

Tonga

ETHNONYMS: None

Orientation

Identification. The Kingdom of Tonga, located in the South Pacific Ocean, was under the protection of Great Britain from 1900 to 1970. Tongans have had a constitutional monarchy since 1875 and in 1970 Tonga became an independent country, joining the British Commonwealth of Nations. The islands of Tonga (known to eighteenth-century Europeans as the "Friendly Islands" because of the friendly reception given to explorers) have a total area of approximately 646 square kilometers. The word *tonga* means "south" in many Polynesian languages.

Location. In 1887, the territorial boundaries of the kingdom were established to encompass an ocean area from 15° to 23° S by 173° to 177° W. The islands fall within a rectangle some 959 kilometers from north to south and 425 kilometers

from east to west. The three principal island groups, from north to south, are: the Tongatapu group (*tapu* means "sacred"); the Ha'apai group; and the Yava'u group. Tongatapu Island, the largest island in the kingdom, is the seat of Tongan government. The Tongan Islands are the low coral type, with some volcanic formations. The highest point in the Kingdom of Tonga is 1,030 meters on the uninhabited volcanic island of Kao. Tongatapu Island has a maximum elevation of 82 meters along the southern coast and the island of Yava'u reaches to the height of 305 meters. Average temperature in the Kingdom of Tonga in the winter months of June-July is 16-21° C and in the summer months of December-January it is about 27° C. The island chain of Tonga is classified as semitropical even though in the northern islands there is a true tropical climate and rainfall on Yava'u can be as much as 221 centimeters per year. Rainfall on Tongatapu averages 160 centimeters per year, with November to March being the local hurricane season. Because of the destructive powers of hurricanes striking mainly in the northern Tongan Islands, the southern island of Tongatapu became the place where Tongan culture was established with relative permanency.

Demography. It has been estimated that in the year 1800 there were approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Tongans residing throughout the islands. In 1989 the resident population of the Kingdom of Tonga was estimated to be 108,000, with Tongans comprising 98 percent of the population and the remainder being other islanders or foreign nationals. The capital and principal city of the kingdom is Nuku'alofa, with an estimated population of 30,000, located on Tongatapu Island. Tongatapu Island itself has an estimated island population of 64,000. There are 48,000 Tongans who are ages of 0-14 (45 percent); 54,000 ages 15-59 (50 percent); and 6,000 (5 percent) over the age of 60. There are also approximately 40,000 to 50,000 Tongan nationals residing in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America.

Linguistic Affiliation. The Tongan language is derived from a proto-Fijian-Polynesian language originally spoken by Fiji islanders about 1500 B.C. Linguistic and archaeological evidence points to the migration of people into Tonga from locations north and west of the islands.

History and Cultural Relations

Through the use of carbon-14 dating techniques, a date of 1140 B.C. is the given date for the beginning of human occupation of Tongatapu. The first Europeans to visit the Tongan Islands were Dutch navigators in 1616 (Willem Schouten and Jacob LeMaire) and additional contacts occurred as other Europeans explored the Pacific throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Contacts between Europeans and Tongans lasted for periods of a few days to several weeks. Publications by Europeans about Pacific Islanders placed Tonga firmly on the map of the world. These published accounts, coupled with the great evangelical revival that swept Europe in the nineteenth century, caused organizations to send individuals to convert the peoples of the Pacific. Tonga, along with the South Pacific islands of Tahiti, was one of the first island groups to receive European missionaries specifically for the purpose of converting the native inhabitants to Christianity. After European missionaries

landed in Tahiti in 1797, additional missionaries continued on to Tongatapu. Other missionaries also arrived in Tonga in 1822 and in 1826 two Tahitians who had converted to Christianity in their native islands arrived on Tongatapu while en route to Fiji and began their Christian work among the Tongan natives. There is no indication that Tongans had extensive trading voyages with other Polynesian island groups. Modern Tonga, an ethnically homogeneous Polynesian kingdom, is attempting to find its way into the twenty-first century. Tongans in the islands are extremely dependent upon relatives living overseas who send money back to family members. In recent years, funds sent back to Tonga from relatives living abroad amounted to ten times the amount of income the kingdom generated from the export of agricultural products such as copra, vanilla, and bananas. Attempts at solving the inherent economic problems of the kingdom have included oil exploration since the 1960s, foreign aid, and increased tourism ventures. As of this publication, however, no oil has been discovered, foreign aid continues, and the tourism industry is much too fragile and dependent upon variables beyond the control of Tongans. Late in 1989, individuals in Tonga began discussing the possibility of a casino for tourists that would be open only to foreign-passport holders in the kingdom.

Settlements

Prior to European missionaries, Tongans lived in dispersed settlement patterns that were kin-based and kin-related territorial units. A typical Tongan residential site included a home (*fale*), with a thatched roof and sides made from woven coconut-palm fronds, as well as a separate area for cooking purposes that would have an earthen oven (*'umu*). Today, in addition to some traditional thatched homes, numerous non-traditional or European-American homes (made of wood, concrete, and metal) are located throughout the islands.

