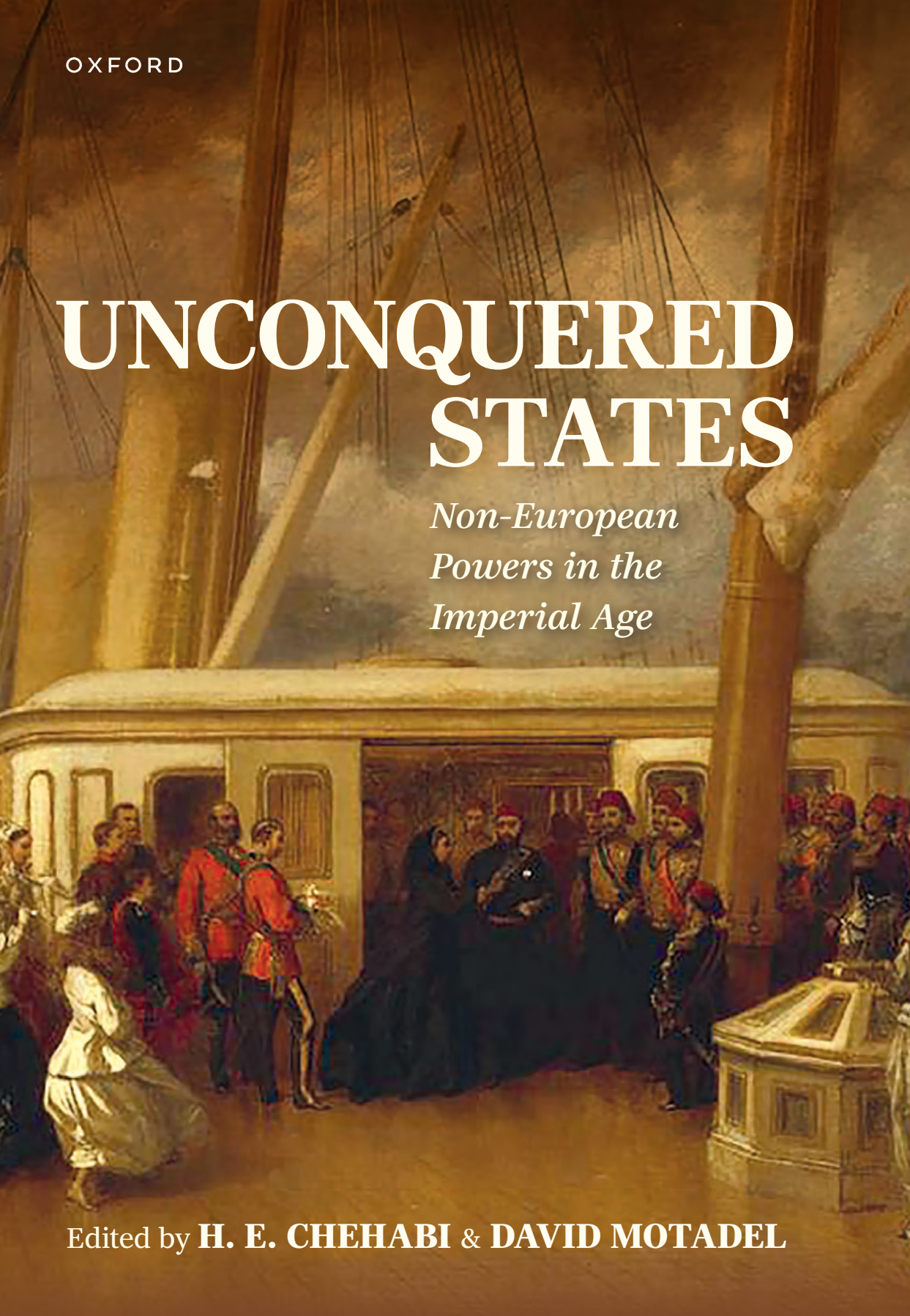
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Edited by H. E. CHEHABI & DAVID MOTADEL

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ali Ansari | Cemil Aydin | Fantahun Ayele | Gwyn Campbell | Michael Charney
Andrew Cobbing | H. E. Chehabi | Edhem Eldem | Hailegabriel G Feyissa | Takashi Fujitani
Ali Gheissari | Lorenz Gonschor | Patrick Jory | Kirk W. Larsen | Andreu Martinez | David Motadel
Izabela Orlowska | Ronald Po | James Roslington | David Keanu Sai | Glenda Sluga
Chika Tonook | Sven Trakulhun | Wensheng Wang | Erik-Jan Zürcher

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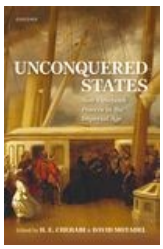

Unconquered States: Non-European Powers in the Imperial Age

H. E. Chehabi (ed.), David Motadel (ed.)

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24

Survival and State Building in the Kingdom of Tonga

Lorenz Gonschor

While the Hawaiian Kingdom, small as it was by global comparison, fulfilled the role of a regional power among the archipelagos of Oceania before its untimely occupation by the United States (see the chapter by David Keanu Sai in this book), a few thousand kilometers to the south-west another Polynesian archipelago also engaged in state-building throughout the nineteenth century: the kingdom of Tonga. Under the firm and determined leadership of King Tupou I, whose longevity spanned virtually the entire century, Tonga was transformed into a modern nation-state that toward the end of the nineteenth century fulfilled almost all the Western criteria of statehood, and which had extended relations with both its Pacific neighbors and the major Western powers. Although suffering major blows of British imperialist bullying, the kingdom managed to escape straightforward colonization and survive seven decades as a British protectorate to re-emerge as a sovereign kingdom in the late twentieth century, a trajectory unique among Pacific Island nations. This chapter will discuss the development of the Tongan state, from its ancient, pre-European origins through the cultural, political, and constitutional changes of the nineteenth century, to its partial subjugation and persistence in the twentieth century, with a special focus on Tonga's relations with both neighboring Pacific Island nations and the Western powers.

While there has developed a significant body of work describing and analyzing Tonga's nineteenth-century state-building process and its relations with European powers, authored by both Tongan and Anglo-Saxon historians—among the more prolific being Sione Lātūkefu, Noel Rutherford, Ian Campbell, Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, and Seniloli 'Inoke—most of this existing historiography is limited to either a domestic Tongan perspective or to merely regionally comparative approaches within the field of Pacific history.[1] Tonga is largely absent, however, from globally

[1] Sione Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga: The Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries and Political Development, 1822–1875* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1974); Noel Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971); I. C. Campbell, *Island Kingdom: Tonga, Ancient and Modern* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2001), which was first published in 1992; Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, *Queen Sālote of Tonga: The Story of an Era, 1900–1965*

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comparative work on non-Western states in the age of empire.[2] While building on the existing literature, this chapter intends to contribute to closing this gap by adding a wider international perspective to the analysis of Tonga's efforts at state-building, modernization, and obtaining international recognition, as well as the reasons for the failure of these efforts to conserve Tonga's independence.

