Nanumea's village, he had to brush the coconut palms out of his way, much as one might push shrubbery away when walking through undergrowth. The men of Nanumea spread out to search for the giant but it was Lapi, direct descendant of Tefolaha, who found him. Tulaapoupou bent down and picked up Lapi in his hand, and prepared to hurl him down onto some sharp projections on the reef. While he was being carried on the giant's shoulder, Lapi fell into a dream-like state. In his dream, Tefolaha came to him and instructed him. Then, when the giant picked up Lapi to hurl him to

his death, Lapi did as the founder had instructed and called out "Tefolaha, your partner!" (Tefolaha tou hoa). This magical incantation had the desired effect, and immediately the reef gave way and Tulaapoupou sank down through it up to his knees. Lapi was able to despatch the helpless giant with the Kaumaile spear.<sup>2</sup> Later, fish came to eat the remains of the body and the reef near the village remained marked with depressions from the impact of Tulaapoupou's knees. Without the giant's aid, the other Tongans were easily routed and the invaders defeated.<sup>3</sup>

As the only surviving memento of Tefolaha, and of Nanumea's heroism in this epic contest, the Kaumaile spear has come today to assume an emblematic significance. It has been passed down, Nanumeans say, through the generations in a line which descends from Lapi and it is now in the possession of a senior member of this lineage. Made of a dense, nearly black wood, and almost six feet long, the spear is a unique artifact in Nanumea today. Its distinctive wide-bladed outline adorns the letterhead paper which the community uses for official correspondence. This outline is also stamped on tickets printed locally for admission to movies shown by the island in the community hall. And the war spear's name is commemorated in Nanumea's primary school: Kaumaile School.<sup>4</sup>

#### Tefolaha as a God

There was one other relic of Nanumea's first chief which was evidently more sacred and venerated than any of the others. This was the preserved skull of Tefolaha described by Henry Pease and A. W. Murray in the quotations at the head of this chapter. Pease was apparently the first westerner ever to see the skull, which was used in the ritual

with which newcomers were incorporated into Nanumean society. He notes that it was stained a deep black and that a priest or chief sprinkled it with water from a coconut shell as he uttered a supplication. A few years later, Murray commented on the existence of the sacred object, but it soon dropped from sight as Christian ideas spread and as the ways of old, which people learned to call the "days of darkness," became relegated to the past.

Though it was undoubtedly the most important of them all, the skull of Tefolaha was but one of hundreds which Nanumeans kept and propitiated. Nanumea (along with its neighboring island community, Nanumaga) was unique in Tuvalu in that its indigenous religious practice included the veneration of ancestral skulls. Important elders were buried after death, but a few days later the body was exhumed and the head removed. In a ritual observance, the remaining flesh was removed from the head.<sup>5</sup> Once the skull was clean, it was installed inside the house of the elder of the lineage alongside any other ancestral skulls there. Informants today report that the skulls were given regular food offerings and drink in the form of green drinking coconuts, and were ritually anointed with coconut oil from time to time. Words of supplication were addressed to these household gods, atuaafale,<sup>6</sup> calling on the spirit (aitu) of the departed ancestor to assist the family in its needs. People also say that when untoward events were in the offing, for instance an impending invasion by foreign warriors as recounted in many traditional accounts, these atuaafale alerted their supplicants by bobbing and otherwise moving around on their shelf in the house.

People report that the skulls were kept inside dwelling houses in the village. Whether there were also shrines for them is unknown,

though neighboring Nanumaga had separate structures described (Powell 1871) as temples:

These temples were inter-mingled with the common houses and scarcely distinguishable from them. In some of them was a rack...[suspended from?] the lower posts of the house or temple which served as an altar. In others the altar consisted of a rude frame-work of sticks about 4 ft long by two ft wide supported upon four small posts about 2½ feet high. On those were placed human skulls, cocoa-nuts and other meat and drink offerings.

Some of the ancestral skulls in Nanumaga were also kept in dwelling houses. When Powell and his group were later allowed to visit Nanumaga's king, the missionary notes:

We found him seated in his own house which differed in no respect from the larger of the two temples of Maumau [one of the main gods]; for on his left hand was an altar with skulls and offerings of various kinds such as fish, cocoa-nuts, pulaka, syrrup &c.

We have already seen in Chapter 4 that these indigenous religious practices were the part of Nanumean culture that was subject to the most intense pressure for change from the missionaries. Although Nanumea had rejected mission overtures strongly, once a pastor was allowed to remain on the island changes followed quickly. Visiting Nanumea in July of 1874, eighteen months after pastor Tuilouaa landed, George Turner (1874) reports:

The teachers told me that things were in a very much better state than they had been. The two kings, eleven of the rulers, and about half the population have embraced Christianity. In the month of May last [i.e., May, 1874] the principal idols were destroyed by the teachers and over 200 skulls (formerly worshipped) were buried. All the Christian party are now clothed. All heathen customs have been given up.

Turner's figures here appear to be a little optimistic, for in tabulations at the end of the report he lists Nanumea's population as 475, and the number of Christians as 180, just 38% of the total. It is

difficult to know if the 200 skulls represent all those formerly venerated or, as seems likely, only a portion of them. If this latter possibility is accepted, then Nanumea may have had 400 or more ancestral skulls distributed among its "53 heads of families" (G. Turner 1876), or anywhere from 4 to 7 skulls per household. Turner's comment that "all heathen customs have been given up" is likewise premature, since a mission report just two years later noted that 13 adults continued to practice the ancient religion and still kept and carefully oiled and dusted the skulls of their ancestors (G. Turner 1876).

While ancestral skulls were venerated and cared for by the ancestor's own descendants, and were thus household gods, the skull of Tefolaha seems to have been featured in public observance. In the rites Pease described, the skull of the founder lay on a stone altar in a clearing some distance from the village. Pease was led

about half a mile [beyond the town] along the water's edge, opposite a wide path leading to a clearing in the woods, one part of which is appropriated to the burying of their dead, the other to dancing and other amusement; the one being separated from the other by a wall two feet high (Pease 1854).

It was in this clearing that most of the ritual of incorporation for newcomers took place, including the rites over Tefolaha's skull. For this portion of the ceremony Pease says he was

hurried as before, across the square, over the wall, and through the burying ground, and seated on the opposite edge, fronting an irregular stone or monument. In front of, and facing [Pease] at the distance of six to eight feet, on one of the graves, is placed a human skull...the head of the first king who ever ruled on this island.

Some years later the naturalist Graeffe (1867:1189) described the setting in more detail. Following behind the priest and another



man who carried Tefolaha's canoe seat, and men carrying long spears and flat "rudder-like" weapons, they were

led to a clearing in the palm grove, where we settled down onto the lawn. In the background of the clearing there stood a coral stone-plate serving as an altar, about 9 feet in height and 6 feet in width, and in a half circle to both sides of this altar there huddled the natives, whereas the king remained in a hut situated on one side.

Although Graeffe does not mention the skull, he describes the actions of the supplicant graphically:

The head priest [is] an honorable looking man with long flowing silver curls and a white beard, decorated with a curious necklace made from a split leaf of a coconut palm frond. Laying thumbs and index fingers together in a manner pointing them away from each other, and spreading the remaining fingers backwards, he kneels down at some distance from the altar and, contorting his body, spews out spells. These were meant for the ten gods of the country, of which Tangaloa and Olefenua were thought to be the mightiest. As further sacrifices small pieces of coconut were brought up in coconut leaf baskets, now placed down there, now here, and this being carried around for a while.

Missionary Murray, who apparently did not witness this ceremony but was told about it by others in the party, says (Murray 1876:408):

A long round of tedious ceremonies is gone through in front of a large coral slab, about nine feet in height. The observances consist of presentations of cocoa-nuts to various deities, accompanied with prayers, singing, dancing, shouting, throwing the spear, &c. One of the concluding observances is very curious--the strangers are sprinkled with water all around.

He also remarks that "ten principal deities are said to be worshipped on the island" and then notes that

there are various objects which the people hold sacred, the chief of which seem to be the skull of one of their ancestors whom they call Folasa, and the seat of one of the canoes in which their ancestors came from Samoa. These appear to be held in great veneration.

In the first few years of western contact missionaries noted down a scattering of information about Nanumea's indigenous religion,

including the names of the gods. We have seen that Murray and Graeffe both say there were ten gods. Graeffe adds that the two "mightiest" among them were Tangaloa and Olefenua, but does not explain this or name the others. In 1871, while the mission ship waited off the coast of Nanumea for the "devilling" ceremonies (the rites of incorporation) to take place, missionary Thomas Powell (1871) conversed with a young Nanumean man aboard the ship. He told Powell that the names of the Nanumean gods were Folasa, Maagai, Tagaloa, Maumau, Kotsi, Feke, and Te Buki [or Te Pusi]. The only other mention of the names of the gods I have found is George Turner's (1876) report:

Their principal gods were Maumau, Laukite, Folaha, and the goddess Telaha [sic]. Each had a temple and a priest, and at the temple of Maumau there was set up a 9 ft. high coral sand stone slab from the beach--18 in. thick and 2 ft. wide. Strangers from ships or canoes were not allowed to have free intercourse with the people, until they or a few as representatives of the rest, had been taken to each of the 4 temples, and prayers offered that the gods would exert their power and drive to the four winds of heaven, any disease or treachery which these strangers might have brought. Meat offerings, songs and dances in honour of the gods accompanied the prayers.

It seems clear from these early reports that Tefolaha (the name Folaha, plus the definite article te) was among Nanumea's main deities and was perhaps the community's principal god. There was evidently a stone slab temple dedicated to him, and probably a priest who officiated at public rites where the founder was invoked. The god's skull was used in some of the ritual proceedings. It is noteworthy, too, that it is Tefolaha alone, of all the gods mentioned in the early records, who is associated with relics or other sacred paraphernalia.

While information about the veneration of Tefolaha is scanty, it seems likely from evidence in the early reports and comments of

informants today that there was a ritual association of the founder and god with the most important plant product of Nanumea, the coconut. This plant, which Nanumeans utilize in myriad ways, is held to be the single essential staple of life (cf. Anne Chambers 1983). Many tales of the founding say that the coconut was brought to Nanumea by Tefolaha. We have already seen (Chapter 4) that in the ritual installation of a new chief the meal prepared by the chiefly lineages and served to all present in the community hall consisted primarily of products of the coconut, especially a dish called poi. This linkage of chiefly ritual with the chief product of the land marked an association which people today are explicit about: the chieftainship is linked with the success of the vital coconut crop. One of the main advantages which was said to accrue to the island in appointing as chief someone from the two main chiefly lineages of Tepaa and Teilo was a bountiful coconut harvest (uluniu). Similarly, severe droughts, which depleted the coconut supply, were cause to remove a reigning chief.

The coconut featured significantly in the rites of incorporation. While the strangers still remained on the beach, four long spears (evidently representative of four major gods) were stuck vertically in the sand and offerings of coconuts and other food products placed beside each one (Pease 1854). In later portions of the ceremony, food offerings were presented to the strangers. As Pease reports this, the woman who brought the offering

was completely drenched with coconut oil, from head to foot, dripping from her hair and running down over her shoulders and her arms; her head was bowed, with her eyes apparently fixed on the offering, while the old priest stood throwing water from a coconut shell, over the offering, and across my shoulders, talking all the while, the purpose of which I could not learn.

Tefolaha's skull was sprinkled in a similar manner with water from a coconut shell, presumably the liquid from inside the nut. The ceremony was brought to a conclusion, after nearly twelve hours, when large quantities of coconuts were brought from the bush and placed in several heaps around the sacred clearing:

One of the young chiefs then goes to the different heaps, as directed by the king, making a few remarks at each; this ceremony over, the nuts are hove into one heap, in a hurried manner, by the young chiefs; immediately after, four coconuts and also some cooked pieces, on a platted leaf or mat, are placed before the stranger and an equal quantity of the same is placed before the chiefs or priests...the balance of the heap is placed before the stranger, with the statement that they are his, as a present from the king, his chiefs and people (Pease 1854).

Another interesting association between Tefolaha and the coconut is recalled by informants today. Venu, a member of the kopiti known as Uma, which seems to have played an important role in the rites of incorporation, told me he had heard that one of the things that people did in pre-Christian times when a foreign ship neared Nanumea was to go down to the shore and pour quantities of coconut sap syrup (kaleve) onto the ground, at the same time calling on Tefolaha's assistance in dealing with the strangers by uttering the magical invocation the warrior Lapi had learned from Tefolaha in ancient times: "Tefolaha tou hoa!" In a related and apparently ancient practice, people sometimes reserve the last few mouthfuls of a green drinking nut consumed while working in the bush for Tefolaha, calling out the ritual words Tefolaha tou hoa quietly as they pour the last bit of liquid onto the ground. If this is done at all today it is done semi-jokingly, but people say that formerly it was normal practice, a way of sharing the coconut with Tefolaha.

Interestingly, the importance of Tefolaha as a local god extended beyond the shores of Nanumea to at least one neighboring island. This island was not in Tuvalu, though, but lay in Kiribati, the Micronesian-speaking archipelago just to the north of Nanumea. Arorae is the southernmost island in Kiribati, while Nanumea is the northernmost island in Tuvalu, and this juncture between the two "culture areas" has usually been assumed to mark a distinct shift in culture. But religious practices reported (Powell 1871) for Arorae are similar to Nanumea, including the veneration of ancestral skulls and the existence of stone "temples":

The idols were slabs or blocks of coralline lime stone of various shapes and sizes. Many of them were too large for [the missionary who tried to destroy them] to manage alone.... About the middle of the settlement were two idols of the principal god...these were a sort of crom-lech. Each consisted of a very large slab of stone resting horizontally upon the arms of two similar ones standing erect.... On this god, or rather shrine, were placed several skulls and a quantity of cocoa-nuts and other food, the offerings of the people.

Another mission visitor (Pratt 1872) explained the procedure in preparing an ancestral skull in Arorae:

They keep their dead above ground for three days, and then make a shallow hole in the house, where they place the body merely covering it with a mat. When one of the family smokes his pipe, he lifts the mat, and puffs the smoke into the grave. Finally the head is separated, and kept in the house. Henceforth the smoke is puffed into the skull's mouth.

