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FEATHERWORK AND DIVINE CHIEFTAINSHIP IN TONGA

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In 2011 a fanned feathered headdress, whose materials and construction are commensurate with 18th century Tongan objects, was uncovered in storage at Madrid's Museo de América (Fig. 1).¹ Such headdresses, known as *palā tavake*, receive scant attention in the academic accounts of Tonga, despite being described by anthropologist Adrienne Kaepler as “the most spectacular of all objects of indigenous Tongan manufacture” (Kaepler 1978: 213).

There are only three mentions of *palā tavake* in the 18th century European explorer literature on Tonga. Members of the Cook (1777), Bruni d'Entrecasteaux (1793) and Malaspina (1793) Expeditions all saw and obtained *palā tavake* during their stays in the Tongan archipelago. The exact present day locations of these acquired headdresses are unknown. For many years researchers pondered whether a fanned, feather headdress in Vienna's Weltmuseum (formerly Museum für Völkerkunde) might be a *palā tavake*. However, recent research suggests that it is not Tongan, but instead comes from Eastern Polynesia (Lythberg 2014). Sacred regalia incorporating feathers were common throughout Polynesia (Coote and Uden 2013: 235; Hooper 2006; Kaepler, Kaufmann and Newton 1993: 83-86). Nonetheless, it is probable that the headdress located in Spain, whose own provenance is not entirely certain, is the only surviving *palā tavake*. Its discovery initiated discussion and debate surrounding its origins, its journey to Madrid and its significance for an understanding of Tonga's past. In this article we describe the feather headdress found in Madrid and consider its probable historical context and connections—both Tongan and Spanish. In addition we discuss the association of *palā tavake* with the Tu'i Tonga, the sacred ruler of Tonga, and the changing nature of the title in the late 18th century.

Tongans stopped manufacturing *palā tavake* sometime during the late 18th or early 19th century. The headdresses were part of the regalia of the Tu'i Tonga—the traditional sacred ruler of Tonga—and became redundant by the early 19th century with the rise of the Tupou Dynasty and the decline and eventual elimination of the Tu'i Tonga title. Conversations with non-chiefly people in Tonga in the late 20th century revealed that many did not recognise images of the headdresses as Tongan. More recently, however, *palā tavake* have been embraced by Tongans as a symbol of their pre-monarchical past and have been incorporated into Tongan art (Fig. 2). The discovery of the headdress in Spain adds another element of interest and excitement to the



Figure 1. Feather Headdress, front view, Museo de América, Madrid.



Figure 2. 'Palā Tavake Flag', by Benjamin Work, Auckland, 2013.

revitalisation of this element of Tonga's past. This article considers the feather headdress located in Madrid and its likely provenance, as well as examining the place of *palā tavake* in Tongan history and the political transformation of Tonga in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

THE FEATHERED HEADDRESS IN SPAIN

The headdress in Madrid is a fan of 33 feather-covered and barkcloth-wrapped bundles of reeds or sticks attached to a broad band with wide ties or drapes at either side. The ties are made of black barkcloth with a subtle stripe. The fan is dark at the bottom and pale at the top. Its top edge contains remnants of long white vestiges of a fan of tail feathers presumed to be from the white-tailed tropic bird (*Phaethon lepturus*) which was known in Tonga as the *tavake* and for whom the headdress is named. Fragments of short red feathers likely to be from the red-breasted musk parrot or *koki* (*Prosopiea tabuensis*) remain in the dark barkcloth bindings. The bindings of the headdress are intricate and the regularity of the bundles of sticks speaks of exacting rigour. The fan is further supported by a barkcloth-covered structure at the back of the headdress wrapped in strings of small shell discs (Fig. 3). Six small appendages adorn the rear of the headdress. They are regularly spaced on every fourth bundle of sticks; there would have originally been seven altogether, but one is missing.