From Ancient to Modern State

In a manner similar to only two other societies in the insular Pacific, namely Hawai'i and Kosrae (in Micronesia), by the time of first sustained contacts with the West in the late eighteenth century Tonga had developed into a highly stratified society—contrasting with the then more decentralized, tribally organized polities of other archipelagos.[3] The archaeologists Robert Hommon and, more recently, Geoffrey Clark have therefore identified classical Tonga as a primary state society, similar to cases of early state development in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, the Indus Valley, Central America, and the Andean highlands.[4] Furthermore, unlike the Hawaiian Islands, which prior to their post-contact unification consisted of four separate kingdoms, and unlike Kosrae, which is a single island, Tonga was the only Pacific archipelago united into a single polity before Western contact.[5] This classical stratification in turn facilitated the formation of a centralized monarchy under George Tupou I in the mid-1800s, which can hence be seen as a continuity of the pre-contact polity (Fig. 24.1).[6]

(Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999); and Seniloli Kimbu 'Inoke, *Legacy of Tonga's Constitution, 1875–2015; Ko e Tuku'au Mai 'O E Konisitūtone 'O Tonga, 1875–2015* (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 2018).

[2] Tonga is mentioned in passing as having been subjected to unequal treaties in Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5. More recent political developments in Tonga have been the subject of a comparative work situating Tonga among other monarchies in the Asia-Pacific region with a similar legacy of avoiding direct colonial rule during the age of empire, see Christine Bogle, "Democratisation in Asia-Pacific Monarchies: Drivers and Impediments; A Study of Bhutan, Tonga, Nepal and Thailand" (Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2019).

[3] Patrick V. Kirch, *The Evolution of the Polynesian Chiefdoms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 217–42; and Patrick V. Kirch, *How Chiefs Became Kings: Divine Kingship and the Rise of Archaic States in Ancient Hawai'i* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 27–8.

[4] Following historian Ian Campbell, I use the term "classical" to designate Pacific island societies and cultures as they were in existence during the time of their documentation by the first European explorers, and by newly literate islander historians a few decades later. I. C. Campbell, *Classical Tongan Kingship* (Nuku'alofa: 'Atenisi Press, 1989).

[5] Robert Hommon, *The Ancient Hawaiian State: Origins of a Political Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 188–99; and Geoffrey Clark, "Chiefly Tombs, Lineage History, and the Ancient Tongan State," *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* 11:3 (2016): 326–43.

[6] Kerry Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: A New South Sea Islands History from First Settlement to Colonial Rule* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1984), 177–97; Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 72–84.

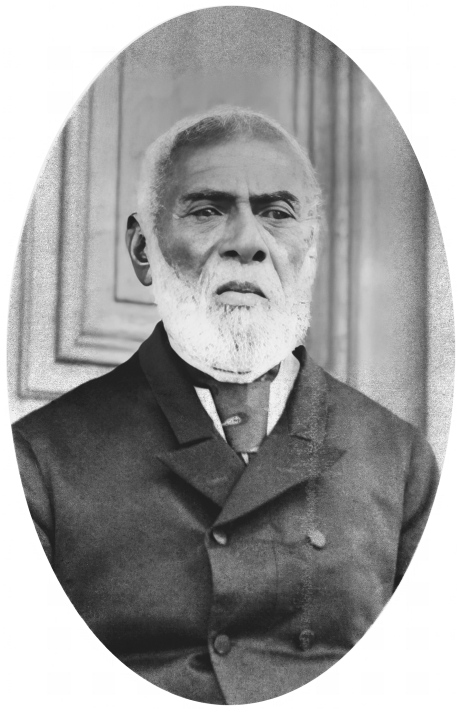

Fig. 24.1 George Tupou I (ca. 1797–1893), the founder of the modern Tongan state, 1880s. (Unknown Photographer) (Public Domain)

In classical times, "when Europeans first reached Tongatapu (Tonga's main island), they not only encountered a large and powerful chiefdom, but one which served as the most central and important node in a wide exchange network linking numerous islands of west Polynesia."[7] This Tongatapu-centered polity, reaching far into the neighboring archipelagos of Western Polynesia, was termed by anthropologist ʻOkusitino Māhina the "Tuʻi Tonga Empire," while it has been referred to by other scholars less spectacularly as the "Tongan Maritime Chiefdom."[8] Whatever the exact nature of the polity, which likely had its climax in terms of territorial extension centuries before the Western encounter, there is evidence in oral histories, in the monumentality of construction in the capital Lapaha on Tongatapu, as well as in the place names within that capital and on the outer islands, to suggest a highly stratified political system firmly controlling Tonga's core island

[7] Shankar Aswani and Michael W. Graves, "The Tongan Maritime Expansion: A Case in the Evolutionary Ecology of Social Complexity," *Asian Perspectives* 37:2 (1998): 135–64, at 153.

[8] ʻOkusitino Māhina, "Religion, Politics, and the Tuʻi Tonga Empire" (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1986); Kirch, *Evolution of the Polynesian Chiefdoms*; and Geoffrey Clark, David Burley, and Tim Murray, "Monumentality and the Development of the Tongan Maritime Chiefdom," *Antiquity* 82:318 (2008): 994–1008.

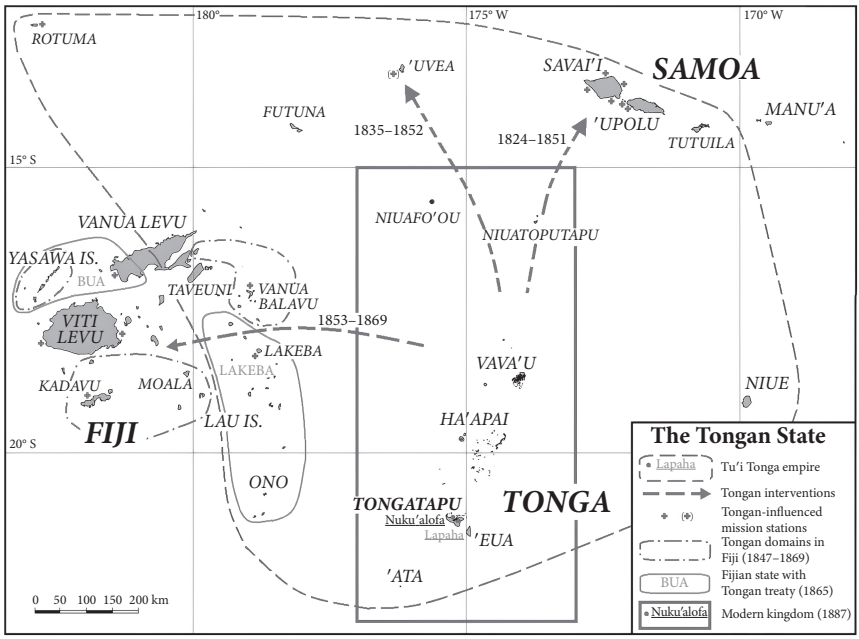

Fig. 24.2 Map showing the geographic extent of the Tongan state and its regional influence. (Author)

groups (of Tongatapu, Haʻapai, and Vavaʻu) and exercising some degree of control, varying through time, over more outlying islands (such as Niuatoputapu, Niuafoʻou, and ʻUvea), as well as important degrees of influence over the surrounding islands of Futuna, Niue, Rotuma, parts of Samoa, parts of Fiji, and possibly even over some islands further beyond (Fig. 24.2).[9] Ruling over this extended empire was the Tuʻi Tonga (literally "Lord of the South") dynasty, direct descendants of the gods, which later became eclipsed from actual political rule by two emerging collateral dynasties of secular rulers, first the Tuʻi Haʻatakalaua and later the Tuʻi Kanokupolu.[10] By the time of Western contact, a diarchy of a sacred formal ruler (Tuʻi Tonga) and a secular actual ruler (Tuʻi Kanokupolu) had been well established, somewhat similar to the early modern Japanese diarchy of the divine emperor and the temporal shogun.