If these practices seem very much like those in Nanumea, so are the names of some of the gods:

The gods of this people were evidently the spirits of their ancestors, associated with some traditional ones of Samoa. Hence at Arorae the people worshipped Tanga-loa, Sa'umani and Borata (the Folasa of Samoa which there means the prophet) (Powell 1871).

This brief note, and a later missionary comment apparently echoing it (Newell 1895:610), is the only indication I have seen that Tefolaha was venerated outside of Nanumea. Two people from Arorae who were resident in Nanumea in 1984 told me that they had never heard of "Borata" but, since most knowledge of archaic religious practice has been lost today in both Tuvalu and Kiribati, this is not surprising. As we have seen, Nanumean traditions speak of occasional contacts with Kiribati, particularly recounting invasions from those islands. There are also some Kiribati loan words in Nanumean today but the true extent of former contacts remains largely unknown.

#### Accommodation with the Church

Of all of Nanumea's traditional gods, only Tefolaha still retains a position of honor in contemporary Nanumea. His successful secularization seems to have been achieved partly through a remarkable accommodation between church officials and those Nanumeans who still preferred to worship their own gods. By 1922 there was still a significant pagan faction in Nanumea which continued to hold to at least some of the old religious practices. But this was the year marking the 50th jubilee of the establishment of Christianity on Nanumea, and the L.M.S. was accustomed to mark this milestone in a grand way. According to informants today, the island's pastor felt that the existence of a pagan faction marred this celebration. In eloquent speeches he urged that Nanumea make its 50th jubilee truly a time of rejoicing by giving up, once and for all, the old gods. Under pressure from the community, the conservatives agreed to do so. The festivities were marked by erecting a cement monument in the center of the village near the ahiga

and by a feast in the hall. But unlike other feasts, these celebrations continued into an all-night function as people danced, ate, and contributed money to the church in repeated trips to a small table set up to hold the plates of coins. Each village side competed to see which could contribute the most before dawn.

The remarkable thing about this boisterous holiday, which has continued to be celebrated in this same fashion yearly on January 8th, the anniversary of Samoan pastor Tuilouaa's landing<sup>7</sup> in stealth on Nanumea, is that it was named after Nanumea's preeminent pagan god, Tefolaha: this is the annual "Day of Tefolaha" (te Po o Tefolaha). If the community had at last relinquished its founder as a god, it retained his memory and significance in other areas of life and, with rich irony, commemorated his name by associating it with this day on which his descendants accepted the new religion.

The ancestral skulls which played so large a part in traditional religious practice, and possibly also the skull of the founder himself, had been buried in a public ceremony in Nanumea in 1874.<sup>8</sup> A century later, though, Nanumeans again found themselves concerned with the remains of the founding father. The circumstances surrounding the search for the bones of Tefolaha illuminate the continuing importance of this man and former god, and what he stands for to Nanumeans. Tefolaha's bones also provided the stimulus that brought the long-standing disagreement between Tepou and Takitua over their respective tales of Nanumea's origins briefly to center stage in a series of encounters in the ahiga.

## A Letter from Samoa

Early in 1975, a few months after my wife, Anne, and I had left Nanumea at the end of our first fieldwork there, the community received a letter from the small Nanumean contingent living in a Tuvalu village in Western Samoa. The letter was read publicly at an island meeting in the ahiga and caused a minor uproar.<sup>9</sup> The Samoan government, the letter reported, was seeking the true heirs of a Samoan chief, Folasā or Folasā-aitu, who had died many generations before. His land holdings, which were said to be extensive, would revert to the government if no heirs were found. There were many claimants. The Nanumean community in Samoa had relayed its view that it was, in fact, the founder of their island home whose lands were in question, and had explained that the people of far-off Nanumea were the heirs of this man. But people in Samoa were dubious about these claims.

The Nanumeans in Samoa were upset by the Samoan response, and their concern was echoed by those who heard the contents of the letter. For one thing, the ancient tale of Nanumea's founding by Tefolaha and with it his establishment of the charter of Nanumean society, was called into question by the skepticism of the Samoans.<sup>10</sup> Another cause for action was the possibility that Nanumea might, by proving to Samoan satisfaction what everyone in Nanumea knew, be able to lay successful claim to a substantial amount of land in Samoa. Probably not a large percentage of people in Nanumea held out much hope for this latter possibility, but the Samoan challenge as relayed in this letter required a response.

In discussions with several Nanumean elders, I learned that the community had become aware several decades ago that Tefolaha might



have lands in Samoa. In the 1950's a Samoan pastor visiting Nanumea (his sister was married to Nanumea's pastor) had mentioned the lands after hearing people talk about the settlement of the island by Tefolaha. Pastor Alesana had then urged people to write to Nanumeans living in Samoa with instructions to communicate Nanumea's story of its founding to them and to the Samoan government, since in his view the lands clearly should come to Nanumea.<sup>11</sup>

In response, the elders met in the ahiga to discuss the tale of Nanumea's origins. Various individuals explained their family traditions of the founding, among them Takitua and Tepou. The majority of the elders favored Takitua's version and so the secretary of the Kau Alik was instructed to write it out and send it to Samoa. This man, Laiti, told me that although he and his kinsmen argued strongly for their version of the tale, he had no option but to comply with the wishes of the elders and send Takitua's tale. He sent two letters to Samoa, each containing a copy of the tale. One was addressed to the Nanumean community there, the other to the government of Samoa. The letter to the Nanumean community was eventually returned to Laiti, undeliverable for some reason.

Nothing more was heard regarding the lands until the mid 1970's when A., a Nanumean living in Samoa, came home for a vacation. During his stay in Nanumea he talked about the holdings of Tefolaha there, giving the impression that the government was anxious for a solution to the ownership question. An entire Samoan village claimed that it descended from this man, according to A., and supposedly the Tongans were also claiming that he had died in Tonga. A. returned to Samoa and shortly afterward the letter mentioned above arrived. The Nanumean

community in Samoa had met and decided that the time was right for Nanumea to press its claim more strongly. It now asked Nanumea to supply any evidence it could that Tefolaha had in fact died in Nanumea, as its traditional tale asserted.

The elders and all interested listeners gathered in the ahiga on April 19, 1975, to pursue the matter. All agreed that Tefolaha had died in Nanumea and the question was whether anyone knew where his remains were buried. If they could be found, then this community would have incontrovertible proof that its ancient tales of origin were justified and that they were in fact Tefolaha's descendants. A letter we received from one of Tepou's sons describes the gathering:

The community discussed [the letter] in the ahiga, [but] no one knew [the whereabouts of] the grave of Tefolaha. [They] asked Takitua, Takitua replied that [he] was buried at [the land called] Falefa...but that he didn't know [where] the grave was. Tepou's tale said that Tefolaha was buried at [the land called] Malele in the lineage of Tefolaha. Malele is the name of our [family] land there were our house stands, inland from the ahiga.

Other informants elaborated on this gathering. According to them, Tepou and Takitua argued (finau) publicly over their respective family versions of the story of Tefolaha, each asserting that his tale was the "true" one and calling into question the veracity of the other.<sup>12</sup> One informant who had been at the ahiga described the meeting:

The island gathered and the letter was read. People asked around, who knew where Tefolaha was buried. Tepou stood and said he knew. He gave his explanation of the coming of Tefolaha. Takitua [then] stood and gave his explanation. Tepou gave his proofs [fakatalitonuga]. In the descent of members of his lineage [he said] each generation passed on the knowledge of where the founder was buried. So it came down to Tepou. He said that in World War II with U.S. forces here there was much disruption and the grave marker which had existed formerly was gone. But Tepou knew the general area.

While Takitua apparently declined to point out a specific site for the grave, he reiterated his family tradition which said that the founder had been buried in Falefa, a land bordering the lagoon shore not far from the community's open "square." According to many, Falefa was the ancient location of the house of Nanumea's aliki.

Two days after this contentious ahiga meeting, on April 21, 1975, those interested gathered to begin the search for Tefolaha's grave.<sup>13</sup> The letter continues:

The men went to dig at the place where Tepou showed them [Tefolaha] was buried. There they found some bones in the excavation. The bones are now preserved here.

S., a kinsman of Takitua but not of Tepou, took part in the dig. He told me:

[Tepou] showed the young men where to go and dig. They did so, and found reddish soil about a foot below the surface and an old tooth with a hole drilled in it, but no whole bones. Other people came and everyone was saying dig here, dig there, all based on hearsay. Tepou said that he had heard from his ancestors that this whole area had been a burial place of the aliki of long ago. Other bones were found too, rotten, but larger than the original ones. All of them were put together in the island office.

The secretary of the community office told me, in 1984, that not long after this he had buried these bones near the ahiga, not wishing to leave them lying around.

Although there are skeptics in Nanumea who doubt that any of the remains found were actually those of Tefolaha,<sup>14</sup> the community as a whole was apparently satisfied that the vicinity of the founder's grave had been located. Another island meeting now discussed a second issue raised in the letter from Samoa. It had enquired whether there was a monument or marker commemorating the fact that Tefolaha had died in

Nanumea. People now considered this and agreed that a monument would be a reasonable idea. Some, particularly those who sided with Tepou's view that the grave lay on his land as specified in his narrative, wanted a proper grave marker installed on the site. Others felt this would interfere with the community's use of the "town square" adjacent to Tepou's land. Eventually a cement column some four feet high and about two feet wide by one broad was erected near the northwest end of the community hall, several hundred feet from where the digging had taken place.

Afterwards, the island's secretary wrote to the community in Samoa informing them that, unfortunately, no single grave had been found and people felt the area had been disturbed during the war. Despite this, he reminded them that another sort of proof of Nanumea's claim to Tefolaha lay in the annual observance of "The Day of Tefolaha," which had been celebrated in Nanumea for over fifty years. Some time later, another letter was received from Samoa, asking that Nanumea contribute to a fund to help pursue the case for the lands of Tefolaha in the Samoan courts. People met again to discuss this, but decided to decline the request. The Nanumeans in Samoa were encouraged to continue their efforts, but told that they would need to finance the case themselves. And there, at least in 1984, things stand. Nothing further has been heard about the court case. No official representatives have come to inspect the memorial to Nanumea's founder, which is still unadorned and lacks an inscription.

## Heirs of Tefolaha

While this incident involving the digging of Tefolaha's bones is only one of the most recent in a long series of events which feature as a theme the founder of Nanumea, it sums up in what Rabinow (1977) has termed "multi-vocal" fashion the continuing significance of Tefolaha to Nanumeans. Questions about the authenticity of the grave and bones remain and it will probably never be known whether they are those of Tefolaha. As important as these issues are for Tefolaha's descendants, they tend to obscure the equally important point that, for most Nanumeans, Tefolaha is uniquely linked with the essence of what it is to be Nanumean. His voyage to this small island and his establishment upon it of the lineages which have given rise to the chiefly families and to most Nanumeans is accepted as ancient and venerable history. As we have seen, though, these events and what they mean are far more than history. They are an important part of the fabric of the present.

The closeness of Nanumea's identification with Tefolaha is sometimes expressed in kinship terms. One early mission report referred to him as "the father of the Nanumeans." Tefolaha is, of course, the forefather, as Nanumeans readily acknowledge and in some cases argumentatively assert. He is also, in a manner of speaking, the spiritual father of the community, both as its former god and now its patron and a focal point of identity. So perhaps it is not surprising that this kinship relationship can be described from the other perspective as well.

In January, 1984, Nanumea's pastor was called suddenly from his sleep to address people in the ahiga. The annual all-night festivities marking the Po o Tefolaha were underway and, in the early hours of

the pre-dawn, some of the young men present had over-indulged in their drinking of fermented coconut sap beer and were causing a commotion. The pastor was roused in the hope that his authoritative presence might calm things without any resort to force by the older men of the community. He spoke to the crowd in the ahiga with his usual eloquence and with a fervor befitting the tumultuous events of the disrupted celebration. "Children of Tefolaha" (gaa tama a Tefolaha), he called to his flock, urging them to heed his words, and evoking in the process the rich panoply of meaning inherent in this celebration. Calm returned as he spoke, the dance soon resumed, and the pastor returned home. In invoking Nanumea's founder and former god, the pastor had chosen to emphasize an association which lies at the heart of what it is to be Nanumean. The choice was apt, intended no doubt to resonate deeply. Yet it had ironic overtones, since it was these same "children" whom the pastor's predecessors had sought to wean away from Tefolaha.

Today, a hundred years later, though Nanumeans are firmly Christian, they remain the "children of Tefolaha." It has been a century of sometimes wrenching change, a period of time that has seen the chiefly lineages decline and most of the founder's relics, his venerated skull and his shrine disappear. The new monument to Tefolaha seems scant compensation. Yet the founder's salient presence endures, as Nanumeans willingly and emphatically deem themselves the heirs of Tefolaha.

## NOTES

The quotations at the head of this chapter come from Pease (1854) and Murray (1866).

1. The name Folasa, evidently well-known in Samoa at the time Turner was writing, also appears in Samoan genealogies (cf. Churchill n.d.). In Tonga, according to a Tongan acquaintance, Folaha is the name of a small village in Tongatapu, as well as an old family name.
2. A version of this story told by Nanumean elder Maheu Naniseni, a descendant of Lapi, has been published (Naniseni 1949, 1982).
3. There are other stories about Lapi's exploits, including an epic voyage with his kinsman Vele to Fiji, but he is best known for his defeat of the Tongan giant. The importance of heroic figures such as Lapi (not to mention Tefolaha) and the possessiveness with which they are treated can be seen in an incident at a funeral feast I attended in 1974. A lively exchange developed over a recent radio broadcast of a historical tale from the island of Nanumaga. The Nanumagans claim descent from an original settler named Lapi (cf. Roberts 1958), but as Lapi is also an important figure in Nanumean history, the discussion centered around a retelling of the Nanumagan tale and questions about which island had rightful claim to him. The consensus among the elders was that the Nanumagan story must be wrong, since all knew that Lapi was a Nanumean, not a Nanumagan. There was some laughter too at the other island's gall in trying to usurp an important Nanumean figure and the discussion continued with good-natured derision of the former island, in keeping with the long-standing rivalry between the two communities.
4. The name Kaumaile, literally "stick [of] maile wood," is of unknown origin. People say that the dense, dark wood from which the spear is made is not a local wood. In 1984, I examined Polynesian spears in the collection of the B. P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu. None I saw were identical to Nanumea's Kaumaile, but the flared blade and raised welts where the handle widens into the blade are most similar to spears from the Society Islands (e.g., Bishop Museum item C306). Spears similar to these are illustrated in Polynesian Society (1953), plates 33 and 34. The Bishop Museum's collection also includes spears attributed to the Austral Islands and to Niue which show some similarity to the Nanumean spear.