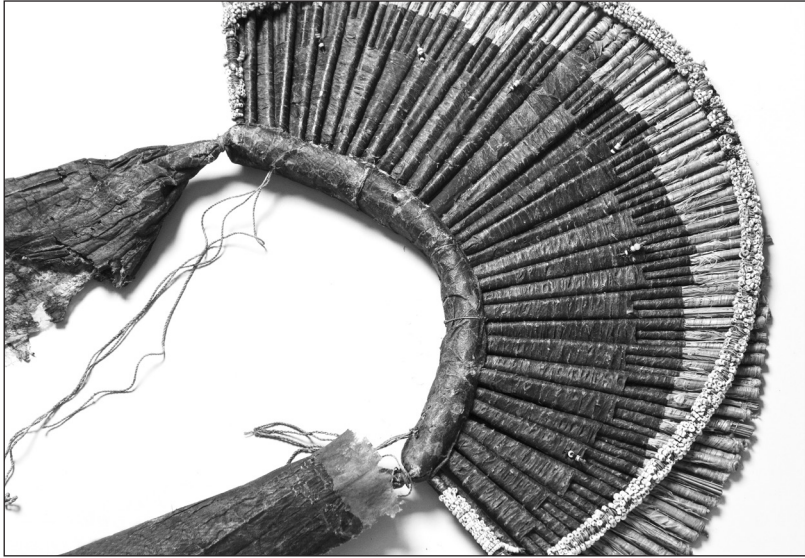


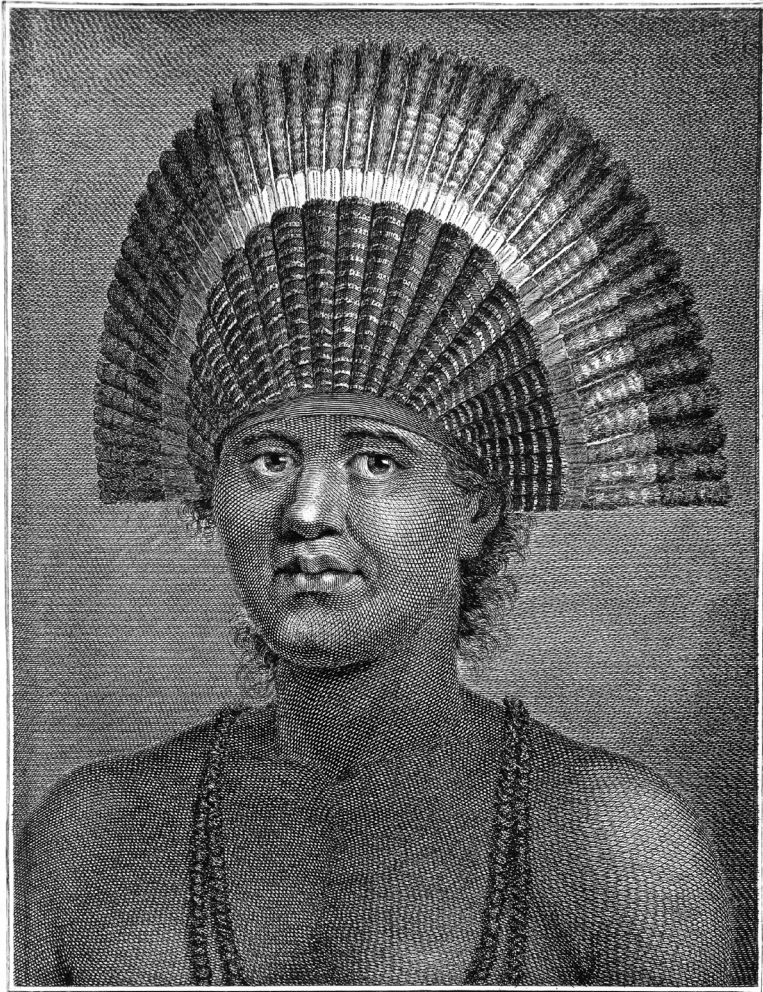
Figure 3. Feather Headdress, rear view, Museo de América, Madrid.

Each contains four beads, one white, one black, then two white. One includes a single European glass trade bead, anchored in place with indigenous resin suggesting, perhaps, that an association with a previous European visitor was desired by its maker or owner.

The remains of the headdress in Madrid match the one described by Cook and portrayed by Webber while at Tongatapu in 1777:

These Caps or rather bonnets are made of the tail feathers of the Tropic Bird with the red feathers of the Paroquets worked upon them or in along with them, they are made so to tie upon the forehead without any Crown, and they have the form of a Semicircle [*sic*] whose radius is 18 or 20 inches; But a painting which Mr Webber has made of Fatafee Polaho [*sic*] [Fatafehi Paulaho or Pau] dressed in one of these bonnets will convey the best idea of them. (Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 117)

John Webber's portrait of the Tu'i Tonga Pau or Paulaho² wearing a headdress (Fig. 4) is still the best surviving image of a *palā tavake*. It fans out above the Tu'i Tonga's head, in clear bands of at least two different coloured feathers.