Following the European encounter of the late 1700s, and possibly as its indirect consequence, the classical system collapsed around the turn of the nineteenth century, and Tonga became fragmented into numerous warring chiefdoms.[11] The

[9] Geoffrey Clark, "The Sea in the Land: Maritime Connections in the Chiefly Landscape of Tonga," in Atholl Anderson, James H. Barrett, and Katherine V. Boyle, eds., *The Global Origins and Development of Seafaring* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2010), 229–37.

[10] Māhina, "Tuʻi Tonga Empire"; Campbell, *Classical Tongan Kingship*.

[11] I. C. Campbell, "The Demise of the Tuʻi Kanokupolu: Tonga, 1799–1827," *Journal of Pacific History* 24:2 (1989): 150–63.

establishment of a Wesleyan (Methodist) mission in 1822 coincided with the rise of the warlord Tāufaʻāhau, who converted to their religion, took the name of King George Tupou, after King George IV of Britain, and through a series of wars and alliances succeeded through the middle of the nineteenth century to reunify the Tongan islands as a Christian kingdom under his rule, first assuming the Tuʻi Kanokupolu title in 1845 after having consolidated a power base in the northern groups of Haʻapai and Vavaʻu, and finally conquering Tongatapu and forcing the Tuʻi Tonga title to lapse after the death of its last holder Laufilitonga in 1865.[12] The latter's descendants would later marry into the Tupou dynasty, whereby the Tuʻi Tonga dynasty came to be effectively absorbed into the modern royal family. In a sense, the process was similar to Japan's Meiji Restoration, but with inverse players, since in Japan the modernizing forces restored the historic sacred dynasty of emperors to an active political role and discarded the secular dynasty of Tokugawa shoguns; while in Tonga the historically usurping dynasty of Tuʻi Kanokupolu took the modernizing and centralizing role, and discarded/absorbed the historic dynasty of Tuʻi Tonga.

Creating a Constitutional Order

After having secured his foothold over Vavaʻu and Haʻapai in the 1830s, George Tupou I promulgated a legal code based on those that had been established by the local rulers of Tahiti and the other Society Islands under the influence of Congregationalist missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the 1820s. Once he had firmly established his rule over the entire archipelago, Tupou's adaptation of the Tahitian law codes culminated in a unified Tongan code of 1850.[13] Unlike Tahiti since 1825 and Hawaiʻi since 1840, however, Tupou's law codes contained no constitutional provisions and his rule remained absolute.[14]

After hostile visits by French gunboats in the 1840s and 1850s had made it apparent that Tonga's continued existence was under threat from Western imperialism, relations with Hawaiʻi intensified during the second half of the nineteenth century, and seeking Hawaiian advice in matters of governance gradually led to a constitutionalization of Tupou I's rule.[15] The connection with the larger sister kingdom to the north was first established in 1853, during the Tongan king's visit to the city of Sydney, upon invitation by the Wesleyan mission which was

[12] Sione Lātūkefu, *King George Tupou I of Tonga* (Nukuʻalofa: Tonga Traditions Committee, 1975).
[13] Ibid., 20–4; Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 81, 274.
[14] Bernard Gille, "L'Assemblée législative tahitienne (1824–1880)," *Revue française d'histoire d'outremer* 78:292 (1991): 375–96; David Keanu Sai, *Ua Mau ke Ea, Sovereignty Endures: An Overview of the Political and Legal History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: Pūʻā Foundation, 2011); and Kamanamaikalani Beamer, *No Mākou ka Mana: Liberating the Nation* (Honolulu: Kamehameha Publishing, 2014).
[15] Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 96–9.

headquartered there. In Sydney, Tupou met with Charles St. Julian, a local journalist who had just been appointed Hawaiian commissioner to the independent states and tribes of Polynesia by Kamehameha III of Hawai'i.[16] In consequence, St. Julian sent his attaché Sawkins to Tonga to report about the situation of the country in 1854; while Alexander Blake, a British settler married to a Tongan noblewoman, provided St. Julian with an English translation of the 1850 Tongan law code.[17]

Based on his personal conversations with King George Tupou during his visit to Sydney and the materials provided by Sawkins and Blake, St. Julian started a lengthy correspondence with the king during 1854 and 1855, in which the Hawaiian consul responded to Tupou's request for advice in modernizing the Tongan government.[18] St. Julian's main points of criticism were missionary dominance and control of the education system, compulsory labor by the commoners for their feudal lords, and the lack of checks and balances in the political system. The Hawaiian consul suggested instead granting freedom of religion, secularizing the education system, replacing compulsory labor with a cash taxation system, and creating a separation of powers, all of which had already been done in Hawai'i.[19]

Initially, King George Tupou was reluctant to adopt any of the suggested changes. Tongan historian Sione Lātūkefu suggests that the reason for the king's reluctance was the fact that his political supremacy over rivaling chiefs was still precarious in the mid-1850s, and he could not afford alienating them by limiting their privileges.[20] By the early 1860s, however, Tupou I had finally gained political supremacy over all remaining rivals in the aristocracy, so he was at last ready to embrace some of St. Julian's suggestions. A new law code was promulgated in 1862, which included a liberation of the commoners from compulsory labor and abolished some of the missionary-inspired prohibitions of the previous codes. Importantly, the 1862 code also created an assembly to advise the king in legislative matters, a first step toward a constitutional order.[21]

However, the reforms of 1862 were still far from what Western powers expected in order for Tonga to be considered recognizable as an independent state, as they had recognized Hawai'i since the 1840s.[22] For this reason, foreign residents refused to recognize Tongan laws and insisted on their homelands' consular

[16] Marion Diamond, *Creative Meddler: The Life and Fantasies of Charles St Julian* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990), 42.

[17] Ibid., 6; Blake's translation of the code is reproduced as appendix 3 in Charles St. Julian, *Official Report on Central Polynesia* (Sydney: John Fairfax and Sons, 1857), 70–2.

[18] The two most detailed letters by Charles St. Julian to King Tupou I, of 15 October 1855, are reproduced in St. Julian, *Official Report on Central Polynesia*, 66–9.