In Nanumea, there is a considerable oral tradition about the near loss of the Kaumaile. Five or six different people related this episode, which started in the late 19th century or early in this century. At that time the Kaumaile was noticed by a British administrator (some people say his name was "Misi Lusi," probably early administrator G. B. Smith-Rewse). This man managed to obtain the spear from its owner at that time, who some say was Teuki, a descendant of Lapi, and it was taken away to England. The spear was gone for many years, until a descendant of Teuki, and a notable figure in Nanumean local government, noticed the spear in the possession of

4. (con't) a Mr. McClure at the phosphate works in Banaba. This man, Manuella, claimed the spear and it was given to him to return it to Nanumea. This was about 1925. In the mid 1930's Manuella returned to Nanumea, bringing the spear with him and it has remained there to this day. People are not generally clear as to why the spear was taken or why Nanumeans were willing to give it up. But the present "owner," the adopted son of Manuella, says that while it was gone, the Kaumaile was taken to a museum in England and was there judged to be about 800 years old.
5. There is little information on how this was done in Nanumea, but for Nanumaga, which seems to have had very similar religious practices, a missionary report (Pratt 1872) is graphic:

The teacher told us of a practice which I could not credit till I had asked a chief, and he at once confirmed it both by words and signs. When a chief dies, or even a much loved head of a family, he is buried; but on the third day his head is taken up, and the flesh is gnawed off and eaten (with cocoanut), raw and stinking by his children. Then the skull is preserved.

Nearly a hundred years later, informants in Nanumaga told anthropologist Gerd Koch (1962:50) that the skull was unearthed three days after burial by the eldest daughter of the lineage head. It was then cleaned by her in the lagoon before being placed in the shrine (fale o atua, "god house").

6. This word is formed from three morphemes: atua, "god," a, "of," and fale, "house." Hence, "household god." The term is archaic in Nanumea and not widely known. Some speakers shorten it to tuaafale, possibly not recognizing in it the root atua. Today the gods of old are usually referred to as aitu (spirit, ghost) rather than atua, probably because Atua has come to refer to the Christian God.
7. Tuilouaa landed on January 8th, 1873 (Powell 1878). In calculating the date of the Jubilee, people must have counted fifty years from 1872, however, perhaps starting from this year because by then a small Christian community had been established on the island. There is considerable oral tradition today surrounding the eventual establishment of the church and the influential actions of several Nanumeans, including two leading warriors (toa). Aspects of the conversion process are discussed in Powell (1871, 1878), Davies (1873), Munro (1982), Kofe (1983) and Isako (1983).
8. When ancestral skulls and other objects used in religious worship were disposed of in neighboring Nanumaga, they were buried in the community's public square. The Samoan pastor there
- [broke] down the altars in the temples, remove[d] the skulls and stone idols, and also the clubs and spears of the gods... He handled carefully the skulls as he took them from their



8. (con't) places, and respectfully covered them with pieces of Samoan native cloth...[Two days later] they proceeded with the burial of the skulls and other sacred relics from the temples and family skull houses. Some of the new converts helped Ioane, and in that grave of heathenism dug in the village malae or place of public meeting they laid 134 skulls, 1 wooden idol, 2 stone idols, 14 shell trumpets used in calling assemblies, and a lot of clubs and spears used only by order of the gods (George Turner 1876).

In Nanumea, according to informants today, some ancestral skulls were buried quietly beneath the houses of their owners, rather than disposed of publicly.

9. My discussion of this incident of the bones of Tefolaha draws on a wide variety of material: letters received from Nanumeans at the time, records kept in family ledger books, taped discussions with elders and others about it, and numerous other conversations with people who took part in the digging or listened to ahiga discussion and debate during this incident. Nevertheless, my account here presents my own view of these events and my own assessment of its importance.
10. I have presented Nanumean comments about Samoan attitudes at face value here, since it has not been possible to verify them or seek Samoan testimony about any of these events. It seems likely that Samoan perspectives would differ from those of Nanumeans.
11. In 1974, Sosemea commented on Tefolaha's lands after telling me the story of Nanumea's founding (cf. Appendix I for the narrative he told):

Remember [that Tefolaha] was a warrior. On his travels there [in Samoa] he ruled, he could take lands. That was in accord with ancient custom. If you are strong, if you are tough, then you go fight with [so and so]. You fight and fight, and if he loses to you, you take those lands as yours. It was like that on Tefolaha's travels. He fought with the Samoans. He just took [those] lands there in Samoa. And so to this day there are lands of Tefolaha in Samoa. They are cared for by the government, right down to this day...If only our people had been smarter in the past, and had gone to claim them from Samoa. [Pastor] Alesana, father of the Alesana here who recently went to Samoa, told us we ought to go claim Tefolaha's lands. But the thing is it would be difficult nowadays. Today there is an [independent] government in Samoa. So I don't know if the British government still has the power to try to get back the land of Tefolaha on behalf of the people of Nanumea. We don't know, but probably it could not, since the government of Samoa is now independent.

12. In 1984, Tepou told me that at that gathering he had challenged Takitua because, years before, Takitua had said publicly that to his knowledge his family tradition stated that the founder was buried "at Malele in the lineage of Tefolaha" (i Malele i te gafa o Tefolaha). Tepou took this to mean at his family's land called Malele and to be a reference to his (Tepou's) family, which Tepou asserts strongly is the true lineage (gafa) of Tefolaha through its descent from Tefolaha's first real child, Koli. Now, at this meeting in 1975, Tepou felt that Takitua was changing his story and claiming that the founder was buried elsewhere.

In 1984 Takitua was declining and I did not manage to discuss this with him before his death.

13. The remains people sought were, I believe, those from the original burial of the founder. No one I spoke with seemed aware that the founder's skull may in fact have been interred separately, possibly together with the other ancestral skulls buried in May of 1874. Tepou said that he learned from his family simply that Tefolaha was buried on their land. He noted, though, that he had heard vague rumors from others that the founder's skull had been taken away somewhere. He had not given much credence to such talk and this search for the remains seems to assume a common resting place for both body and skull.
14. As S., whose account of the dig is quoted above, told me, the problem was "there is no proof" (hee ai laa he fakamaoniga), since none of the bones found were from a clearly marked grave such as one might expect for the founder and the first aliki of Nanumea.

In 1984, Tepou added a footnote to all of this. He told me that in 1978, three years after the dig had taken place, members of his family were talking about it when an elderly female relative of his perked up. As a young woman, she had come upon a large slab of stone, such as might mark a grave, on Tepou's land. Her father had told her quietly that this was Tefolaha's grave. She now showed Tepou this area and he and his family dug there. According to him, they located a large flat piece of coral stone beneath the surface. While no bones lay beneath it, the soil was discolored and reddish and Tepou feels it is the grave of his illustrious ancestor.

## Appendix I

NARRATIVE TEXTS: THE FOUNDING OF NANUMEA

The accounts of the founding of Nanumea by Takitua and Tepou (presented in Chapter 3) are not taken from a single "text" source, but are the result of many discussions and several tape-recording sessions with both men. They are thus fuller than any single text I recorded since they include material I learned over a period of years from the two men, as well as responses to my questions. Narrative texts as recorded have a value of their own, though, since they allow the reader to appreciate and examine the material as presented by the narrator in his or her own words. Even where this must be read in translation, the existence of the text makes it possible to take account of the ordering of the material, phrasing, and stylistic features of the Nanumean language.

## Translation

The translations provided here are of a type that has been called "ethnographic," concerned, as Casagrande (1954:336) notes, "primarily with the explication...of the cultural context of the message in the source language." In Casagrande's delineation, ethnographic translation contrasts with three other types: pragmatic, aesthetic poetic and linguistic. Pragmatic translation seeks to render the message of the original with little heed for aesthetic or grammatic form or the cultural context of the material. An aesthetic-poetic

translation attempts to preserve both the cultural content and context, while maintaining a sense of poetry. This aesthetic intent may distort the original by reflecting literary modes currently prevalent in the translator's culture. Linguistic translation is the most restricted of all. In this type of translation,

the essential aim...is to identify and assign equivalent meanings to the constituent morphemes of the source language...The resulting translation is...commonly designated "literal" or "interlinear," as compared to a so-called "free" translation (Casagrande 1954:337).

In the texts here I have tried to provide a smooth and accurate translation along the lines suggested in Elbert and Monberg's (1965:22) classic study of Polynesian narrative:

An ethnographic translation is not rendered morpheme-by-morpheme but ordinarily does attempt to translate with glosses or by grammar every morpheme as long as there is no loss of clarity and smoothness. There is no one-to-one correlation of grammatical elements....This kind of translation differs...from the linguistic translation in that it has meaning...[and]...is closer to the original than are the meanings in either aesthetic or pragmatic translations. Fidelity of message and of style is a goal, but not at the sacrifice of smoothness and clarity.

Achieving these goals in translating Nanumean into English can be difficult. To take one example, English distinctions such as he/she and his/hers are not made in Nanumean and have had to be supplied in the translations in order for them to make sense. To paraphrase Elbert and Monberg, I have generally had to resort to two sorts of compromises in the translations: I have omitted grammatical features common or obligatory in Nanumean but absent in English, and I have supplied the equivalents for features common in English but usually lacking in Nanumean.

The following summary (adapted from Elbert and Monberg 1965: 22-24) of some structural differences between Nanumean and English will help clarify some of the decisions which have had to be made.

I. Grammatical and lexical distinctions common in Nanumean but normally absent in English:

dual: plural (pronouns, possessives)  
 inclusive: exclusive (pronouns, possessives)  
 o:a (type of possession, dependent on item possessed)  
 plural: non-plural  
 directionals: toward speaker/away, up/down, near addressee, etc.

II. Grammatical and lexical distinctions common in English but usually absent in Nanumean:

lineal: collateral status of kinsmen  
 male: female

III. Features obligatory in English but often absent in Nanumean:

tense  
 verbs  
 subjects and objects of verbs

## The Texts

Narrative 1 Told by Tepou Hoa,<sup>1</sup> December 31, 1973, at our house, Nanumea. Present at tape-recording session: Tepou, Anne Chambers, Keith Chambers.

[Tala i aa Tefolaha -- The Story of Tefolaha]<sup>2</sup>

(1) Ko Pai mo Vau. Tino hauai laa. Konaa ni ommai lua faafine konaa, ni tino ailoa. Pelaa laa ni maua mai e Tefolaha, e noho i konei. Telaa ni fakatuu e laaua te fenua tenei. E, me ni ommai i ai, ka ko Nanumea nei i aa Pai loa mo Vau. Ni fakatuu gina e laaua telaa a Lakena hoki koia. Ko te one ni ommai mo laaua. Tenaa te tala ni ommai mo laa kete, fakatuu e laaua a Nanumea. E ommai naa laa mo laa mo one, ka fai koa tuku laa mo one, ko te fenua koa fano o tupu. (2) [I te taimi telaa e hee ai ni laakau] me ko te hauga naa a Tefolaha. E oko mai Tefolaha, taايا loa i ai e Tefolaha. Taa i ai ke olo, me e ona te fenua. E hee tonu a Tefolaha. Ka ko te fenua e o Pai loa mo Vau. Tenaa laa tteke tokoluaa me e o laaua te fenua. Muna a mea, "E oku te fenua!" Muna a Pai mo Vau, "E, ko ai maa igoa?" Ke hee iloa e Tefolaha. Telaa laa e i ai tala pelaa. (3) Ko takapili ai Tefolaha ki na feitu aitu. E lua ona feitu. Ko fano ai pelaa ki luga o noho mai luga i te fale. Mo mea kolaa e nnoho ai mai lalo tokoluaa. Ka koa noho mai luga. Ka koa avaifo ai na loko. Telaa e taku nei loa ki te loko. E loko a Tefolaha. E i ai ni mea pelaa me he fulufulu piho e fuaniki kkii. (4) Tenaa laa kae i ai he manu telaa e lave i ai. He manu tea foinini kkii ailoa. Telaa e fakalave e ia. Ko tona uiga he loko. Te mea tenaa. Koa tuku ai e Tefolaha ki lalo.

Penei me i tokoluaa e fai a laa mea, e ffili a laa titi. Pelaa te kamataga o te tala. Tena e fai a laa mea penaa. Kae pula atu a Pai.