POULAHO, KING of the FRIENDLY ISLANDS.

Figure 4. John Webber & John Hall, 1784, 'Poulaho, King of the Friendly Islands', engraving on paper, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland.

The materials are commensurate with other 18th century Tongan chiefly objects and the headdress itself is comprised of high value and high status items. The hundreds of shell beads were time-consuming to prepare, especially in the quantities used in the headdress, required to completely wrap the supporting structure at the back of the fan. The black barkcloth is of a variety of barkcloth known as *ngatu'uli*. *Ngatu'uli* is decorated with fine candlenut soot which is difficult and time-consuming to make and is reserved for chiefly usage. Black barkcloth has particular efficacy in Tongan events that occur at the threshold between the world of the spirits and the living, such as funerals, where it is placed closest to the body of the deceased. In addition, the headdress required many feathers from the red-breasted musk parrot and tail feathers of the white-tailed tropic bird. Each tropic bird has only two of the long feathers which were used en masse to crown the headdress. Many birds of both species would have been needed to decorate the *palā tavake*.

The *palā tavake* in Madrid is an exquisitely crafted item. It is clear that considerable time and skill were invested in creating it. There is a precision to the preparation of materials and their assembly that speaks not only of the extraordinary expertise of its maker but also of a desire or need to make the headdress a beautiful object to be worn by an individual of illustrious rank. This is understandable considering the intended wearer was the Tu'i Tonga, the sacred ruler of Tonga who was a direct descendant of a god. In Tonga the head is regarded as *tapu* to someone of lower rank. *Palā tavake*, placed on the head of the Tu'i Tonga, would, therefore, have been regarded as an immensely sacred item.

DIVINE CHIEFTAINSHIP IN TONGA

Palā tavake were closely associated with the highest ranking of Tonga's elite. By the late 18th century Tonga was one of the most highly stratified polities in Polynesia based around chiefly rank, titular authority and tribute. At that time there were three great titles in Tonga—the Tu'i Tonga, the Tu'i Ha'atalalua and the Tu'i Kanokupolu. The Tu'i Tonga was the highest ranking of the three paramount titles, as the first Tu'i Tonga was thought to be the son of the god Tangaloa 'Eitumatupu'a. 'Eitumatupu'a was said to have descended from the heavens to Tongatapu and impregnated a local woman. Their son was 'Aho'eitu. When 'Aho'eitu came of age, he sought out his father and was given the title Tu'i Tonga and the authority to rule the islands. This descent from divine ancestors promulgated honour and authority to the titleholder and his close relatives. It is, by far, the oldest of the three titles. The Tu'i Ha'atalalua and Tu'i Kanokupolu are collaterally descended from the elder title with the first holder of the Tu'i Ha'atalalua title a younger brother of a Tu'i Tonga.³ Although junior in chiefly rank to

the Tu‘i Tonga, the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalua and Tu‘i Kanokupolu were vested with executive authority and were, essentially, the political rulers of the Tongan archipelago in the late 18th and throughout the 19th centuries.

It was, however, the Tu‘i Tonga who was the embodiment of divinity and society due to his direct and senior lineal descent from the gods. This divinity was marked in several ways, including the wearing of the *palā tavake*. To emphasise the difference in their essence, status and power, the Ha‘atakalua and Kanokupolu titles and chiefs were known as *Kauhalalalo* ‘from the sea side of the road’ while the Tu‘i Tonga was said to be *Kauhalauta* ‘from the bush side of the road’. This distinction was not just locational but also marked the inherent difference in the rank of the Tu‘i Tonga. The very body of the Tu‘i Tonga and his close relatives (*fale‘alo*) were regarded as corporally different from the *Kauhalalalo* due to their senior divine ancestry. This difference further emphasised by the exclusive designation of *sino‘eiki* ‘body of the chief’ for the Tu‘i Tonga and the *fale‘alo*. In addition, the body of the Tu‘i Tonga was distinguished from his male subordinates by not being circumcised or tattooed, both customary practices for Tongan men at that time (Martin 1817 [II]: 78-79).