[19] Lātūkefu, *King George Tupou I*, 30–2.

[20] Ibid., 31–2.

[21] The earliest version of the 1862 code I have been able to examine is an 1868 revised edition, titled *Koe Gaahi Lao oe Buleaga o Toga …* (Togatabu: Fale Buluji oe Buleaga, 1868). An English translation is appended in Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga*, 238–51.

[22] Sione Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution: A Brief History to Celebrate Its Centenary* (Nuku'alofa: Tonga Traditions Committee, 1975), 25; and Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, 31.

jurisdiction, despite the absence of treaties formally establishing such.[23] In 1871, British settlers actually petitioned for the formal establishment of extraterritoriality, arguing that Tonga was only "semi-civilized."[24] In order to prevent this and make foreigners accept Tonga as fully "civilized," the king sent former Wesleyan missionary Shirley Baker, whom he had hired as his chief advisor in 1872, on an extended diplomatic mission to Sydney in 1873. Consulting with the premier of the British colony of New South Wales, as well as with Edward Reeve, St. Julian's successor as Hawaiian consul-general, Baker sought more detailed information on both the British colonial system in Australia and the Hawaiian Kingdom.[25] Having obtained a copy of the then Hawaiian Constitution of 1864, upon his return Baker promoted it as a model for Tonga in the Tongan-language newspaper *Koe Boobooi* and subsequently drafted the new constitution, which was promulgated on 2 November 1875.[26]

The 1875 Constitution consists of three parts, the first two parts essentially copying the Hawaiian Kingdom's. These included a bill of rights—including personal freedoms in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, such as freedom of speech—and a structure of government consisting of a legislative assembly, composed of both holders of noble titles and elected people's representatives, and a cabinet of ministers and privy council appointed by the king, including governors of the outer islands. The Constitution also regulated the succession to the throne in a strict system of male primogeniture (with female succession allowed as a last resort). Another innovation was the creation of hereditary noble titles (*nōpele* in Tongan, very obviously an English loanword) entitled to seats in the legislature. Of the many holders of chiefly titles of various ranks from the traditional Tongan system, a selection—those the king needed to reward in order to stabilize his rule—received titles inheritable according to the same rules of male primogeniture as the crown; furthermore, nobles—initially all of the same rank—could be promoted to the non-inheritable higher rank of baron.[27] Once again there were similarities to Meiji Japan, where holders of traditional Samurai ranks were appointed into Western-style titles of nobility, depending on political expediency.

The third part of the Constitution, drafted by Tupou and Baker without using outside models, created a unique land tenure system, attempting to balance the fear of dispossession by foreign investors, feudal revenue seeking by the nobility, and the rights of commoners to secure possession of their plots. It took several

[23] Lātūkefu, *King George Tupou I*, 39.
[24] Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, 69–70.
[25] Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga*, 201–2.
[26] *Koe Boobooi* 2:1 (1 March 1875): 3; *Koe Boobooi* 2:3 (1 May 1875): 20–1; and *Koe Tohi Lao o Toga* (Nuku'alofa: Fale Buluji oe Buleaga, 1876), 1–30. An English translation is provided as an appendix in Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 90–116. Hereafter *1875 Tongan Constitution*. For a recent in-depth discussion of the Constitution, see 'Inoke, *Legacy of Tonga's Constitution*.
[27] Elizabeth Bott, "Power and Rank in the Kingdom of Tonga," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 90:1 (1981): 7–81, at 59–60.

revisions throughout the 1880s and 1890s to perfect these provisions, but in the end all land was declared inalienable crown property and subject only to leaseholds, while the nobles were granted hereditary estates, which in turn they could lease to other parties.[28] Lands not included in a noble estate or assigned directly to the royal family as a crown estate were considered government estates. Commoners in turn could be granted hereditary land leases either from noble estate holders or directly from the government if located in government estates.[29]

Regional Relations

While still struggling to reunify Tonga, George Tupou I also started attempts to regain power over all the outer islands once under Tongan influence and thus restore the Tuʻi Tonga empire under a new dynasty (Fig. 24.2). When installed as the Tuʻi Kanokupolu in 1845 (i.e., while still based on Haʻapai and Vavaʻu and not yet having full control over Tongatapu), he had himself ceremonially addressed as ruler not only over Tonga but also over Fiji, Samoa, Niue, ʻUvea (Wallis), and Futuna. A brilliant strategist, Tupou I used the Wesleyan mission, which had also set up missions in some of those islands (Fig. 24.2), to recruit Tongan political agents. For instance, Tupou I attempted to invade ʻUvea in 1835 and continued attempts to gain influence there through a minority of Wesleyan converts—the majority as well as the island's paramount chief or king, Lavelua, having been converted to Catholicism.[30] In Samoa, the Tongan Wesleyan mission also acted as an important agent of Tupou's influence, and Tupou himself visited Samoa twice in the 1840s. However, the king did not involve the Tongan government directly in Samoan political affairs.[31]

In Fiji, Tongan converts were also heavily involved in the beginning of the Wesleyan mission on the eastern Fijian island of Lakeba in the 1830s. From the 1840s to the 1850s, King George Tupou's cousin Maʻafu conquered a large domain in Fiji in the name of the Tongan kingdom and subsequently administered the conquered territories as a Tongan official.[32] Tupou I himself intervened militarily in Fijian power struggles to support his local ally Cakobau, who

[28] *1875 Tongan Constitution*, Arts., 109–31.

[29] Guy Powles, "The Persistence of Chiefly Power and Its Implications for Law and Political Organisation in Western Polynesia" (Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1979), appendix D, 1–11.

[30] I. C. Campbell, "Imperialism, Dynasticism, and Conversion: Tongan Designs on ʻUvea (Wallis Island), 1835–1852," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 92:2 (1983): 155–67.

[31] I. C. Campbell, "The Alleged Imperialism of George Tupou I," *Journal of Pacific History* 25:2 (1990): 159–75. Nonetheless, there remained important political relations; for example, in 1875 a Samoan delegation traveled to Tonga to learn about the Tongan government system, according to an article in the Tongan government newspaper *Koe Boobooi* 2:5 (July/August 1875), 37.