(5) Pula atu naa laa a Pai kia Vau, a te mea telaa ko tuku ifo i toku piho, ko ia ko fanaifo ki lalo. Tena ko te loko a Tefolaha. Avaifo, ko muna a Pai, "E Vau, e Vau, a te mea tenaa ko tai hepaki ki tou piho." Ffuti ake te loko a Tefolaha. Ko naa iloa i ai ko Vau telaa. I aa, ko fanake. Koa galo atu laa te loko tenaa. Koa noho. Aue! Koa avaiko hoki te loko a Tefolaha ki te piho e oku me ka hee naa iloa toku igoa. Avaifo naa. (6) Kae tenaa, "E Pai, a te mea tenaa ko tai hepaki ki tou piho." Ko futifuti ake i ai te loko. Ko naa iloa i ai ko Pai mo Vau [Tepou chuckes]. Tena fanaifo i ai Tefolaha. Taa loa i ai ke olo. "Ko ai maa igoa?" "Ko Pai mo Vau." [Tepou laughs] [Fanaifo] mai luga i te fata pelaa iluga. Me ko te mea ko ia laa he aitu. Koa fano laa ki na feitu aitu. Hee mafai o lavea. (7) Tena koa hau i ai, "E, olo, e oku te fenua!" "E o maaua loa te fenua! Ko ai maa igoa?" "Ko Pai mo Vau." A, aaua, ikai olo laa, tagi la tokoluaa, koa olo. Koa tagi tele laa me ikai, me e o laaua laa te fenua. Kae he loi laa te mea a Tefolaha. Ovatu i ai, olo ki Lakena, fakatuu loa i ai Lakena e laaua, ki te laa kete one. Kae i laa ologa, ni maligi a laa mo one, i te laa kete one. Telaa i Lafogaki, ni maligi, maligi ki lalo laa mo one, tenaa ni tupu ai a Lafogaki. (8) Koa tuu i ai te mea tenaa ko Lafogaki, pelaa he motu foiniki. Ka olo i ai o nnoho i Lakena. Ovatu, fakatuu Lakena. Oti ai, e tuu Lakena, pelaa koa gata mai te tala ikonei i aa Pai mo Vau, pelaa e fai fai i aa Pai mo Vau ni olo ki Kilipati. Galo nei loa i ai te tala i aa Pai mo Vau. Fakaoti atu

loa uunaa i Lakena, galo i ai, galo ailoa. Koa noho a Tefolaha, koa noho ikonei. Fai i ai na aavaga. Aavaga aitu ko Laukite. Laukite he aitu. (9) Ni noho mo Tefolaha. Pelaa laa he aitu. Noho laa i ai. Ia Tefolaha hoki laa he tino kae liu aitu, koa aitu. Ke iloa, telaa fai na aavaga he aitu, ko Laukite. I Nanumea nei e faigataa o iloa e laatou te, a te igoa o te aavaga a Tefolaha. E hee iloa. Laukite, pelaa he tupua, Laukite he tupua. Pelaa he tupua naateahoo. Telaa laa koa fakaola gina e Tefolaha mo mea a fai na aavaga. (10) Fai i ai, nnoho loa i ai, fai loa i ai laa tama. Fai a laa tama. Tenaa laa faanau mai te laa tama muamua. E kai tino, pelaa a fekai ko ia, e kaitaua. Taa mata tama naa. Mate. Toe faanau mai i te lua. E penaa hoki, kai tino hoki. E fai mai me, mea naa ko te motou kaaiga ailoa tenaa. A te tino he tino ailoa penei, ka ko te gutu pelaa mo te paala, te ika. E gutu, e gutu paala. (11) Kae he tino loa penei ka ko te gutu laa e loa pelaa mo te gutu o te paala [Tepou laughs]. Tenaa e penaa katoa e toko faa tama a Tefolaha ni fai. Konaa ni taa mate katoa me fekkai, kai tino. Kae faannau mai i ai ana tama fakamuli. Ko Koli. Telaa e lelei e hee kaitaua. Tuku loa i ai ke hao a Koli. Fano fano fano, koa lahi a Koli. Tukua loa e Tefolaha ke pule a Koli. Ko ia ke aliki i uta nei i Nanumea. Kae e fai ai o fano a Tefolaha ki Saamoa. (12) Tenaa i na hauga tenaa. Koa fakatoka o fano. Ka koa faannau ana tama e tokolua. Faannau laa ko hee faannau i feitu aitu. Kae faannau i te tamana. Telaa, ko te uiga o te muna tenaa "faannau i tagata," ko faannau i te malamalama. E, koi faannau i te pouliuli. Pelaa me ni fai laa aitu i tinaa tino ko malamalama penei, a tama konaa. Ia, hee iloa



laa me ko Laukite. Ko hee aitu. Ka koa, koa tino ailoa pelaa ke iloa.  
 Ko hee ai hena feitu aitu. (13) Tenaa laa ni fai ana tama e tokolua.  
 Fano a laa o fano ki Samoa. Ko toe ffoki a Tefolaha. Ka koa nnoho laa  
 a Koli mo ona tuagane kolaa koi foinini, Teilo mo Tepaa. Fano fano  
 fano fano fano laa, koa lahi ona tuagane konaa. Tuku gina loa i ai e  
 Koli ke olo o aliki i te fenua, a Tepaa mo Teilo. E aliki, ka koa noho  
 a Koli o pula, o pula kia laa mea a fai. Telaa e i ai he mea e see,  
 ko Koli koa fakatonu atu kia laa. (14) Penaa te laa faiga. Ko ia  
 te pule, mai luga i aa Tefolaha. Ka ko tana pule, ke olo ona tuagane  
 o aliki. Tenaa noho loa i ai. Noho loa penaa. Tenaa laa ko te tama  
 mua telaa ko Teilo. Ko ia te aliki. Kae penei, ka fai koa hopo a  
 Teilo o aliki, e i ai te muna pelaa faka Nanumea, a te kata, e kata.  
 Mana fai, ko te kata o Teilo mana koa hopo ki te aliki, hee maua o fai  
 atu, me koa aliki a Teilo. (15) Konaa laa a atu ko hee maua loa o fai,  
 i te moana, a paala mo takuo. Ia, ko te fenua hoki i uta penei, ko  
 hee maua o fai te ua, me ia Teilo koa hopo, koa hopo i te aliki. Ke  
 iloa, koa fano ko ia o noho o aliki. Konaa loa ona kata, e kata ki  
 te moana, kae kata ki uta i te fenua. Hee maua o fai a ua. A pii uke  
 kkii a niu i te fua. Teilo. Ka fai koa hee aliki a Teilo, ka koa hau  
 a Tepaa o aliki, a ika i tai kolaa, manini mo ika taa tili, e uke uke  
 kkii. Koa hee maua o fai te ika. Ko Tepaa tenaa mana koa fakahopo.  
 Nei hoki kahee ai ni ika ake ka ou lua lavea gina. (16) Mea e taku  
 ki te ika ake. Hee maua loa o fai te ika mana koa fai koa ake a ika.  
 Mea naa laa e ake katoa i te motu i Lakena. Ika ake, te homo, ni aa,  
 ni ika kuma, uke uke kkii. Ka fai penei koa fakahopo a laa a Teilo.

Aatafata laa, a te fenua koa sauniuni katoa me ia Teilo koa fano o aliki, o fakahopo ki luga i te aliki. Taea naa kae tuku mai te ua! Ko tena uiga e manuia, manuia te noho aiga tenaa a te [aliki]. [Kafai] koa noho laa a Teilo, e, ka ko Tepaa koa fano o noho i te aliki, tenaa, i ika i tai uu laa, gaa manini mo [ika penaa] i te papa, kolaa i galu koia, hee maua loa a fai. (17) Uke a ika ake. A te ika ake, oo, koe nei ka hee ke lavea. Taatou e olo ailoa penei, a puke puke loa ki lalo i ika. Tenaa te failoga a lua aliki naa, mana hohopo. Ko Tepaa, ko te papa. E uke a ika i te papa. E uke hoki a ika ake. Ko Teilo, hee maua o fai te atu, atu, takuo, paala, ko te ika i te moana. Kae i uta penei, uke te ua. Hee maua o fai te ua. Telaa a niu, ko fua kkii. Koa uke a pii. (18) Tenaa te mea, konaa lua aliki muamua. Fano Tefolaha. Toe foki mai, toe hau. Toe foki mai, olou muna laa telaa na aavaga he Toga. He aavaga fou. He tagata, he tino loa, koa tino loa penei. Tefolaha hoki koa hee aitu. Tenaa ommai laa i ai, ko toko tolu ana tamalliki. Ko Tutaki mo Fiaola mo Lavega. Konaa ana tama ni ommai mo ia. Tenaa laa ommai laa i ai, ka koa nnoho laa tama kolaa, a tama a Tefolaha kolaa i te aliki. Fakahopo gina loa i ai e Tefolaha, ke ommai o tautua mai tua, kia Teilo mo Tepaa. (19) Pelaa ko laaua ko Teilo mo Tepaa, koa olo o aa koia, o nnoho i uta i te aliki, ka ko laatou naa e fai a mea a te aliki. Telaa laa ko Lavega, ko ia e tavili penei, "E, ni aa mea a te aliki?" Pelaa, e mea koa fakahopo, tenaa koa maua laa te tonu i te kau kolaa, i aa Lavega. Mea na ko te kaaiga o Lavega. Koa fai ai ki te fenua, "A ttou mea, a ttou motomoto taki selau." Pelaa, mea nei e mahani o fai i maga, i maga e fitu. Tenaa

koa olo ai taatou o fai mai ttou mea. Koa avake i ai ki uta i te maneapa uu laa, o tuki, o tuki a poi o mmiti. Me hee ai he mea ake, e fakahopo te aliki tenaa, e fai loa ki te poi. Ka ko Tutaki ko ia e tufa i gaa uta, tenaa na galuega. (20) Tenaa laa ko Tutaki koa tuu o tufa, o tufa a mea, a poi ki tino, e ana te galuega tenaa, me e noho laa me i te fakahopoga laa o te aliki. Ka koa i ai laa ni faiva ni olo o fai. Me hee maua loa a tiiaki a te, a faiva, me ni olo o ahi i te aa, i te aliki. Koa fakahopo. Me i ai ni ona ika fou. O aahi, o aahi pelaa ki te moana, ke iloa. Me olo o taa tili, me o aa. Ko maua mai laa a ika. Koa hopo ai a Tutaki, a Fiaola. Koa fano a Fiaola o pula i ika. Tenaa laa fai fai fai te kaatoa. (21) Muna a Fiaola, "E Tutaki, te kaatoa telaa o ika." Tiiaki loa e ia. Koa hau ai Tutaki o tufa a ika. Tenaa te galuega. Konaa galuega a laatou. Tutaki e noho o tufa. Ko Fiaola, kafai koa i ai ni ika e aumai, koa fano Fiaola o pula. Me e fia te aofai o ika. Kafai ni ika lahi, ko ia telaa e helehele a ika. Helehele, fakatau ki tino ko ia o te fenua. Tenaa na galuega a Tutaki. Ka koa hau a te tino telaa o te tufa, me e ana, ko na galuega ailoa e tufa. (22) Ka ko te kau laa i aa Lavega, koa hee ai ni llou mea e fai. Tenaa e noho ailoa, ko laatou ailoa e tausi te aliki, me i te kau naa e mafai e laatou o hiki te matagi. Konaa te kau i haa Takitua. Ko muna mua o te aliki. E tausi laa e laatou penei. Koa fai laa i ai, muna a Teilo, "Au koa fano ki Lakena." E faagu ki te kau naa. E faanoi atu kia Lavega, "Aku e fano ki Lakena aatafata." A, ko llei. Ko ia laa e fano o kave te aliki. Lavega. Kafai laa e ili pelaa te matagi, me e tuu mai konei, ia, e llei laa e fano.

(23) E fano iko. Fano laa koa noho i Lakena. I te taimi laa koa fai o hau, ko aumai laa te aliki ki konei. A ko te matagi e tuu i konei. Ko kalaga te aliki ki te matagi ke fanatu. Oo, a Lavega. E. Ko fanatu te matagi. Fano o aumai te aliki. E i ai ailoa ni muna a laatou e tavili, e tavili ki luga i te matagi. Kolaa, mea laa ni mea naateahoo, e. E hee iloa laa i aso nei me koi mafai ai o fai penaa, me [ikai], haa Takitua. (24) Au hee kau iloa nei me e mafai nei laatou, me ko hee mafai. Ka ko muna loa a laatou, konaa katoa ailoa. Me ko laatou hoki, kafai ko ia e i ai he malaga koa fano, pelaa koa olo nei ki Nanu-maga, pelaa o follau, ko faanoi atu kia laatou. Ke hau he tino mo laatou o fano o kkave te malaga. Me kafai laa e tupu ni fakalavelave pelaa a maofa vaka, e hee mate laatou. Me e maofa, kae tuu ki lalo, e tuu ki lalo, e tuu ailoa pelaa me e tuu i uta i te fenua. (25) E i ai te ika, e i ai te ika o laatou, e aa ko ia. Koa tuu i ai. Ko laaotu laa ke tuu iluga i te ika tenaa. Ko fakaola, mafai ai o ffau o llou vaka, koa hopo ki luga. Tenaa, tenaa te llou galuega, ko te fakaola o te [malaga] me i ai laatou, e i ai te ika tenaa e aa koia. Mana fai e fakalavelave pelaa, koa aapulu a vaka, koa tuu ki lalo. Tenaa te kau o Lavega, konaa ollou mea e fai. E aliki i te tai. Ko laatou e olo ki tai, ko fanatu te llou aliki me ia laatou e pule i tai. (26) Ikai, konaa ollou mea e fai. Ka ko ommi ki uta nei, koa noho, e noho laatou i te feitu mana koa fakahopo te aliki. E i ai ni mea a te aliki e fai, ko laatou e tavvili e. E tavvili laatou e, "A mea nei a taatou e fai pelaa...." Oti i ai, koa tonu i ai, koa fai ai ki te fenua, "A ttou mea ni mea kolaa, kolaa, pelaa." Tenaa te galuega a

laatou. Ka fai laa koa ommai ki gaa uta, koa i ai laa ni meakai pelaa e uke e. Koa hopo laa Tutaki o fano o tufa. A koa i ai ni ika, koa aumai ni ika, koa hau Fiaola o fano o tufa, o helehele, mana fai e lahi a ika. (27) Me e mahani, he fonu, a te fonu, kafai e oko mai e aumai uu laa, hee ai he tino e fano o fai. Tena ko te kau i haa Fiaola. Ko te kaaiga loa o laatou. Me ommai loa laatou o helehele te fonu. Nei, kae pula nei koe, kafai nei e mate te fonu, ko Laiti loa e fanake o, kae nei ko ia nei koa fanake o helehele te fonu. Me ko te pologa, he pologa a llou mea naa. Ko tona tofi ailoa tenaa mai mua, tenei e oko mai ki poo nei, tenaa, ko tena pologa, pologa o te kau naa ko te tufa. Ko te helehele o mea, o ika. Ko te pologa o Tutaki, ko tufa. Ko te pologa o Lavega ko te fai, ko olo o tavili me ni aa ttou mea e fai i te aliki. (28) Konaa a pologa o te [kau naa], e oko mai nei loa ki poo konei. Konei loa e fai nei, ka ko te mea laa pelaa me koa hee ai he aliki e aa koia, o Nanumea nei e fai. Ko hee pelaa mo fenua Kilipati. Fenua lahi kolaa haa Butaritari e noho loa te aliki. Kae i uta nei ko hee fai. Ikai, pelaa me koa tapu mai paalagi me koa hee ai he aliki. Ikai, ka konei laa e noho loa tino o te aliki i uta nei. [I poo konei a Tutaki mo Fiaola] koa fai katoa fakatahi te llou galuega tenaa. Ka ko Lavega, e noho loa mo ona galuega tenaa. Ko te kau katoa, konaa, ko te kau a Lavega, e tokouke te kau naa. (29) Ka ko au laa ko hee ai haku haga e fai. Naa laa ko taku noho. Ka fai loa e noho penei, ka fai e i ai he tino e see, ko au loa ko fai atu, "E, hee fai te mea tenaa me...." A aku, toku nohoaga i uta nei i Nanumea [Tepou laughs]. Ka kolaa laa koa nnoho mo llou aliki, koa nnoho o tausi llou fenua. Ka ko taku galuega tenaa.