Economy

Subsistence and Commercial Activities. Prior to the establishment of a market economy, Tongans were subsistence farmers and fishers who had adapted to the environment of their relatively small groups of islands. Because of the relatively low population density of the islands in traditional times, Tongans were essentially self-sufficient horticulturalists and fishers who traded for foodstuffs and material goods among themselves. In the late 1980s, earnings from the tourism industry, accompanied by funds received from Tongans living abroad, accounted for the majority of all personal income in the Kingdom of Tonga. In traditional Tonga, tropical products such as yams, breadfruit, taro, and coconuts were all cultivated on small farms. Tongans fished the surrounding waters by spear fishing, by net fishing, and by hand. In recent years the pressures of population growth and tourism have forced Tongans to import much of their foodstuffs, including canned meats and fish.

Industrial Arts. Contemporary Tongans are small-scale handicraft manufacturers for the tourist industry and there are still independent artisans, manufacturers of basketry and wood carvings, on the islands. In traditional times, Tongans carved small statues and bowls and manufactured other

items, such as baskets, mats, and sails, from tropical materials.

Trade. Evidence indicates that, in traditional times, Tongans had large double-hulled canoes called *kalia* that could carry provisions for up to 200 people, and in them Tongans made extensive trading voyages between Fiji and Samoa.

Division of Labor. Young males in traditional Tonga followed their father's occupation, with the eldest son receiving the title to the trade. Hereditary occupations included canoe building, fishing, and cooking; some trades could be hereditary or not, such as tattooing and barbering. Both men and women could be priests, and women also gathered reef fishes and fished with nets in the lagoon. Women manufactured valuable items (*koloa*), such as basketry, mats, and tapa, and women prepared kava. Kava, the nonnarcotic drink made from the roots of the *Piper methysticum* plant, continues to be an important social and ceremonial drink and elaborate rituals involving kava drinking exist for various ceremonial occasions such as marriages and funerals. Tapa, a clothlike material made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*), is still widely manufactured today for sale to tourists. Mats in traditional Tonga, woven for floors and walls, could also be worn as waist garments (*ta'ovala*) or used as sails for canoes. With a cash economy and increased sales of female-produced items for the tourist market, certain women now make more money than men, and tensions between the sexes have increased in contemporary Tonga.

Land Tenure. Current Tongan law guarantees that every male over the age of 16 should receive an allotment of land: an *'api* of 3.3 hectares for agricultural purposes and 0.16 of a hectare as a site for a home. Because of population growth and limited natural resources, however, thousands of Tongan males are landless today. Prior to the Tongan constitution, established in 1875 by King George Tupou I (1797-1893), land rights in Tonga were vested with an extended kinship group, the *ha'a*, a corporate landholding and property-sharing descent group. The leadership of the *ha'a* distributed resources to members. In 1875, however, all land was acquired by the Crown for redistribution to a newly created class of hereditary nobles (*nopele*) for eventual redistribution to the people.

Kinship

Kin Groups and Descent. Divided into various *ha'a*, traditional Tongan society had a patrilineal descent system, yet matrilineal lines were also taken into consideration for decisions involving chiefs. Tongan society was—and continues to be—an extremely rank-conscious society, with rank being based on age or birth order, gender, and kinship affiliation. There was a great deal of mobility in traditional Tongan society, and the rank of an individual on any given occasion was relative to the other individuals present at that occasion.

Kinship Terminology. Kinship terminology was extended to collateral relatives, though to a lesser degree than in the Hawaiian system.

Marriage and the Family

Marriage. Monogamy was and is the norm in Tonga, but in traditional times multiple marriages were not uncommon and marriage dissolutions and subsequent remarriages often occurred.

Domestic Unit. Traditionally, a wife became part of her husband's lineage upon marriage and set up residence in the territory of her husband's ha'a or in the area of a smaller kindred group (*kainga*). Large families were the rule in Tonga, and children were frequently adopted by individuals. The extended family was—and continues to be—an important organizing group in Tonga.

Inheritance. Currently there are strict rules of male primogeniture in Tonga, but in traditional times adopted and fictive kin could inherit various titles and possessions. Much of traditional Tongan consensus and flexibility was eliminated with the introduction of Tongan law codes and the constitution of 1875.

Socialization. That which occurs in Tonga in day-to-day existence is *fakatonga*, or the Tongan way of life or doing things; Tongans have continuously adapted to changing environmental situations to the best of their abilities. The most important agents of socialization in traditional Tonga were members within the immediate family and then individuals of the ha'a: parents, siblings, and near relations were key. In contemporary Tonga, in addition to family relations, criteria such as religious affiliation, educational background, and whether one is of the *nopele* class or "commoner" class contribute to day-to-day socialization activities. Perhaps the most important expression of Tongan reality is the concept of *'ofa*, literally "to love" or have a fondness towards an individual; the phrase *'ofa atu* (literally, "love to you") can be heard on many important ceremonial occasions.