[32] John Spurway, *Maʻafu, Prince of Tonga, Chief of Fiji: The Life and Times of Fiji's First Tui Lau* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2015).

subsequently converted to Wesleyanism. However, formal Tongan involvement in Fiji ended when Maʻafu officially separated himself and his Fijian domains from the Tongan government and instead became a Fijian chief in 1869. Four years earlier, Tupou had concluded written treaties in a Western fashion with the two closely allied Fijian chiefdoms of Lakeba and Bua, but they remained short lived, as the two Fijian states eventually merged into the larger Kingdom of Fiji under Cakobau in 1871, and Fiji as a whole was annexed as a British colony in 1874.[33]

Historian Ian Campbell has questioned the durability of Tupou's imperial project. The evidence in the Uvean and Samoan cases shows no long-term commitment to political domination over these islands, and it appears that the prolonged Tongan involvement in Fiji was more due to the personal ambitions of Maʻafu than to any concerted Tongan government policy. Campbell thus argues that throughout the 1850s, Tupou remained busy consolidating his power on Tongatapu and had no energy to get involved in overseas imperial activities. By the 1860s, when Tupou's power was fully consolidated in all of Tonga's core islands, Western imperial powers had already made important inroads into the region, and Tupou thereafter used a deliberately low-key approach to regional politics, with the safeguarding of Tonga itself as the chief goal.[34]

Instead of rebuilding a Tongan empire throughout Western Polynesia, Tupou thus consolidated his realm as a modern nation-state limited to the three core island groups of Tonga plus the two northern outliers of Niuatoputapu and Niuafoʻou. In 1887, Tonga enacted a law defining the territorial boundaries as a rectangle by longitudes and latitudes, simultaneously limiting the national territory to the mentioned islands and making Tonga one of the first instances of a nation claiming a boundary of its territorial sea (Fig. 24.2).[35]

Tonga's relations with Hawaiʻi were, despite the greater geographical distance, significant, as pointed out. Not only was Hawai'i's chief diplomat in Sydney, Charles St. Julian, the first official of another government with whom Tupou I maintained a sustained correspondence; St. Julian's above-mentioned 1855 appointee as Hawaiian consul in Tonga, Alexander Blake, was also the first resident foreign representative in the kingdom.[36] After Blake passed away in the

[33] Treaty between Jioaji Tubou [Sioasi Tupou], King of the Tongan Islands, As Represented by Tubou Haabai [Tupou Haʻapai] and Henele Maafu on the First Part, and Jioaji Tui Bua of the Second Part, 3 January 1865; Treaty between George Tubou [Tupou] King of the Friendly Isles, As Represented by Henry Maafu and Tubou Haabai [Tupou Haʻapai] of the One Part, and Tui Neiau [Tui Nayau] King of Lakeba and Surrounding Islands, of the Other Part, 14 February 1865. Manuscript copies of the English versions of the treaties, as registers nos. 371 and 383 on pp. 620 and 653 of deeds book, HBM Consulate Registry of Deeds 1858–1873, National Archives of Fiji.

[34] Campbell, "Alleged Imperialism."

[35] Hans J. Buchholz, *Seerechtszonen im Pazifischen Ozean: Australien/Neuseeland, Ost- und Südostasien, Südpazifik* (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1984), 116–17.

[36] Gabriella Renee Blake-ʻIlolahia, *Alexander Blake* (Nukuʻalofa: Privately published, 2016). Descendants of Blake married into the Tongan royal family, so that the current king Tupou VI and his older brother and predecessor George Tupou V are both direct descendants of Alexander Blake.

early 1860s, however, there was a hiatus in Tongan-Hawaiian relations until the previously mentioned constitutional exchange of the mid-1870s. Finally, after King Tupou I had appointed Shirley Baker premier and minister of foreign affairs in 1880, Baker initiated negotiations directly with Hawai'i's foreign ministry for a formal treaty of friendship, which, however, were not completed at the time.[37] In late 1886, King Kalākaua wrote to Tupou I, expressing his "feelings of friendship which We have always entertained towards Your Majesty and the Tongan People, a race so closely allied by blood to the Hawaiians," and appointed a diplomatic delegation to resume treaty negotiations, as well as to invite Tonga to join a Polynesian confederation Hawai'i had already formed with Samoa.[38] But neither of the two projects could be realized because of the combined effects of German gunboat diplomacy in Samoa and a coup d'état by pro-American settlers in Hawai'i.[39]

While durable political alliances with other island nations failed (until Tonga joined Pacific regional organizations in the post-colonial era in the second half of the twentieth century), aristocratic connections and marriage alliances with Polynesian neighbor islands have always been important. Both the Tu'i Tonga dynasty and lower-ranking Tongan chiefly families have always been part of genealogical networks extending into Fiji and Samoa, with several chiefly and nobility titles pointing to place names there, such as Tu'ilakepa, referring to Lakeba in Fiji; or Tu'i Kanokupolu, connecting to the island of Upolu in Samoa. This continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and close relations between the Tongan royal family and leading aristocratic families of Samoa, Fiji, the Cook Islands, Tahiti, and the Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand) endure to this day. A marriage alliance with the Pomare royal family of Tahiti, namely the wedding of George Tupou I's great-grandson and successor George Tupou II to Princess Edith Marie Pomare, was once planned but did not materialize.[40] A relationship of Tupou II with one of Cakobau's granddaughters, on the other hand, resulted in a Fijian branch of Tonga's royal family that includes none less than the former president of the Republic of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau (in office 2009–2015).[41]

[37] Lorenz Gonschor, "Manuscript XXXIV: 'The Feelings of Friendship Which We Have Always Entertained'; Fragments of Tongan-Hawaiian Relations, 1880–8," *Journal of Pacific History* 55:1 (2020): 97–114.

[38] King Kalākaua to George Tupou, 3 December 1886, typescript copy from retired fragile letter book, Series 418, Box 2 (executive correspondence, outgoing, Kalakaua 1886–1887), FO&Ex, Hawai'i State Archives. I acknowledge Kealani Cook and Tēvita Ka'ili for first bringing this letter to my attention. Jason Horn Horn, "Primacy of the Pacific under the Hawaiian Kingdom" (MA thesis, University of Hawai'i, 1951), 105–7.

[39] Malama Meleiseā, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Authority in the Modern History of Western Samoa* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987), 39; and Paul F. Hooper, *Elusive Destiny: The Internationalist Movement in Modern Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1980), 65.

[40] "Tahiti: The Pomare Dynasty," The Royal Ark: Royal and Ruling Houses of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, online.

[41] Wood-Ellem, *Queen Sālote of Tonga*, 61; and "Tonga: The Tupou Dynasty," The Royal Ark, online.

Relations with the Western Powers

Tupou I initially used military force to consolidate power domestically, as well as trying to reconquer parts of the former Tu'i Tonga empire during the first half of the nineteenth century. Numerous troops of able-bodied men, organized and drilled in the fashion of traditional warriors and equipped with muskets, axes, and traditional weapons such as spears and war clubs, remained at the king's disposal to quell domestic opposition throughout the second half of the century, such as those used to persecute loyalists of the Wesleyan mission in the 1880s mentioned above.[42] However, once confronted with overwhelming European naval power, starting with hostile visits by French warships in the 1840s and 1850s, Tupou I and his advisors quickly realized that their small kingdom had no resources to build a military force that would be able to face any European navy in battle. Hence, Tonga did not make serious attempts to modernize its armed forces—except for a small royal palace guard corresponding to Western standards in uniforms and equipment—but rather focused exclusively on diplomacy in its relations with Western powers (Fig. 24.3).[43]

Arguably the first act of such diplomacy was the above-mentioned visit of the Tongan king to Sydney in 1853, even though it was more of a private visit to the headquarters of the Wesleyan mission and lacked the protocol of a state visit. Nonetheless, the trip became an important inspiration for Tupou I, as it provided him a first-hand view of Western society, with both positive aspects to emulate (modern infrastructure, technology, and administration) and negative ones to avoid (the land- and homelessness and poverty of the lowest classes, especially of Australian Aborigines).[44] While the British Empire and its agents officially ignored him, since Tonga did not yet have formal relations with any power and the kingdom was considered only "semi-civilized" at the time, the formal relations Tupou I established with Hawai'i through the trip served as a model and inspiration to achieve proper relations with the Western powers as well.