Narrative 1

## English Translation, Tepou's Tape

[The Story of Tefolaha -- Tala i aa Tefolaha]<sup>2</sup>

(1) Pai and Vau. People of Hawaii. Those two women came there [they were] real people. Well, [they] were found by Tefolaha, [they] were living here. Those two made this island. Yes, because [they] came, and Nanumea belonged only to Pai and Vau. They made it [and] Lakena also. They brought the sand with them. That is the story, they came with their baskets, they made Nanumea. [They] came with their sand, and if they put [down] some sand land would grow. (2) [At that time there were no plants] because [they came with] the coming of Tefolaha. Tefolaha arrived, Tefolaha chased [them] right away. [He] told them to go [saying] the island was his. Tefolaha was not truthful. The island was Pai's and Vau's. So those two [were] angry because the island was theirs. What's his name [Tefolaha] said, "The island is mine!" Pai and Vau said, "All right, what are our names?" Tefolaha did not know. Well, there is a story [about] that. (3) Tefolaha changed to his spirit nature. He had two natures. [He] went up to sit up above the house. The place right where those two were sitting below. [He] sat up above. And [he] lowered down his "loko." That [thing] is called a "loko." Tefolaha's "loko." There was a thing like a very thin hair. (4) And there was an animal attached to it. A very tiny white animal. Attached to it. That was the "loko." That thing. Tefolaha lowered it down.

While those two [were] doing their thing, weaving their skirts. That is the beginning of the story. So they [were] doing their thing like that. Then Pai looked [up]. (5) Pai looked toward Vau, that thing was being lowered down on my head, it was going down. That [was] Tefolaha's loko. [He] lowered [it] down, [and] Pai said, "Hay Vau, hey Vau, that thing is almost touching your head." [Tefolaha] pulled up his "loko." He knew that that was Vau. Well, [the loko was pulled] up. The "loko" was gone. [He] sat. Oh! The "loko" of Tefolaha was lowered down to my head because [he] did not know my name. Lowered down there. (6) And then, "Hey Pai, that thing is almost touching your head." [He] pulled the "loko" up. [He] knew [they were] Pai and Vau [Tepou chuckles]. Then Tefolaha went down. [He] told them to go. "What are our names [they asked]?" "Pai and Vau." [Tepou laughs] [He] came down from the attic above. Because the thing is he [was] a spirit. [He] went to his spirit nature. [He] could not be seen. (7) So [he] came, "Hey, go, the island is mine!" "The island is ours alone! What are our names?" "Pai and Vau." Well, no, [so they] went, those two cried [but] they went. [They were] really crying because, well, the island was theirs. But Tefolaha's [words] were lies. [They] went, went to Lakena, those two made Lakena from their basket of sand. And in their departure some of their sand spilled from their basket of sand. There at [the islet] of Lafogaki their sand spilled, spilled down and Lafogaki grew [up]. (8) The thing called Lafogaki, a small island, stood there. [They] went, to stay at Lakena. Went, [and they] made Lakena. Afterwards, Lakena stood there, well this story of Pai and Vau ends here, they say that Pai and Vau went to Kiribati. The story of Pai and Vau disappears there. [They] finished

there with Lakena, disappeared, [and were] gone. Tefolaha stayed, remained here. He married. A spirit wife named Laukite. Laukite [was] a spirit. (9) [She] stayed with Tefolaha. [She was] a spirit. [She] stayed there. Well, Tefolaha [was] a person but if he changed to a spirit [he was] a spirit. You know, so he married a spirit wife, Laukite. In Nanumea today it is difficult for them to know the name of Tefolaha's wife. [They] don't know. Laukite, a god [of old], Laukite the god. [She was] an ancient god. Tefolaha slept with her [at] the place where [they] married. (10) [They] did that, stayed there, [and] had children. They had children. So their first child was born. It ate people, it was cannibalistic, [it was] fierce. [He] killed that child. [It] died. [Laukite] gave birth a second time. [It was] like that again, cannibalistic too. [They] say, [well], that was [known in] our family alone. The body [was just] a body like this, but the mouth was like the "paala" fish. A "paala" fish mouth. (11) So the body [was] just like this, but the mouth [was] long like the mouth of the "paala" [Tepou laughs]. So all four children Tefolaha had [were] like that. So [he] killed [them] all because [they were] cannibalistic, [they] ate people. Then his later children were born. Koli. And [she was] fine, [she] was not fierce. Koli was allowed to survive. Time passed, Koli grew up. Tefolaha allowed Koli to rule. She [was] to be chief here in Nanumea. But Tefolaha prepared to go to Samoa. (12) [He had] come [from] there. [He] prepared to go. But his [other] two children were born. Born, [but] not [to his] spirit side. But [they were] "born to the father." Well, the meaning of the phrase "born to the man" [is] born in the enlightenment. [Previously his children were] born in darkness. [They] were [born] of a spirit [together with a] real person [who] was enlightened as now. But [I] don't know



if it [was] Laukite. [It was] not a spirit. But [it was] a real person, you know. It had no spirit side. (13) So [he] had two children. [He] went to Samoa. Tefolaha returned [to Samoa]. But Koli and her still-small brothers Teilo and Tepaa remained. Much time passed, her brothers grew up. Koli allowed Tepaa and Teilo to become chiefs of the island. [They were] chiefs, but Koli remained to watch, to watch the things they did. So if there [were] something wrong, Koli would correct them. (14) That [was what] those two did. She was the leader, according to Tefolaha. And her decision [was that] her brothers became [the] chiefs. So it remained [like that]. Remained just like that. Well Teilo [was] the oldest child. He [was] the chief. And when Teilo reigned as chief, there is a Nanumean phrase, the "blessing" [literally, "smile"], [it was] blessed. If, the blessing of Teilo if [he] assumed the chieftainship, [there was] an abundance of skipjack tuna [atu], because Teilo was chief. (15) So [there was] an abundance of skipjack tuna in the sea, [and] king fish and yellow fin tuna. And also the land, here ashore, [there was] an abundance of rain, because Teilo was reigning, reigning as chief. You know, [he was] serving as chief. Those were his blessings, a blessing at sea, and a blessing on land. An abundance of rain. Drinking nuts, coconuts, [all] produced abundantly. Teilo. When Teilo was not chief, and Tepaa came to be chief, there were abundant fish on the reef, "manini" fish and fish [caught with] nets. Abundant fish. That [was] when Tepaa assumed the chieftainship. Today too [this happens], but you two have not seen fish swarm (16) That [phenomenon] is called "ika ake" [when fish swarm]. There is an abundance of [reef] fish when fish swarm. They all swarm at Lakena islet. Fish swarms, "homo" fish, "kuma" fish, many many [of them]. If Teilo was going to be installed [as chief],

tomorrow the island would prepare because Teilo was going [to be] chief, to be installed in the chieftainship. In the morning would the rain ever fall! That meant that it was blessed, the reign of the [chief] was blessed. [If] Teilo were to rest and Tepaa were to assume the chieftainship, then the reef fish, the "manini" and [fish like that] on the reef, by the breakers, would be abundant. (17) Many swarming fish. Fish swarms, well, you have not seen [them]. We [would] all go [out] like this, just picking up fish. Those were the hallmarks of those two chiefs, when [they] reigned. Tepaa's [hallmark was] the reef. There were many fish on the reef. And many fish swarming. Teilo's [hallmark was] abundant skipjack tuna, yellow fin tuna, kingfish, fish of the deep sea. And ashore here, much rain. Abundant rain. And the coconuts really produced. Many drinking nuts. (18) That is how it was, those [were] the first two chiefs. Tefolaha [had] gone. [He] returned, [he] came again. Returned, they say [he had] a Tongan wife. A new wife. [He was] a man, just a person, [he was] just a person like this. Tefolaha was no longer a spirit. So [he] came, [he had] three children with him. Tutaki and Fiaola and Lavega. Those are his children [who] came with him. So [they] came, but their children, Tefolaha's children, remained in the chieftainship. Tefolaha appointed [the latter three] to serve Teilo and Tepaa, from behind. (19) So Teilo and Tepaa went to, to sit inland in the chieftainship, but those [three] there prepared the things of the chief. So Lavega, he spoke in this manner, "Well, what are the things [we should do] for the chief?" Things to do with the installation [of a chief], the orders of that group, Lavega's, would be received. That is Lavega's family. [They would] say to the island, "Our things, our 'motomoto' nuts, one hundred from each [family]." Well, it is customary to do this in chiefly lineages, the seven chiefly lineages. So

we would go and prepare our things. [They] would be taken up inland to the community hall, to pound the "poi" [for all] to sip. Because when the chief was installed there, there was no other [food suitable], it was done only with "poi." And Tutaki distributed [food] in the hall, that was his work. (20) So Tutaki [would] stand to distribute, distribute things, "poi" to people, that was his job, because it was the installation of the chief. And [they] would also have gone fishing. One could not omit the fishing, because [they] were going to inspect for the chief [who was to be] installed. Whether there were new fish. To inspect, to inspect the sea, you know. Whether they [would] go cast nets, or what. [They] got fish. [Then] Tutaki, [I mean] Fiaola, took over. Fiaola went to look at the fish. So [he] counted the total. (21) Fiaola [would] say, "Hey Tutaki, that is the total [number] of fish." [Then he] left it. Tutaki came to distribute [the] fish. That is [his] job. Those are their jobs. Tutaki stayed to distribute. And Fiaola, if there were fish brought, Fiaola went to look. [To determine] the total number of fish. If there were any large fish, he cut up the fish. Cut [them up], thinking of [the number] of people in the community. That was Tutaki's [sic] job. Then the person of the "distributors" would come, the work of distributing was his alone. (22) But Lavega's group, there was nothing for them to do. [They] just remained, they cared for the chief, that group was able to call up the wind. That is Takitua's group. [That] was an ancient skill of the chief. [They] cared for them like this. Teilo [might] say, "I am going to Lakena tomorrow." All right. He [would] go to take the chief. Lavega [would]. If the wind blew thusly, or came from here, well, fine [they] went.

(23) [They] went there. Went, stayed in Lakena. At the time [they] were preparing to come [back], to bring the chief back here, if the wind blew from here, then the chief would call to the wind to go [there]. Oh, [I mean] Lavega [would call]. Yes. The wind [would] go. Go to bring the chief. There are words of theirs they speak, speak aloud to the wind. Well, those are ancient things. [I] don't know if today [they] can still do it that way, or [they cannot], Takitua's group. (24) I do not know if they can [do it], or cannot. But those were their own skills. And it was them, too, if there were a sea voyage going, say going to Nanumaga, sailing, they were notified. A person of [Lavega's] group to go take the voyage. Because if any trouble happened, the canoe was damaged, they [would] not die. If [the canoe] were damaged, and [they] stood down, [they would] stand as if standing ashore on land. (25) There is a fish, there is a fish of theirs, [which they] stand upon. They stand upon that fish. [They are] saved, able to lash their canoe and climb [back] aboard. That is their job, the saving of the [voyage] because they are [there], there is the fish [which they stand upon]. If there is trouble like that, the canoe is sinking, [they can] stand down. That is Lavega's group, those are the things they do. [They are] chiefs at sea. They go to sea, their rule takes over because they rule at sea. (26) Well, those are the things they do. But [when they] come to shore, they rest, rest [until] a chief is to be installed. There are things of the chief [they] do, [that] they say. They say, "We will do these things thusly...." [That] accomplished correctly, [they] say to the community, "Our things [we'll do] are that, that, and so on." That is their

job. If [they] come ashore [and] there is a lot of food, Tutaki goes to distribute [it]. If there is fish, fish are brought. Fiaola comes to distribute [I mean] to cut up, if the fish are large. (27) And it is customary [when there is] a turtle, a turtle, if one comes, one is brought there, no one [is supposed] to handle [it]. That is the [job of] Fiaola's group. Just their family. And they come to cut up the turtle. Today, if you watch, if a turtle is caught today, it is Laiti's [lineage] alone that goes, today it is he who goes to cut up the turtle. Because it is a "duty," that [job] is a traditional responsibility. That is his responsibility from ancient times, right down to today, that is his responsibility, [the] responsibility of that group is to distribute. [And also] the cutting up of things, of fish. Tutaki's responsibility is distribution. Lavega's responsibility is to do, to go to speak about what our things are [we'll] do for the chief. (28) Those are the responsibilities of [that group], right down to today. Here [they] are still doing [it], but the thing is that there is [now] no chief who, which Nanumea selects. It is not like the Gilbert Islands. [In] those large islands like Butaritari the chief remains. But ashore here there is none. No, it was forbidden by the Europeans, there was to be no chief. Well, but the people of the chiefly [lineages] are still here. [Today Tutaki and Fiaola] are doing their work together. And Lavega still sits there with his work. That group, the group of Lavega, that is a very large group [of people]. (29) But me, I have no work to do. Except for sitting [here]. If [I] sit here in this way, if someone is in error, I just say "Hey, do not do that because...." [That is] me, my position here in Nanumea [Tepou laughs]. But they all remain there with their chieftainship, sitting [there] to care for their island. And my job is that [which I explained].