Sociopolitical Organization

Social Organization. Tongan society was and is hierarchical in nature. There is an administrative class consisting of the agreed-upon titleholders or rulers, currently personified by the nobles (*nopele*) and the reigning monarch. Experts in traditions or spokespersons (*matapule*) are next, followed by the bulk of the populace, the commoners. Before the Europeans arrived in Tonga, the embodiment of all that was sacred and secular (and leader of all Tongans) was the individual designated as the "Tu'i Tonga." In approximately the fifteenth century, as Tongan society expanded in size, a division was made between the sacred and secular aspects of managing the islands. An individual who was the brother of the Tu'i Tonga was designated the "Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua," the administrator of the secular aspects of Tongan society. Approximately 200 years later, the Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua delegated some of his secular authority to his son and created the lineage known as the "Tu'i Kanokupolu." In traditional times, the fourth major Tongan individual was the sister of the Tu'i Tonga, designated the "Tu'i Tonga Fefine," given the title of "Tamaha." All Tongans, including the reigning monarch of the modern Kingdom of Tonga, theoretically trace their kinship affiliations, and hence their rank relative to one another, from these four chiefly titleholders. In traditional Tonga, succession to a title and chieftainship depended upon a variety of factors, especially the decision of the corporate land-

holding and property-sharing descent group. Any individual who had a position of authority in traditional Tongan society and had a title as evidence of rank did not have the title because of any inherent rights but only because he or she had the consensus of the governed group. The titleholder operated within a system of checks and balances that ensured that the governed were willing to be influenced and led by these individuals.

Political Organization. Tongan culture began to change in the seventeenth century, when the first European explorers landed in the islands. The culmination of these changes took place in 1875 when the Tongan constitution was introduced. By the nineteenth century, a traditional and flexible system of titles and inheritance, which had been in operation for hundreds of years, passed out of existence. In 1875, a rigid father-to-son inheritance system was instituted and the inherent consensus and flexibility concerning the rights of leadership or chieftainship passed out of existence.

Social Control. Informal social control could take the form of gossip when there was inadequate social reciprocity on various occasions. Tonga operates under a constitutional monarchy and in addition to the current reigning monarch there is an executive branch (consisting of the prime minister and a cabinet appointed by the king) as well as the legislative and judicial branches. The twenty-nine-member Legislative Assembly or parliament consists of the governors of Ha'apai and Yava'u, nine cabinet ministers, nine nobles, and nine commoners. Tonga also maintains the Tonga Defense School of 400 individuals, charged with maintaining public order, patrolling coastal waters, and engaging in various Kingdom of Tonga projects.

Conflict. Although Tongan oral histories report some traditional conflicts relating to political situations, Tongans were essentially peaceful islanders prior to the coming of European missionaries. In early nineteenth-century Tonga, the Christian missionaries made numerous efforts to convert the chiefs to the new religion, since if the chiefs converted, their people would follow. As word of missionary successes in the islands spread, other missionaries arrived and religious wars of intense fury began in 1826. Although it may not have been a deliberate nineteenth-century missionary plan, a divide-and-conquer policy saw non-Christian Tongans fighting against Christian Tongans, and there were additional conflicts in 1837, 1840, and 1852. With the aid of missionaries, three Tongan law codes were introduced to Tongans in 1839, 1850, and 1862. The culmination of all missionary involvement was the Tongan constitution of 1875. Tonga continues to have problems: its economy remains unsound and the lack of serious planning for its improvement may lead to political unrest in the future.

Religion and Expressive Culture

Religious Beliefs. Traditional Tongans believed in a multideity world including Tangaloa, who pulled up certain islands from the sea. There were traditional gods of various trades (such as fishers or artisans) and gods of various ha'a. In observance of the strictures of fundamentalist Christianity, it is written into the Tongan constitution that the Sabbath is a legal day of rest in the Kingdom of Tonga, and no commercial activities or entertainment are officially allowed.

It should be pointed out, however, that these legal regulations do not coincide with actual activities.

Arts. In traditional Tonga, tattooing was an important form of ornamentation, but with European contact this traditional art has all but vanished. One of the highest forms of traditional arts that has survived into the twentieth century is tapa artistry. Tapa continues to play an important role in gift giving, being redistributed among Tongans on important occasions. Other forms of the expressive arts in Tonga surviving into the twentieth century include dances and kava preparation.

Medicine. Tongans practiced traditional medicinal techniques, utilizing local products and the assistance of Tongan specialists who interceded with the deities for good health. Today there are modern hospital facilities on Tongatapu.

Death and Afterlife. In traditional times, after a Tongan titleholder died the body would be interred in a royal tomb (*langi*) on Tongatapu Island, and the soul was believed to go to Pulotu, the home of Tongan deities and the location where Tongans were thought to reside with their principal gods in the afterlife. Prior to the introduction of Christianity, commoners were believed not to have souls, but this way of thinking appears to have changed. Tongan kinship ties are truly demonstrated at times of death, and each individual who is related to the deceased has a specific task to perform during the funeral activities. Black is the color of mourning in Tonga.

See also Anuta, Futuna, Lau, Niue, Rotuma, Samoa, Uvea

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CHARLES F. URBANOWICZ

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