Tonga's formal state-to-state relations with the West started in a quite different manner in 1855. After protests by French Catholic missionaries about being discriminated against in favor of the British Wesleyans, a French navy ship sent by the French commissioner in Tahiti (from 1847 a French protectorate) compelled King George Tupou I to sign an unequal treaty with Paris, granting French citizens extraterritorial privileges in Tonga. While often regarded as Tonga's first treaty, there are some uncertainties about its status under French law, since unlike

[42] Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, 153–76.

[43] Only under the British protectorate in the twentieth century would a modern Tongan military force be built, mainly to serve British imperial interests, see Amanda L. Sullivan Lee, "Tau: A Brief History of the Tongan Military from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present" (MA thesis, University of Hawai'i, 2019).

[44] Lātūkefu, *King George Tupou I.*

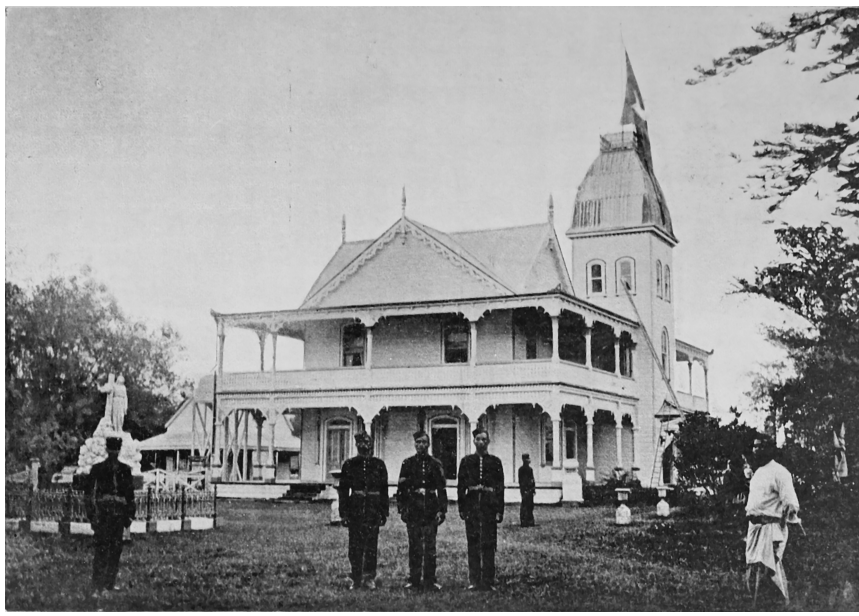

Fig. 24.3 Palace guards in front of the royal palace in Nukuʻalofa, Tonga. Built by King George Tupou I in 1867, it symbolized Tonga's standing as a modernized native state in parity with the Western powers, ca. 1900. (Unknown photographer) (Public Domain)

other similar arrangements with other Pacific Islands kingdoms, the 1855 Tongan Treaty was not filed as a treaty in the French diplomatic archives but ended up in an obscure box in the French colonial archives instead.[45]

During Tonga's second major diplomatic mission to Sydney, Shirley Baker's above-mentioned 1873 trip, and despite the subsequent creation of a constitutional government modeled on that of Hawaiʻi, Great Britain still refused to give formal recognition to Tonga, possibly to keep open the option of colonial annexation and avoid creating a precedent for other emerging indigenous kingdoms in neighboring archipelagos such as Samoa, where Britain had important commercial interests.[46] Tupou I's government hence turned its attention elsewhere and concluded

[45] Koe tohi fakatotonu a Tupou koe Tui o otu fonua o Toga, pea mo du Bouzet e kovena oe kakai falanise oku nofo i Oseania, a ia oku ne fai oe tohi ni koe fekau a e afio a Napoleone III koe Tui o falanise; Convention entre le Tupou, roi des iles Tonga d'une part, et, au nom de sa Majesté Napoléon III Empereur des Français, M. du Bouzet chef de division, gouverneur des établissements français de l'Océanie d'autre part, 9 January 1855, original in File B 14, Box 13, Océanie, National Overseas Archives, Aix-en-Provence; Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga*, 166.

[46] On Samoa's struggle for sovereignty and attempts at state building at the time, see Lorenz Gonschor, "A Pan-Pacific Synthesis of Nation-Building: Samoan, Hawaiian, Tongan and American Contributions to the First Constitution of Sāmoa, 1873–1875," in Seve Folototo Seve, Togialelei Safua Akeli, Anita Latai Niusulu, and Sauiʻa Louise Mataia Milo, eds., *Proceedings of the Samoa Conference IV, 2018* (Apia: Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa), 39–50.

an international treaty with the German empire in 1876.[47] Since the 1850s, Tonga had hosted an important community of German immigrants, most of them merchants and traders, and by the 1870s much of Tonga's international trade passed through German hands.[48] Establishing formal political relations with Germany was thus a mutually beneficial venture. The treaty contained no unequal provisions, and thus theoretically elevated the Tongan kingdom to a status of equality with Western powers.[49] Subsequent relations with the German empire were cordial, demonstrated for instance when in 1880 the body of Crown Prince and Premier Tēvita 'Unga, who had passed away in Auckland, was repatriated to Tonga aboard a German warship.[50]

However, Tongan attempts to use the German treaty as a precedent for relations with other powers were not successful. While the German treaty doubtless provided leverage to persuade Great Britain to undertake some degree of recognition, the treaty Britain concluded with Tonga in 1879 was unequal, as was its amended version of 1891.[51] In addition, because of a "Most Favored Nation" clause in the treaty with Germany, German nationals could henceforth claim the same provisions of extraterritorial privileges as Britons, which rendered the German treaty *de facto* unequal as well. Like all other non-Western states in the nineteenth century except Hawai'i, Tonga was thus trapped in the unequal treaty regime.[52] In 1888, Tonga also concluded a treaty with the United States of America.[53] Although somewhat more equitable than the British treaty in providing something of reciprocity in jurisdictional extraterritoriality, in effect the American treaty only served to confirm the unequal treaty regime for the kingdom.

[47] Talite Feofeani a Jiamani mo Toga; Freundschaftsvertrag zwischen Seiner Majestät dem Deutschen Kaiser, König von Preußen etc. im Namen des Deutschen Reichs, und Seiner Majestät dem Könige von Tonga; Treaty of Friendship between His Majesty the German Emperor, King of Prussia etc. in the Name of the German Empire, and His Majesty the King of Tonga, 1 November 1876; original in Treaty Archives, Political Archives of the Foreign Office of Germany, Berlin. Reprinted in Tongan in *Koe Boobooi* 2:13 (November 1877): 107–8. The German and English texts were reprinted in *Reichs-Gesetzblatt*, 34 (1877): 517–22.