Narrative 2 Told by Sosemea Samuelu,<sup>3</sup> July 28, 1974, at our house, Nanumea. Learned by Sosemea from Takitua Peni. Present at tape-recording session: Sosemea, Laina Teuea, Anne Chambers, Keith Chambers

[Tala o te Hauga o Tefolaha -- The Story of the Coming of Tefolaha]

(1) Mea nei ko te tala o te hauga o Tefolaha, ine. Mea nei ko te tala muamua ailoa o te kamataga, a Tefolaha o fano o tau pelaa ki Samoa. Oti i ai uu naa, ko tena malaga ailoa o haele mai ikonei, ki Nanumea, ine? Pelaa muamua ko te tauga, ko te faitauaga telaa a Tonga mo Samoa, ine? E iloa e taatou, pelaa ko te mea he toa ine? Pelaa he toa. Telaa laa oti i ai uu laa, malaga mai loa i ai konei, ki Nanumea. I te taimi konaa e ttou iloa gina a te mafuaga a Tefolaha, he tinaa tino Tonga tonu ailoa. (2) Tefolaha. Kae maahani o fakaigoa i Tonga, e lua ona feitu. Te feitu aitu mo te feitu tino. Telaa laa te mea, ka fai e tau mo tino, e maahani loa a manumaaloo tele ttou tagata naa. A tefolaha, ine. Telaa laa i te taimi e tahi ni kkave naa a te aa ko ia, a te putukau tau a te kau Tonga. Ki Samoa. Pelaa mo te maahani mua e fai taua tele. Telaa laa fanatu naa te putukau tenaa o te kau Tonga ki luga i Samoa. (3) Koa aga mainaa Samoa hoki o fai te taua. Tenaa laa manumaaloo a te kau Tonga i luga i Samoa. Toe foki a Tonga. Me koa leeia a te kau Samoa. Tuumuli ki tua! [Sosemea laughs]. Tenaa laa toe tahi hoki. Toe tuku mai hoki. Tenaa a te kau Tonga. Pelaa he taahhaoga te lotou mea, mua e. Pelaa ka fai e fia taa tino, kave te taua. Malaga e? Toe fanatu hoki. Leeia hoki te kau Samoa, i te kau Tonga. (4) Tenaa laa i te malaga tenaa i te

lua, a te kau Tonga, ni fia fai ai a Tefolaha ki faafine Samoa. Tenaa laa, mmuni loa i ai a Tefolaha i Samoa. E olo te lotou kau, ka koa noho i Samoa. Aavaga naa mo Teati te igoa o te fafine Samoa. Teati te igoa a te aavaga a Tefolaha. Mea laa, hee ai laa tamalliki ni maua i luga i tana aavaga tenaa. Fano fano i ai. Toe hiki mai i ai te taua a te kau Tonga. Ka koa tau atu naa mai luga, a Tefolaha mai luga i Samoa. (5) Koa tau ki luga i tona fenua tonu ailoa. Ko Tonga. Telaa laa ni manumaaloo ai te kau Samoa. Auua laa i te toa o Tonga telaa koa noho i luga i Samoa. Telaa laa koa manumaaloo ai te kau Samoa. Noho loa i ai i konaa a Tefolaha. Tana nohoga ikonaa hee loko leva, hau loa i ai tana malaga o taahhao mai ki konei, ki Elise. Haele mai, haele mai, oko mai loa ki Nanumea tonu. (6) Tuu mai loa ki uta i Nanumea, e hee ai ni tino i uta i Nanumea. Kae haele mai naa e fepaki loa mo te fale, e tahi. Kae naa lavea mao mai gina ailoa e toko lua faafine e nnoho i loto. Ffuli loa i ai ki tona feitu telaa aitu. Ko fano naa o noho mai luga i te fata, e, e noho mai luga. E lua iloa gina te mea telaa e fakaigoa mua ikonei i Nanumea ko te loko. (7) Tukutuku ifo te loko mai luga i te fafine e toko tahi. Ko te mea e fia naa iloa gina a igoa o toko lua kolaa e. Telaa laa koa noho atu te fafine e toko tahi pelaa. "E Pai, a te loko tenaa e ko tukutuku ifo i luga i tou piho, ko tai patele ki tou piho." Telaa laa koa iloa gina e Tefolaha me ko Pai te mea telaa, a te igoa o te fafine telaa, e. (8) Koa fano, ko tukutuku ifo a te loko mai luga i te igoa o te, mai luga i te piho o te fafine e tokotahi. Telaa laa koa noho mai a Pai. "E Vau, a te loko tenaa koa tukutuku ifo i tou piho. Tai patele

ki tou piho." Tenaa, oti loa i ai, ffuli ki tona feitu tino, ka ko haele mai i te mataloa. Ana muna, "Olo ke aatea mo toku fenua." Muna a Tefolaha, e fai ki luga i toko lua faafine kolaa. (9) Ke olo ke aatea mo tona fenua. Muna a toko lua faafine, "Mai fea tou fenua? E o maaua loa te fenua nei!" "Hee o koulua te fenua nei. Penei mo aku, e kau iloa gina a lua igoa. Ia," muna a Tefolaha, "kae mate mai laa i toku igoa me ko ai?" Pula atu pula mai, pelaa laa, hee laa iloa te igoa o Tefolaha. Ia, "Ka ko ai maa igoa?", muna a Pai mo Vau. Muna a Tefolaha, "A tou igoa ko Pai, ka ko koe ko Vau." Taaffuke ake toko lua faafine kolaa, olo loa ke aatea mo te fenua. (10) Telaa laa noho ikonaa Tefolaha, ikonei, hee loko leva, fano loa i ai, toe foki. E foki naa, e foki ki tona fenua tonu ailoa. Naa laa i tona fanoga naa i te fakalua, i tona fokiga naa, e fano ki Tonga, ki tona tinaa fenua tonu ailoa. Puke mai loa i ai a, fai loa i tana aavaga. Te igoa laa o tana aavaga tenaa, mea naa ko tena aavaga i te tokolua ine, ko Puleala. I Tonga. (11) Ommai loa i ai pelaa ki Samoa ine. Ommai ki Samoa, puke ifo loa i ai te faoa o tena vaka. Mai Samoa. Puke mai loa tona faoa. Ommai i ai ikonaa. Ommai loa ki uta nei i Nanumea e. Noho loa i uta nei i Nanumea. Tino Samoa tonu ailoa na faoa. Ka ko tena aavaga he Tonga, ko Puleala. I tana aavaga mua laa he tino Samoa, ko Teati. E hee ai ni laa tama ni maua i Teati, telaa laa tiiakina atu loa i Samoa. Hee ni manako ki ai me hee ai ni ana tama. (12) Ka ko te ommaiga i konaa, noho loa ikonei. Telaa laa fanafanau loa i ai ana tama. Faannau loa i ai ana tama. Tena tama muamua laa ko Tutaki. Ka ko te tokolua ko Fiaola. Ka ko te tokotolu, Lavega. A igoa a tamaliki



konaa a Tefolaha. Telaa laa fano fano i ai, fai tama hoki a, fai tama hoki a Lapi mo Lavega...e! [notices his mistake] (13) Telaa ni fanafanau mo telaa laa e maua ai haa, a Vele mo Lapi, tamaliki haa Tutaki, tamaliki a Tutaki. Mai luga ikonaa i tamaliki a Tefolaha. Mea laa aavaga naa mo te, e aavaga ki luga i te aa ko ia, telaa e fai atu au. Fanafanau iloto uu naa, aavaga loa i ai mo tena tuaatina, tama a Lofale. Ko Lofale laa mea laa. Pelaa ko hee loko kau iloa tonu a te fakahologa i aavaga, a tino konaa, a taufanaua konaa. Ni fai tama a Tefolaha, Lavega. Fai tama a Tefolaha. (14) Iloto uu naa, te maafuaga uu naa, hee iloa a iloa iloto naa i te maafuaga...iluga i te faoa konaa ni ommai i te kau Samoa, ine?...Telaa laa ko tama telaa a Lavega, ni aavaga mai luga i tama kolaa, a Tutaki, ine. Fakatauaavaga uu naa, e...Ko Takitua e maaina tonu loa i ai, te fakahologa...Tena laa fanafanau loa i ai i uta nei i Nanumea. Mai luga loa i ai i konaa i aa Tefolaha. Fai tama haa Lavega. Fai tama haa Tutaki. Fai tama haa mea. Fano loa i ai i te aa koia, i te fanafanaua tenaa, i uta nei i Nanumea. Tena laa te gataga o taku tala tenaa i te hauga a Tefolaha.

Narrative 2      English Translation, Sosemea's [Takitua's]<sup>3</sup> Tale

[The Story of the Coming of Tefolaha -- Tale o te Hauga o Tefolaha]

(1) This is the story of the coming of Tefolaha, eh. This is the very first story of the beginning, of Tefolaha to go fight with Samoa. After that, [it tells of] his voyage to come here, to Nanumea. But first is the fighting, the wars of Tonga and Samoa, you know? We all know about this [his being] a warrior, don't we? A warrior. Well, [when] that was all over there, [he] voyaged here, to Nanumea. At that time, we all know about the origins of Tefolaha, [he was] a real Tongan.

(2) Tefolaha. And [they] said in Tonga that he had two natures. A spirit nature and a human nature. Well the thing is, if he fought with people, this fellow was used to winning. Tefolaha, eh. So, one time a group of, a group of Tongans went. To Samoa. Before, they were used to fighting back and forth. So that group of Tongans went to Samoa. (3) Samoa faced them in a battle. The Tongans were victorious over Samoa. [The] Tongans returned [home]. Because the Samoans had lost. [They] really lost badly! [Sosemea laughs]. Well, [they did it] once again. [They] set out again. The Tongans. This was like a game to them in the old days. If [they] wished to kill people, [they] had a war. Voyaged [there], eh? [So Tonga] went again. Again the Samoans lost to the Tongans. (4) Well on that second

voyage of the Tongans, Tefolaha was enamoured of the Samoan women. So Tefolaha just hid there in Samoa. Their group [of Tongans] left, but [he] stayed in Samoa. [He] married Teati, [that was] the name of a Samoan woman. Teati [was] the name of Tefolaha's wife. The thing was, they had no children as a result of that marriage of his. Time passed. The Tongans again waged war. But [now] Tefolaha was fighting for Samoa. (5) [He] fought against his very own country. Tonga. And so, the Samoans were victorious. Because the [chief] warrior of Tonga was staying with the Samoan [side]. And so the Samoans were victorious. Tefolaha remained there. His stay there [was] not very long, [then] he came on his voyage to visit here, to the Ellice Islands. [He] came and came, and reached all the way to Nanumea itself. (6) [He] came ashore at Nanumea, there were no people on Nanumea. But as [he] walked around [he] came upon a single house. [He] saw from far off two women sitting inside. [He] changed right to his spirit nature. [He] went to sit up above in the attic, to sit above. You two know [about] that thing which used to be called a "loko" here in Nanumea. (7) [He] let down the loko onto the first woman. Because he wished to know the names of those two there. Well the first woman said, "Hey Pai, that loko there is lowering down onto your head, [it] is almost touching your head." So Tefolaha knew that that [woman] there was Pai, the name of that woman there. (8) [He] went [on], lowering the loko down onto the name of the [notes his error], onto the head of the other woman. So Pai said, "Hey Vau, that loko is lowering down onto your head. [It is] almost touching

your head." That done, [he] changed to his human nature, and walked in the door. He said, "Go away from my island." Tefolaha said [that] to the two women there. (9) To go away from his island. The two women said, "Who says it is your island? This island here is ours alone!" "This island is not yours. Take me, for instance, I know your names. So," Tefolaha said, "Can you guess what my name is?" [The women] looked this way and that way, [but] they did not know the name of Tefolaha. Pai and Vau replied, "What are our names?" Tefolaha said, "Your name is Pai, and you are Vau." Those two women there jumped up, [and] went away from the island. (10) So Tefolaha stayed there, here, not very long, [then he] went, returned. He returned there, returned to his real country. On his second journey there, his return, he went to Tonga, to his real country. There [he] took, married a wife. The name of his wife there, the thing is that was his second wife, was Puleala. In Tonga. (11) [They] came to Samoa. Came to Samoa, [he] got the crew for his canoe. From Samoa. Got his crew. [They] came here. Came right here to Nanumea. [They] remained here in Nanumea. His crew were real Samoans. But his wife, Puleala, was a Tongan. But his first wife was a Samoan, Teati. [He] had no children from Teati, and so [he] discarded her in Samoa. [He] did not want her because she had no children. (12) So on that trip [they] stayed here. And so his children were born. His children were born. His first child was Tutaki. The second was Fiaola. And the third [was] Lavega. [Those were] the names

of Tefolaha's children. Well, time passed, children were born, children were born to Lapi and Lavega...oh! [notices his mistake] (13) So [they] gave birth and Lapi and Vele [were born], children of Tutaki, children of Tutaki. Descending from the children of Tefolaha. [The] thing is [they] married to, [they] married into, well, as I said. [They] gave birth inside [the kin group], [one of them] married his tuaatina, "sister's child," the child of Lofale. Lofale. Well I don't really know the ordering of spouses, of those people, of those birth sets. Tefolaha had a child, Lavega. Tefolaha had children. (14) [They gave birth] incestuously<sup>4</sup> there, the origins there, [well] I don't really know about [the details] of the origins...there from the canoe crew which came from Samoa, eh?...Well, that child of Lavega married that [other] child, of [his brother] Tutaki. [They] married back and forth [in that manner]. Takitua is very clear about it, the order [of who married who]....So, [they] gave birth here in Nanumea. [And] descended there from Tefolaha. Lavega had children. Tutaki had children. What's his name had children. Well, it went on, the giving birth went on here in Nanumea. That is the ending of my story of the coming of Tefolaha.

## NOTES

1. I discussed this tale and its ramifications with Tepou on numerous occasions in 1973, 1974 and 1984, copied it verbatim from his family ledger book, and tape-recorded it at least three times. This version was recorded during a long interview early in my fieldwork. A few questions which my wife or I addressed to Tepou in order to clarify points in his narration have been omitted in the transcript here.
2. "Historical" narratives of this sort have no set titles, although often the first sentence or two will provide a working title (as Narrative 2 here does).