The Tu‘i Tonga commanded ritual seniority and was the “Significant One”, to borrow Sahlins’s phrase (1983: 523-24), in early Tongan society. He was the one that mattered, the central structuring figure of society and its wellbeing. Offerings, known as the *‘inasi*, were made twice year to the god/goddess Hikule‘o and his/her embodiment, the Tu‘i Tonga, in recognition that their participation was essential to the prosperity of the land. The seedlings of the *kahokaho* yam, a special variety of *Dioscorea alata* reserved for chiefs, were presented to the Tu‘i Tonga on behalf of the Hikule‘o at the time of planting and at the time of harvest.⁴ They were brought to him in a ceremony which was performed at the tomb of the father of the incumbent Tu‘i Tonga and thus emphasised the Tu‘i Tonga’s lineal descent from divinity (Farmer 1855: 129-30; Gifford 1929: 76, 103, 217).

The tombs of the Tu‘i Tonga were known as *langi*, which also means ‘sky’ in Tongan. *Langi* could also denote the person of the Tu‘i Tonga and he was often thus referred to in narratives, poems, songs and chants (Collocott 1928: 79, Malupo 1870, Thomas n.d.: 25). The multiple meanings of *langi* reference the divine origin of the Tu‘i Tonga and his title and also alludes to Tangaloa ‘Eitumatapu‘a’s descent from the sky. This divine lineal descent of the Tu‘i Tonga also was reflected in the special *tapu* state (‘sacred’, but also ‘prohibited’) which surrounded the Tu‘i Tonga and his immediate family (*fale‘alo*) and their ability to make things *tapu*. This sanctity set them apart from the rest of Tongan society and, as elsewhere in Polynesia, sacred regalia, including the *palā tavake*, were part of that distinction. The *palā tavake*, with its multitude of red and white feathers,

is yet another reference to the sky, with birds being creatures (like the Tu‘i Tonga) who move between earth and the heavens. It is not known if the females and other males of the *fale‘alo* were traditionally vested in regalia, but the Tu‘i Tonga wore the *palā tavake*—the large headdress composed of red and white feathers which fanned out like a sunburst from ear to ear. In Tonga, they were associated with Tangaloa ‘Eitumatupu‘a, the god who lived in the sky and from whom the Tu‘i Tonga descends. The spiralling barkcloth-covered sticks adorned with red and white feathers reach upwards to Tangaloa reinforcing this bond and the Tu‘i Tonga’s own personal efficacy as earthly representative of divinity. The honour bestowed upon the title and its holder also is evident in the skill and beauty of the objects made for them, including the *palā tavake*.

Palā tavake were not the only feathered ornaments in Tonga worn by chiefly individuals. Gifford (1929: 127) recorded that “a headdress of feathers (*fae* or *faefae*) was worn by chiefs during times of festival or ceremony or at the outset of a war expedition”. Kaepler suggests that *palā tavake* were not worn exclusively by the Tu‘i Tonga although they were reserved for very high ranking chiefs (Kaepler 1999: 47). However, *palā tavake* do seem to be associated with the title or, as will be argued below, those aspiring to it.

PALĀ TAVAKE AND EARLY EUROPEAN VISITORS TO TONGA

There are few European accounts of *palā tavake* that might inform an understanding of the splendid specimen in Madrid. Of the various European voyagers who stopped at the Tongan Islands in the 18th and early 19th centuries only three described having seen *palā tavake*. British expeditions under the command of Captain James Cook stopped at Tonga three times during their second and third Pacific voyages. They made two short calls of seven and four days in 1773–74 and a more significant ten week visit in 1777. Cook and his men obtained three *palā tavake* during their last visit to Tonga (Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 117). Of the three headdresses, two were traded to Tahitians or Marquesans and presumably dismantled by them (Gathercole 2004). The third is not among any identified in the known Cook collections. Sixteen years later in 1793 Tonga was visited by two European expeditions within a month of each other who both saw and received *palā tavake*. A French expedition, under the command of Joseph Antoine Bruni d’Entrecasteaux, visited Tongatapu in April and early May and received one (Labillardière 1800: 375). Research (Douglas, Lythberg and Veys n.d.) is underway to identify the Bruni d’Entrecasteaux collections dispersed in museums in France, Norway and the Netherlands, but to date no feather headdress has been identified. A Spanish expedition, under the command of Alejandro Malaspina, stopped at the northern archipelago of Vava‘u in May 1793. Arcadio Pineada, a member

of the Malaspina Expedition, saw two headdresses and acquired one during the Spanish expedition's stay in Vava'u in May of 1793 (Pineada n.d.). Although there is no accompanying documentation which identifies the headdress in the Museo de América as having been collected by members of the Malaspina Expedition, the Museo does contain other Tongan artefacts attributed to the voyage and it seems highly likely that the recently discovered *palā tavake* returned to Spain with the Expedition.