[48] James N. Bade, *Germans in Tonga* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).

[49] Johannes H. Voigt, "Tonga und die Deutschen oder: Imperialistische Geburtshilfe für eine Nation im Pazifik," in Hermann Joseph Hiery, ed., *Die Deutsche Südsee, 1884–1914: Ein Handbuch* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2001), 712–24.

[50] Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, 125–8.

[51] Treaty of Friendship between Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and His Majesty the King of Tonga; Koe Talite o Bilitania mo Toga. Printed English version in item 18 874 431, Archives New Zealand, Wellington. Tongan version reprinted in *Koe Tohi Lao oe Buleaga o Toga, 1883. Ko Hono Tolugofulu ma Valu Ta'u oe Bule Monuia* ihe *Kelesi ae Otua oe Kigi Ko Jioaji Tubou* (Nuku'alofa: Kuo Buluji Maae Buleaga o Toga 1883): 162–4. The English version of the 1891 revision, Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and Tonga; Made by Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and His Majesty the King of Tonga on the Twenty-Ninth Day of November 1879 and Amended on the Second Day of June 1891, was reprinted in *The Law of Tonga, 1891: Passed by the Legislative Assembly, and Sanctioned by His Majesty in the Year 1891* (Auckland: H. Brett, for the Tongan Government, 1891), appendix, xix–xx.

[52] Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism*, 5.

[53] Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation, between the United States of America and the King of Tonga; English version reprinted in *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776–1949*, vol. 11 (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1974), 1043–7.

It was mainly Great Britain, however, that used the unequal treaty regime to its advantage in Tonga. British officials, specifically vice consul Alfred Maudslay and his successors John Blyth and H. F. Symonds, acting under orders from the Western Pacific high commissioners in Fiji, especially Arthur Gordon, in office 1878–1880, and John Thurston, in office 1880, 1885–1887, 1888–1895, and 1896–1897, frequently meddled in the kingdom's internal affairs. For instance, they used the treaty's extraterritoriality provisions in order to claim oversight over Tonga's finances—given that many of the taxpayers were British settlers—and threatened to deport British subjects working for the Tongan government, thereby undermining more and more any degree of Tongan sovereignty Britain had acknowledged in the treaty. The Tongan government, aware that similar meddling by British officials had recently led to Fiji being annexed by the United Kingdom in 1874, and to Samoa's government being dismantled and the archipelago's descent into chaos through the deportation of its American-born premier in 1876, reacted initially by seeking dialogue and conciliation with Britain, rather than further confrontation. But mutual mistrust continued.[54]

Increasing Tensions and Imperialist Interference

Increasing British interference coincided with tensions within Tongan society arising during the 1880s, and the two mutually reinforced each other: since Tupou I survived the first and second generations of his heirs, the longevity of the founder of the modern kingdom led to a more and more acute succession crisis. As the pool of possible successors to the throne increased, intrigues among and between rivaling aristocratic families intensified. There was also an increasing presence of British settlers who insisted—more than their German counterparts—on their extraterritorial treaty rights.[55]

Most important, perhaps, were the growing ruptures within the Wesleyan mission. The unconditional support given by Baker to Tupou I and his government, for which he had been rewarded with the premiership after Tēvita 'Unga's death in 1880, was strongly criticized by other missionaries. Arguing that Tonga had now been Christian for several generations and should not be considered a "mission field" anymore, Tupou I and Baker made the case for the creation of an independent Tongan Church no longer under the authority of the Wesleyan headquarters in Australia; but this met with staunch refusal from Sydney. In

[54] Deryck Scarr, *Fragments of Empire: A History of the Western Pacific High Commission, 1877–1914* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1967), 93–107; and Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, 215–19.

[55] One such obnoxious British settler was printer and journalist Robert Hanslip, who put his printing press at the disposal of the king's opponents, see Ralph D. Barney, "An Early Public War of Words in Pacific Politics: Tonga 1860–1890," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 38:3 (1974): 349–60.

Tonga, this colonialist attitude of the Wesleyan missionaries was spearheaded by James Moulton, the founder of Tupou College, a selective mission school intended to educate a native elite.[56] A visionary of high-standard education that went beyond the simple paternalistic mission schools advocated by most of his colleagues, including classics and sciences, Moulton certainly had long-term goals for the nation similar to Tupou I.[57] Unfortunately, however, Moulton looked down on Baker for being less educated and ended up siding with the paternalistic mission superiors in Sydney, British imperialists, and opposition Tongan nobles.

Characterizing themselves as a "Christian nation" rather than a "mission field" was of course also a political move that Tupou I and Baker hoped would strengthen Tonga's international position. For virtually the entire nineteenth century, being a Christian state was one of the necessary conditions for a non-Western power to achieve inclusion in the family of nations as a full-fledged member; and Hawai'i, the fellow Polynesian kingdom and great political model for Tonga, had indeed achieved this status.[58] Of course, merely being Christian was not sufficient; Madagascar, which had similarly been recently converted by Protestant missionaries, and Ethiopia, which had been Christian for well over a millennium, had both fought in vain for full-fledged sovereignty and were instead subjected to unequal treaty regimes, just like non-Christian states. But the proximity of Hawai'i certainly made Tongan leaders think more in terms of the latter.

The argument about church autonomy came to a head in 1885, when Tupou and Baker founded the Free Church of Tonga and started persecuting those Wesleyans siding with the Sydney mission. In retaliation, in early 1887 a group of Tongan opponents attempted to murder Baker, who suspected a larger conspiracy involving British government agents behind the failed assassination. With accusations going back and forth, internal discussions reveal that British officials began to contemplate establishing a protectorate from 1887.[59] Three years later, contemplation turned into real gunboat diplomacy: a British naval invasion personally commanded by Thurston in 1890 used a broad interpretation of the extraterritoriality clause in the Tongan-British Treaty as a justification to arrest and deport Premier Baker (who had not formally renounced being a British subject) and force King Tupou I to appoint a pro-British government headed by opposition noble Siaosi Tuku'aho, a friend of the British settler community, as premier, assisted by British imperial official Basil Thomson as "deputy premier" (a position not provided for in the Constitution). Under Thomson's aegis, the

[56] Siupeli Taliai, Helen Taliai, Geoffrey Cummins, Anne Cummins, 'Alifeleti 'Atiola, and 'Aioema 'Atiola, eds., *Tupou College Sesquicentennial History, 1866–2016* (Toloa, Tonga: Tupou College, 2016).

[57] James Egan Moulton, *Moulton of Tonga* (London: Epworth Press, 1921).

[58] British legal scholar John Westlake, for instance, mentions in his 1894 treatise on international law that besides all states in Europe and the Americas, international society included "a few Christian States in other parts of the world, as the Hawaiian Islands, Liberia and the Orange Free State," see John Westlake, *Chapters on the Principles of International Law* (Cambridge: University Press, 1894), 81–2.

[59] Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, 181–219.