English material in brackets is supplied to make the translations readable. Where Tuvaluan words or phrases are enclosed in brackets, they were omitted in the taped discussion, or appeared in a slightly different form in response to a question during the interview. In the few cases where this happened, a slight rearrangement of words was necessary to make the text comprehensible. An ellipsis (in Narrative 2) indicates minor omission of short passages which were redundant.

For ease in comparison, numbers have been assigned every few sentences throughout the texts and to their English equivalents in the translations.

3. While this tale is "Takitua's," it did not come from Takitua directly. As noted in Chapter 1, Takitua approached me early in my stay in Nanumea with this tale, and I took down his long rendering of it then in English. Subsequently, there were several other opportunities to discuss it with him, and to inquire further into his views of the origins of Nanumea and the chiefly system. Although I eventually tape-recorded several narratives from Takitua, the story of Tefolaha was not among them. The tale which is presented here, then, is that of a young kinsman of Takitua, Sosemea. Sosemea learned the story from Takitua, and had recently gone to refresh his knowledge of this and other stories from Takitua when he recorded it one evening at our house. The major difference here from Takitua's telling of the tale is in Sosemea's omission of explanatory material accounting for the organization of the chiefly lineages.
4. The incestuous relationship referred to in somewhat uncertain fashion here is explained in Takitua's narrative in Chapter 3, and diagrammed in Figure 3-2.

## Appendix II

CHIEFLY AND NON-CHIEFLY DESCENT GROUPS

Summarized here is basic information on the major corporate descent groups of Nanumea. These are listed in alphabetical order in two groups, beginning with the chiefly lineages.

I. CHIEFLY LINEAGES (Maga o Aliki)1. Te Aliki a Mua (alternate name, Pihelea)

Meaning of name: Disputed. Either "the front chiefs" (i.e., stemming from Niutao or another island in that direction), or "the oldest chiefs," referring to birth order of Tefolaha's children. Alternate name, assumed in a 20th century reorganization, is name of an ancestor.

Responsibility or Expertise: To "sit" as Nanumea's aliki, to noho i te papa, "sit on the mat [in the ahiga]," or noho i te nohoaga, "sit in the seat [of the island's chief]." Island said to be blessed with abundant ocean fish and bountiful coconut crop when this lineage reigned.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: Yes

Other: Has provided only two ruling chiefs from 1866-1966. See note below under chiefly lineage Tuinanumea.

2. Te Aliki a Muli

Meaning of name: Disputed. Either "the back chiefs," i.e., "real" Nanumean chiefs as opposed to those stemming from islands in mua direction, or the younger of the two main lineages of chiefs.

Responsibility or Expertise: To "sit" as Nanumea's aliki, as for the lineage above. When this lineage reigned, the island was said to have plentiful reef fish and (possibly) bountiful coconut crop.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

Other: Three sub-segments of this lineage exist, but exact genealogical connections have been lost. None apparently maintained its genealogies. Despite this, this lineage has provided six reigning chiefs from 1866-1966.

3. Te Aliko o te Tai (alternate name, Tuumau)

Meaning of name: "Chiefs of the sea," referring to the view that while any sea voyage in progress this lineage rules at sea. Alternate name, "steadfast," refers to group's view of itself as standing fast while other chiefly groups fled Nanumea (Chapter 3). This name assumed in 20th century.

Responsibility or Expertise: Disputed (cf. Chapter 3). All agree that this lineage takes responsibility for chieftainship during sea voyage, accompanying the chief, protecting him. Lineage had powers to call and control winds, and some fish. Responsible for overseeing installation of reigning chief. Dispute centers over whether this lineage had rights to "control" (pule) of chieftainship, including selection and deposition of chiefs.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: Yes

Other: This lineage has a great many sub-branches today, apparent result of many generations with numerous male offspring. Genealogies well kept and leading elders can trace connections between sub-branches and other branches of chiefs.

A former god (feao; atuaafale) of this lineage was Fiaita. Probably formerly an elder of this lineage, as name appears in genealogies, his skull was preserved and he became its patron. Fiaita was propitiated for many years after Christianity accepted.

4. Fakavalevale (alternate name, Te Paaheiloa)

Meaning of name: "Crazy," "spirit-possessed," referring to the supposed spirit-aided ability of this lineage to consume prodigious quantities of food. Some say it was forbidden for a reigning chief to leave any food on his tray after eating and that this lineage had the role of consuming the leftovers. Regardless of the quantity, people from Fakavalevale could finish it. Alternate name, used by some members, may stem from an early member who bore that name. Some say, too, that it refers to their supposed physical beauty, since they have no defects, paa.

Responsibility or Expertise: As above.



Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

Other: This lineage has provided seven ruling chiefs from 1866 to 1966, holding chiefly office for 31 years.

A very widespread lineage, with four or five sub-branches. Members today cannot recall exact genealogical connections between them.

5. Pologa

Meaning of name: "Responsibility," "duty."

Responsibility or Expertise: Some say this lineage was to "do the work of the chiefs," perhaps meaning to attend to miscellaneous responsibilities. It has not had a member hold chiefly office.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: Yes

Other: The members of this lineage trace descent from a warrior named Poke (cf. Chapter 7). They seem to have had a quasi-chiefly status, which might account for their not having had a member serve as high chief. Kopiti Uma, below, is associated with this group.

6. Taualepuku

Meaning of name: Unknown. Some chiefly genealogies list an individual named Taualepuku many generations ago.

Responsibility or Expertise: As for Pologa, some say this lineage had the responsibility to assist the chiefs, to "do the work of the aliki." Others phrase its role as policeman (leoleo) of the chiefs. It was not until 1952 that a member of this lineage held the position of high chief.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No (some, however, say such a genealogy exists).

7. Tuinanumea

Meaning of name: Uncertain. The name is a personal name used in this lineage. The word tui, "horn," "tip," can refer to the tips of islets, which were owned by the chiefly lineages (cf. Chapter 3). See note discussing this at end of this Appendix.

Responsibility or Expertise: No particular responsibility noted, but this lineage has provided five reigning chiefs in the century from 1866 to 1966.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: Yes

Other: To judge from genealogies, this lineage is closely linked to Te Alikī a Mua and the two may have been considered branches of a single lineage earlier in this century (cf. Appendix IV).

## II. NON-CHIEFLY DESCENT GROUPS (Kopiti)

### 1. Falemua

Meaning of name: "First house." According to its leading spokesman, Tepou, the name refers to the birth position of Tepou's ancestor Koli, whom Tepou says is Tefolaha's first real child. Thus the house she founded is the "first house."

Responsibility or Expertise: Disputed (cf. Chapter 3). According to Tepou, his lineage has a special position vis-a-vis the chiefs, descent from Koli giving them the responsibility to "watch" and to comment when affairs of the chiefs need attention. According to others, this lineage does not have this overseer role.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: Yes

Other: This lineage counts numerous noted warriors (toa) in its ranks in past generations. Some people characterize it as a lineage of warriors. Members of the lineage dispute this claim.

### 2. Faletolu (alternate name, Te Kau o Telagai)

Meaning of name: "Third house." Reason for this name is uncertain. The alternate name is descriptive, meaning "the group of the turtle float," a reference to an implement used in this group's traditional work as turtle catchers.

Responsibility or Expertise: This lineage had the prerogative and responsibility of catching sea turtles (fonu) which were sighted in the ocean off the southwestern shore of the village. In this venture, they were felt to have the assistance of some of the undersea gods, which protected them from attack by fish or sharks. If others usurped this role, members of Faletolu could call fish or sharks to attack them. Turtles caught by Faletolu within specified boundaries near the village were eaten in the community hall by the whole community.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

3. Fenuagogo

Meaning of name: Uncertain, although a tentative translation is "land of noddy birds [gogo]." This kopiti had a base land of this same name in the village (cf. Map 5-1).

Responsibility or Expertise: Unknown

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

4. Kopiti haa Tonga

Meaning of name: "Descent group of Tongans," referring to this group's account of its origins from a Tongan or Tongans who were spared long ago during battles with Tongan invaders. This group is one of those which have literally originated "from the sea," mai tai (cf. discussion in Chapter 6).

Responsibility or Expertise: Unknown

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

Other: A relatively small group today.

5. Kopiti Samoa (alternate name, Filikafai)

Meaning of name: Refers to group's origins as descendant of Samoan named Fualau, who arrived in Nanumea some time after its settlement by Tefolaha. Alternate name is that of group's home base land in village.

Responsibility or Expertise: Unknown

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

Other: This group associated with ownership of the small islet, Te Afua a Taepoa (cf. Map 2-2), which its traditions say was made by an ancestor named Taepoa. Like the previous kopiti, this is a group "from the sea."

6. Lalofetau

Meaning of name: Unknown. Group associated with a home base land it owned in village area, also known as Lalofetau. Lalo means "down," "below," while fetau is a large native hardwood tree (Calophyllum inophyllum) used for many craft items, especially the hulls of outrigger canoes.

Responsibility or Expertise: Uncertain, but some say this group had many warriors among its ranks. Group claims descent from

Tefolaha via his son Tutaki and later the hero Lapi. This group possesses the Kaumaile spear (Chapter 8).

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

7. Maheku

Meaning of name: Unknown. Group has as its home base a land of this same name in the village.

Responsibility or Expertise: This group carries on the pologa ("duty") given by Tefolaha to his sons Tutaki and Fiaola to divide and distribute foodstuffs during community functions in the island's community hall. Informants usually refer to the group's duty as tufa, "to distribute," and note that today the separate duties of dividing (that is, cutting up fish, especially large ocean fish and turtles, according to specified rules and procedures) and distribution are done jointly.

Only, apparently, when turtles which are to be eaten by the community in the ahiga are cut up, does the singular specialization of nifo (literally, "tooth"), i.e., cutting into portions, come into play today.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

Other: While some informants argue that those who carry on the traditional responsibilities given by Tefolaha (such as tufa and nifo described here) are counted among Nanumea's chiefs, most also say that Maheku is not a chiefly "branch" (maga), but a non-chiefly group, a kopiti. There remains some uncertainty about the role and position of this group.

This kopiti had as one of its lineages or household gods, atuaafale, an individual known as Iopu. Probably, he was an ancestor whose skull was venerated. With the coming of the church this name was considered takahala, "bad," and no longer used as a personal name within the kopiti.

8. Mahikava

Meaning of name: Unknown. Possibly the name of an ancestor.

Responsibilities or Expertise: Unknown

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

Other: A simplified diagram of the major branches of this kopiti appears as Figure 5-1.

9. Te Malie

Meaning of name: Refers to this group's chosen role as "peacemakers."

Responsibilities or Expertise: Group traces descent from an individual it refers to as te malie o te fenua, a difficult to translate phrase that might be glossed "the peace-loving one of the community." People say that this group intervened in altercations between warriors (toa), attempting to bring peace to Nanumea in the ancient days when lineage champions fought for supremacy. An especially famous recent ancestor was Teuhie (f. c. 1870), a warrior who assisted in the bringing of Christianity, opposing in the process Nanumea's preeminent warrior at that time, Moulogo.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: No

10. Uma (alternate name, Te Alatau Tapu)

Meaning of name: Uncertain, but see below for one view. Alternate name, which is not widely used or preferred, is name of one base land of this kopiti, located at ocean shore near the community hall, adjoining another land called Uma.

Responsibilities or Expertise: Informants say this group was associated in some way with the rites of incorporation for newcomers (cf. Chapters 4, 8) and also with a land called "the forbidden road," Te Alatau Tapu, adjacent to the shore and community hall. According to one informant members of the kopiti Uma were involved in these rites and ultimately welcomed strangers with an embrace (uma) as they were escorted along this "forbidden road" to the village center. I am not certain that this information is widely known, and no other elder corroborated it.

If, as seems likely, this group played a role in these religious rituals, it might have had priestly functions or been involved with rites using the founder's skull (cf. Chapter 8).

Today members of Uma are some of Nanumea's most noted canoe makers. They say that in ancient times an important prerogative of their group was to serve as "carpenters" (tufuga) to Nanumea's chief.

Genealogy to Tefolaha: Yes

Other: The boundary between this group, which most informants say was a kopiti, and the chiefly lineage called Pologa is difficult to discern. People said to be members of Pologa are also key members of Uma. It may be that Uma/Pologa is a single

group with a quasi-chiefly status (n.b. Taulialia's remarks, Chapter 5, that Uma was both a kopiti and chiefly group). If so, it may be that its role in the rites of incorporation carried with it special status.

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NOTE

In 1866, a German naturalist (Graeffe 1867:1189) visiting Nanumea met or was told about a chief Tuinanumea. He says:

Von den Eingebornen erfuhr ich dass zwei häuptlinge, von denen aber nur einer den Namen Tui Nano-mea führt, mit den Priestern, deren Anzahl etwa sieben ist, das Volk regieren.

I have taken the last part of this passage to mean, "only one of whom bore the name Tui-Nanomea." But according to Birgit Horlor, a native speaker of German to whom I showed this passage, the phrase could also be rendered, "only one of whom bore the title (emphasis added) Tui Nanomea."

As far as I am aware, there is no evidence, other than this ambiguous statement by Graeffe, that the chiefs of Nanumea may have held titles. The word tui occurs in other Polynesian languages as a title signifying the highest ranking chiefs (cf. Goldman 1970) but does not have this meaning in Nanumea, nor, according to informants, did it in the past. Today's practice is for elders of chiefly lineages to continue to use their given names when assuming leadership, even when they become high chief. Tuinanumea seems to be such a personal name, used by this lineage of the same name.

## Appendix III

CHIEFS AND MAGISTRATES SINCE 1866

Assembled here is information I have been able to gather about Nanumea's major office holders since the first written mention of a chief's name in 1866. Those dates which are known to be approximate are preceded by the abbreviation "c" for circa. My sources include informants' testimony, archive records in Fiji, Funafuti and Tarawa, and family ledger books including that of Takitua, whose list of chiefs from Lie onward served as my starting point.

[Table is on following page]

| Dates               | High Chief <sup>(a)</sup><br>( <u>Ulu Alik</u> i), and<br>lineage <sup>(b)</sup> | Administrative <sup>(a)</sup><br>Chief (Chief<br>Kaupule; <u>aliki</u> ) | Magistrate <sup>(a)</sup><br>( <u>Famasino</u> ) and<br>lineage <sup>(b)</sup> |
|---------------------|--|--|--|
| pre 1866-<br>c 1869 | Tuinanumea <sup>(c)</sup> I-7  |  |  |
| c 1870-1876         | Lie <sup>(d)</sup> I-2   | POSITION   | POSITION   |
| c 1877-1879         | Manatu I-7   | NOT  | NOT  |
| c 1880-1881         | Heiloa I-4   | YET  | YET  |
| c 1882-1883         | Maheu I-4  | ESTABLISHED  | ESTABLISHED  |
| c 1884-1885         | Tauila I-4   |  |  |
| c 1886-1895         | Vaetolo I-7  |  | Tupau (1893) ?   |
| c 1896-1903         | Niti I-2   |  | Tekalau or Moti II-7   |
| c 1904-1905         | Pou I-2  |  | ?  |
| c 1906-1907         | Tukia I-2  |  | ?  |
| c 1908-1917         | Sosene I-4   |  | Esela ?  |
| 1918-1928           | --   | Metai <sup>(e)</sup> ?   | Lagitupu II-8  |
| 1929-1931           | --   | Malulu I-1   | Paulu II-7   |
| 1931-1936           | --   | Malesa I-2   | " "  |
| 1936-1945           | Maiau <sup>(f)</sup> I-4   | " "  | Fati II-1  |
| 1946-1947           | " "  | " "  | Manuella II-6  |
| 1948-1951           | Kaipati I-7  | Pito I-1   | Pilitati II-8  |
| 1951                | Hepikia <sup>(g)</sup> I-3   | " "  | " "  |
| 1952                | Esekia/<br>Hepikia <sup>(g)</sup> "  | Esekia I-6   | Pito <sup>(h)</sup> I-1/II-7   |
| 1953                | Hepikia <sup>(g)</sup> "   | " "  | " "  |
| 1954-1956           | Samuelu I-7  | " "  | " "  |
| 1956-1957           | " "  | " "  | " "  |
| 1958-1960           | POSITION   | Takitua <sup>(i)</sup> I-3   | " "  |
| 1961-1965           | ABOLISHED BY   | Uni I-4  | Niumalee II-3  |
| 1966                | GOVERNMENT   | Paitela I-2  | " "  |
| 1966-on             | ABOVE POSITIONS REPLACED BY ISLAND COUNCIL FORM OF GOVERNMENT                    |  |  |



## NOTES

- a. It is likely that in pre-contact times the word aliki "chief" was used to refer both to those who were members of the chiefly lineages, as well as to the person who reigned as the island's high chief. The combined group of elders who represented all the chiefly lineages were the Kau Alik (as in Appendix IV). With increasing western influence, a variety of terms came to be used, including tupu, "king."

Here, I have used ulu aliki, head chief, to refer to the position of high chief from the beginning of contact until the laws of 1917 took effect (cf. Chapter 4). Since this date marked the start of a salary for the chiefly position, and changed the official title to "Chief Kaubure" (Tuvaluan, "Kaupule"), I have used this term for this government administrative position.

In about 1936, and continuing on until 1956, Nanumea had an "unofficial high chief" (which I have here called ulu aliki, the term Nanumeans used) in addition to its administrative chief. In 1956, the colonial government banned the "unofficial" high chief position, leaving only the administrative chief position until 1966, when a major government reorganization abolished the post of chief altogether.

- b. Lineage designations (I-7, II-8, etc.) refer to the chiefly and non-chiefly lineages listed in Appendix II. Part I of that Appendix lists chiefly lineages 1-7, while Part II lists non-chiefly lineages 1-10.
- c. Tuinanumea is the first aliki of which there is written record (Murray 1866; Graeffe 1867:1189). Nothing is known about him, nor is he recalled by informants today. It is likely that he was a member of the chiefly lineage Tuinanumea. Some 13 years earlier, in 1853, Pease (1854) met with Nanumea's chief, describing him as about 35 years old. He did not give the man's name.
- d. Lie is reported by Powell (1871) as "an agile old man of middle stature." He is the first aliki to appear in a list of chiefs which Takitua had recorded in his ledger book.
- e. Metai, also known as Maika, was the first aliki to hold the salaried position of Chief Kaupule. It seems likely that from about this time, c. 1918 to about 1936, the chieftainship was in disarray.
- f. Maiou was the first individual to hold the newly established position of Head Chief, Ulu Alik, in about 1936. Informants are not certain about events leading to the establishment of this revitalized "unofficial" chieftainship, but some note that it coincided closely with the Land Commission held late in 1936 under

colonial Administrative Officer Donald G. Kennedy. Whether Kennedy had any influence in this matter is not known.

- g. Government touring diaries and Nanumean Council minutes complement informants' remarks to shed light on the succession here. From 1948 Kaipati served as Ulu Alik. He left Nanumea early in 1951 and the community selected Hepikia to serve as a temporary replacement, noting that his lineage (Tuumau, the same as Takitua's) was, by tradition, not permitted to act as reigning chief. Esekia took over as the new Ulu Alik in October of 1951 but a year later was appointed by a colonial government officer to the post of Administrative Chief; the official only learned later that the man he had appointed was already the "unofficial Head Chief" of Nanumea. Thus, Hepikia was again called to fill in as Ulu Alik and served from November 1952 until September 1954.
- h. The same government officer mentioned in note "g" appointed Pito to the post of Magistrate in 1952, "promoting" him from the job of Administrative Chief. This unusual move placed a man whose main lineage affiliation was with the aliki of Nanumea in the position of Magistrate, which had heretofore only been filled by men whose main affiliation was with the non-chiefly kopiti descent groups.
- i. Takitua's tenure as Administrative Chief was unusual, in that Nanumeans (including members of Takitua's own lineage) all agree that members of the chiefly group Tuumau are not to serve as reigning chiefs. Takitua told me that he only took the job after colonial administrators urged him to accept it as a promotion from his long service as Nanumea's Chief of Police.

#### TABULATION

##### I. Chiefly Office Holders

##### II. Magistrate Office Holders

| Lineage             | Times         |             | Lineage             | Times         |             |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------|
|                     | Position Held | Total Years |                     | Position Held | Total Years |
| Alik                | 2             | 6           | Falemua             | 1             | 9           |
| Alik                | 6             | 34          | Faletolu            | 0             | 0           |
| Alik                | 3             | 5           | Fenuaagogo          | 1             | 5           |
| Fakavalevale        | 7             | 31          | Kopiti haa          |               |             |
| Pologa              | 0             | 0           | Tonga               | 0             | 0           |
| Taualepuku          | 2             | 6           | Kopiti Samoa        | 0             | 0           |
| Tuinanumea          | 5             | 19+         | Lalofetau           | 1             | 2           |
| (lineage uncertain) | 1             | 10          | Maheku              | 2             | 14          |
|                     |               |             | Mahikava            | 2             | 13          |
|                     |               |             | Te Malie            | 0             | 0           |
|                     |               |             | Uma                 | 0             | 0           |
|                     |               |             | (lineage uncertain) | 2             | 9+          |
|                     |               |             | Alik                |               |             |
|                     |               |             | Maheku              | 1             | 8           |

## Appendix IV

THE KAU ALIKI (CHIEFLY LINEAGES) IN 1909

This appendix presents a remarkable document from a ledger book I examined in 1974. The book was lent for copying by its owner, Tinilau (b. 1904), who had gotten it from his mother's brother (tuaa-tina) named Tuufue. The book has several entries made in 1909, the earliest ledger book entries I saw in Nanumea, and includes one dated 2 September 1909, giving a genealogy from Tefolaha, and the present one dated 3 December 1909.

The document copied here, a list of leading elders of Nanumea's chiefly lineages in 1909, was apparently made at a meeting of members of the chiefly lineages, although this is uncertain since there is no explanatory material. The document's importance stems from two features: 1) it is a list of people whom Nanumeans considered key figures in the chiefly lineages over 75 years ago. It thus provides a unique time perspective on the institution of the chieftainship. 2) The title of this entry in the book indicates that these members of the chiefly families are arranged in groups on the basis of their traditional "responsibilities," pologa. While no indication is given of what these duties are, the fact that differing "duties" is seen to be the important differentiating characteristic is significant in efforts to come to a closer understanding of Nanumean conceptions of the chieftainship.

Part I presents a verbatim copy of the entry as it appears in Tinilau's ledger book. Part II translates the entry's heading and is my effort to identify the groupings in terms of what is known today about the chiefly lineages. Information I have gathered about the varying responsibilities of the chiefly lineages has already been summarized in Appendix II. Part III is notes.

## I. 3 Tesema 1909 O Igoa o Tagata ote Kauliki e tofu mo latou Pologa

|           |                        |
|-----------|------------------------|
| Kaimoko   | Malulu                 |
| Likilua   | Lipeka                 |
| Matakea   | Mahi                   |
| Tekino    | Halue                  |
| Togia     | Kautoa                 |
| Tihala    | Fakaua                 |
| Founuku   | Faiao                  |
| Hipa      | Malita                 |
| Poke      |                        |
| Pale      |                        |
| Sosene    |                        |
| Taupea    | "fafine"               |
| Paia      | "fafine"               |
| Paitela   |                        |
| Pou       |                        |
| Moulaulau |                        |
| Nakeagi   | Luapeia                |
| Mami      | Tinilau (e an Tematua) |
| Malesa    |                        |
| Maheu     |                        |
| Hou       |                        |
| Tauila    |                        |
| Tagafa    | Solomona               |
| Kanava    |                        |
| Teulu     | Pinau                  |

II. 3 December 1909

"Names of Men of the Chiefs Council according  
to their Responsibilities"

- |                                     |  |            |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------|--|
| 1. Kaimoko                          | } Te Aliko o<br>te Tai<br>(and others,<br>see notes) | 26. Malulu | } Te Aliko<br>a Mua<br><br>and<br>Tuinanumea |
| 2. Likilua                          |  | 27. Lipeka |  |
| 3. Matakea                          |  | 28. Mahi   |  |
| 4. Tekino                           |  | 29. Halue  |  |
| 5. Togia                            |  | 30. Kautoa |  |
| 6. Tihala                           |  | 31. Fakaua |  |
| 7. Founuku                          |  | 32. Faiao  |  |
| 8. Hipa                             |  | 33. Malita |  |
| 9. Poke                             |  |            |  |
| 10. Pale                            |  |            |  |
| 11. Sosene                          |  |            |  |
| 12. Taupea "woman"                  |  |            |  |
| 13. Paia "woman"                    |  |            |  |
| 14. Paitela                         | } Te Aliko a Muli                                    |            |  |
| 15. Pou                             |  |            |  |
| 16. Moulaulau                       |  |            |  |
| 17. Nakeagi Luapeia                 |  |            |  |
| 18. Mami Tinilau (child of Tematua) |  |            |  |
| 19. Malesa                          |  |            |  |
| 20. Maheu                           | } Fakavalevale                                       |            |  |
| 21. Hou                             |  |            |  |
| 22. Tauila                          |  |            |  |
| 23. Tagafa Solomona                 |  |            |  |
| 24. Kanava                          |  |            |  |
| 25. Teulu Pinau                     |  |            |  |

## NOTES

Te Aliko o te Tai (names 1-13)

Names 1-5 are, according to genealogies and informants' statements, of core members of the lineage Te Aliko o te Tai. No. 5, Togia, is Takitua's father's father. I am uncertain of the lineage affiliation of nos. 6-7. No. 8, whose name before it was changed was Haleti, was a member of Taualepuku. No. 9, Poke, should, by my records, have been a member of either kopiti Uma or chiefly lineage Pologa. Nos. 10-11 were, I believe, members of Fakavalevale, according to informants today. Sosene served for many years as Nanumea's high chief. Why his name appears with individuals of Te Aliko o te Tai is unclear. Nos. 12 and 13 are the widows of two former reigning chiefs, Manatu and Vaetolo. Their inclusion among the "men" of the Chiefly lineages is interesting. Their husbands both come from the lineage Tuinanumea.

Te Aliko a Muli (names 14-19)

These are individuals in two sub-branches of this lineage (indicated, apparently by the gap between the two sets of names). No. 15, Pou, served briefly as reigning chief early in this century. Luapeia is the daughter of Nakeagi (no. 17); her inclusion may signal that she was his only remaining heir.

Fakavalevale (names 20-25)

These are all key individuals in this lineage. No. 20, Maheu, and 22, Tauila, both served as high chief late in the 19th century. Solomona is the son of Tagafa, while Pinau is the son of Teulu. Apparently the sons were adults at the time.

Te Aliko a Mua and Tuinanumea (names 26-33)

This listing of these two lineages together may indicate that their "duty," to serve as reigning chiefs, was identical and that they are closely related. No. 27, Lipeka, and no. 31, Fakaua, were important members of Tuinanumea. No. 32, Faiao, is a woman and her inclusion here is problematic. No. 33, also a woman, is the daughter of Fakaua, no. 31.

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- LMS London Missionary Society, London. See specific documents under SSJ, SSL or SSR below.
- PMB Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, Canberra, Australia. The Bureau microfilms important documents relating to the Pacific. Copies were consulted at Turnbull Library, Wellington.
- SSJ, Manuscript materials of the London Missionary Society, now  
SSL, housed at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Univer-  
SSR sity of London. Microfilm copies of the South Sea Journals (SSJ), South Sea Letters (SSL), and South Sea Records (SSR) are held in various world libraries, including Wellington's Alexander Turnbull Library, where I consulted them.
- WPHC Western Pacific High Commission Archives, Suva, Fiji; now (1984) the Fiji National Archives. WPHC 4/IV is the Series "Inwards Correspondence, General," i.e., material sent from the Colonies or from London to the High Commission. This is catalogued under the number of the "minute paper" and year filed. Thus WPHC 4/IV 296/1894 is "minute paper" 296 of 1894. Most of the files pertaining to Tuvalu are now housed at the Tuvalu National Archives.
- TUV Tuvalu National Archives, Funafuti. Numbers following the designation TUV are the Archive's cataloguing number.

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