Tongan Constitution as well as the Tongan-British Treaty were revised in order to strengthen British power.[60]

Denouement

In 1893, George Tupou I, the ruler who shaped Tonga for most of the nineteenth century, passed away at an age of well over 90. He was succeeded by his 19-year-old great-grandson, who took the name George Tupou II. While evidently unexperienced, the new king made the wise decision of dismissing Tukuʻaho as premier and replacing him with Siosāteki, a more loyal and more competent noble who had worked under Baker.[61] However, the existing tensions between the royal palace, the Free Church, German settlers, and economic interests on the one hand, and the Wesleyan mission, British settlers, and the British Western Pacific High Commission in Fiji on the other, continued.

Furthermore, the geopolitical environment changed. In 1899, as part of the Tripartite Convention relating to Samoa, Germany and Great Britain demarcated their interests in the Central Pacific, and while Britain renounced all its claims in Samoa to Germany, Tonga now fell into the British sphere of influence. The strategy Tonga had used during most of Topou's lifetime to keep itself in a niche of sovereignty by skillfully playing off British and German imperial interests against each other had lost its point. Soon thereafter, in 1900, a second British naval invasion took place, during which Tupou II was forced to sign a new version of the treaty with Great Britain. Even though still formally called a "friendship treaty," it was in fact a protectorate agreement through which Tonga lost its ability to conduct its own foreign affairs.[62] In 1905, an additional amendment was added that formally allowed domestic interference as well.

However, unlike in most other such cases, in which a protectorate became the first step toward eventual colonial annexation (e.g., Madagascar and Tahiti), Tonga remained a protectorate for the next seven decades, spanning the remainder of the reigns of George Tupou II and his daughter Queen Sālote Tupou, and the beginning of the reign of her son Tāufaʻāhau Tupou IV.[63] It never became a British colony and conserved a considerable degree of autonomy, more than was typical for British protectorates. Officially, Tonga was not even referred to as a

[60] Tellingly, Tukuʻaho was not buried in any of the Tongan aristocratic burial grounds but rather in a single roadside grave with a headstone bearing the telling inscription, "erected by the Europeans of Tongatapu," see Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 139; Powles, "Persistence of Chiefly Power," appendix D, 8–11; and Thomson's memoirs of the period, Basil Thomson, *The Diversions of a Prime Minister* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1894).

[61] Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 138.

[62] Ibid., 133–4.

[63] Wood-Ellem, *Queen Sālote of Tonga*; and ʻAmanaki Taulahi, *His Majesty King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV of the Kingdom of Tonga: A Biography* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1979).

protectorate but rather as a "protected state."[64] Overall, one could say that the Tongan kingdom survived the protectorate period rather smoothly, until in 1970, following the tide of decolonization in surrounding island territories, the protectorate treaty was dissolved, and Tonga regained its independence as a sovereign state and member of the Commonwealth of Nations. In 1971 Tonga was a founding member of the South Pacific Forum, still the primary regional organization today.[65] In 1999, together with the other small island states of Kiribati and Nauru, Tonga joined the United Nations.[66]

The protectorate period also provided the framework in which close relations with the British royal family were established. Unlike Hawai'i and the larger Asian countries, the Tongan royal family was absent from late nineteenth-century networks and events of the European high aristocracy such as Queen Victoria's jubilees. By the mid-twentieth century, however, Tongan royals were part of similar events, such as Queen Sālote Tupou's well-publicized presence at Queen Elizabeth II's 1953 coronation, reciprocated by the latter's visit to Tonga a few months later.[67] Close connections with the British royal family and other royal houses throughout the world continue to this day.[68]

New political conflicts arose in the final two decades of the twentieth century over the question of democratization. In fact, due to the near absence of civil society pressure groups at the time, the late nineteenth-century Tongan Constitution had been made more authoritarian than its Hawaiian model.[69] This had been reinforced through amendments made in 1914 under the British protectorate, which caused the legislature to be dominated by royal appointees.[70] Due to a growing Tongan diaspora overseas and better educational opportunities, the development of civil society accelerated in the 1980s, which marked the beginning of a democracy movement. Its protests against the authoritarian monarchy and aristocracy increased steadily, culminating in violent riots after the death of King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV in 2006.[71]

The new king George Tupou V eventually gave in and agreed to a major constitutional reform in 2010. Tonga now resembles a parliamentary Westminster

[64] In contrast, several other territories within the British Empire named "protectorate," e.g., the Solomon Islands, were *de facto* colonies with merely a smaller colonial bureaucratic apparatus than those named "crown colony."

[65] Greg Fry, *Framing the Islands: Power and Diplomatic Agency in Pacific Regionalism* (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2019), 111–15.

[66] "Members States," website of the United Nations, online.

[67] Wood-Ellem, *Queen Sālote of Tonga*, 238–57.

[68] For instance, George Tupou V's visits to the king of Bhutan in 2007 and 2010; the current King Tupou VI's attendance at Queen Elizabeth II's diamond jubilee in 2012; and the visits to Tonga of Prince William and Duchess Catherine in 2011 and of Prince Harry and Duchess Meghan in 2018.

[69] Powles, "Persistence of Chiefly Power," appendix D, 6–7.

[70] Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 142.

[71] For a chronology of the Tongan Democracy movement and its achievements, see Ian C. Campbell, *Tonga's Way to Democracy* (Christchurch: Herodotus Press, 2011).

system, with a prime minister elected by the legislative assembly, even though one third of legislators remain selected by noble title holders, and the king retains certain executive powers.[72] Most Tongans today take great pride in being citizens of the only hybridized indigenous monarchy in Oceania to have survived through the imperial period, but the country is still trying to find a balance between preserving traditions and finding its place in a changing modern world.[73]

Indeed, for nearly the entire nineteenth century, Tonga's policy was highly effective in safeguarding the country from Western imperialism. This was due mainly to two factors: the personality and long life of King George Tupou I and the relatively marginal position of the archipelago in terms of European economic interests in the region (which were mainly concentrated in neighboring Fiji and Samoa). It was the very same marginalization, however, that also brought disadvantages to Tonga's struggle for sovereignty. For instance, unlike Hawai'i, Tonga lacked the resources to have its own diplomatic network to lobby for its interests on a global scale. In the end, during the scramble for the colonization of the last independent Pacific archipelagos in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Tonga was unable to maintain its independence in the face of horse-trading between the Western powers in creating spheres of influence—for instance, as a buffer-state between such spheres, like Siam had the opportunity to do. Nonetheless, the ability to present itself as a relatively well-functioning and stable state in Western terms, and the keeping of a certain firmness in negotiations despite overwhelming British military power, allowed Tonga to end up with the least intrusive of all possible imperial regimes in Oceania.

[72] Guy Powles, *Political and Constitutional Reform Opens the Door: The Kingdom of Tonga's Path to Democracy* (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 2013); and 'Inoke, *Legacy of Tonga's Constitution*.

[73] Trish Tupou and Amanda Sullivan-Lee, "Tonga," *The Contemporary Pacific* 33:1 (2021): 252–9.