To more fully assess the origins of the headdress in Madrid, we also consider specific individuals who were engaged with Tongans in the late 18th century. Identifying in existing genealogies and traditions the individual Tongans met by the various Europeans who came to Tonga is not easy even when names are provided. The visitors rendered the names as they heard them which was, understandably, more often than not, imperfectly. In addition, Tongans were often known by several different names during their lifetime and this compounds the challenge of accurate identification. However, to appreciate the political transformations surrounding divine chieftainship in Tonga, it is important to distinguish the central individuals associated with the feather headdresses who were met by the European chroniclers.

When Cook and his men visited Tonga in 1777, Pau was Tu'i Tonga, Maealiuaki appeared to be Tu'i Ha'atakalaua and Tupoulahi was Tu'i Kanokupolu although, because he was elderly and almost blind, his son, Tu'ihalafatai, exercised the practicalities of actual rule (Afuha'amango n.d.: 5, Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 892-93, Erskine 1853: 128, Thomas 1879: 153). Cook seems to have known Tu'ihalafatai by the name "Finau" (Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 177, Bott 1982: 19-20).

In 1793 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux and his men met Tu'i Kanokupolu Mumui whom they knew as Tubou [Tupou], as well as a clearly high ranking and influential woman whom they called "Queen Tiné" or "Tineh" on Tongatapu (Labillardière 1800: 351). The French understood that Queen Tiné was performing the duties of the male Tu'i Tonga until Pau's son was of age (Labillardière 1800: 376). All genealogies point to Queen Tiné being Tu'i Tonga Fefine Nanasipau'u, the elder half-sister by a different mother to Tu'i Tonga Pau. Bott believes that the Tongans called her "*ta'ahine*", the term for a chiefly woman, but that the French thought that this was her name, which they rendered as "Tiné" or "Tineh" (Bott 1982: 61, see also Thomas n.d.: 29). Her explanation is probable. At the time of the French visit there was no reigning Tu'i Tonga because Ma'ulupekotofa had died some time previously. Nanasipau'u was Ma'ulupekotofa's elder full sister; she was also Tu'i Tonga Fefine.

One month after the French visited Tongatapu, a Spanish expedition under the command of Alejandro Malaspina called at the northern Tongan archipelago of Vava'u. Of all the people they met, "Vuna" appears to be

the central figure. He is described as a man of about 45 years of age and as “King of Vavao” [Vava‘u]. The Spaniards recorded that he had more than four wives, at least two of whom were the daughters of the late Tu‘i Tonga “Paulajo” [Paulaho/Pau] and his wife “Dubou” [Tupoumoheofo]. The second in command of the expedition recorded the women’s names as “Fatafegi” [Fatafehi] and “Taufa” [Taufa]; Malaspina referred to them as the “two Fatafegis”. The son of the one known as “Taufa” was a boy of about eight to ten years old named “Feileua” (also spelled as Feyloe-hua).

Bott believed that the man known to Malaspina as Vuna was, in fact, Tu‘iha‘ateiho Fā‘otusia Fakahikuo‘uiha whose personal or nickname may have been Vuna (Bott 1982: 34-36). Gifford’s work also tends to support this claim (Gifford 1929: 81, 137). Fā‘otusia is recorded as the son of Tu‘iha‘ateiho Haveatunga and the Tu‘i Tonga Fefine Nanasipau‘u, the woman known by Bruni d’Entrecasteaux as “Queen Tiné”.

Bott bases her supposition of Vuna’s identity as Fā‘otusia on the Tongan genealogies (*hohoko*) which list the two daughters of Tu‘i Tonga Paulaho and Tupoumoheofo (Sinaitakala and Fatafehi Lapaha) as being married to Tu‘iha‘ateiho Fā‘otusia (see Fig. 5). One daughter, Fatafehi Ha‘apai, is remembered as marrying only Fā‘otusia and having one daughter by him named “Fana” (Bott 1982: 34). Collocott recorded a poem about a man who wished to marry the Fatafehi Ha‘apai, but was bitterly disappointed to find that she had gone to Vava‘u to marry a man named Vuna (Collocott 1928: 86-87). The other daughter of Tu‘i Tonga Paulaho and Tupoumoheofo recorded as marrying Fā‘otusia was Fatafehi Lapaha. Her son by Fā‘otusia was Makamālohi who was the Tama Tauhala ‘Extraordinary Child’ (Spillius [Bott] 1958-1959). Gifford was told (1929: 81) that there was only one individual in history who held this title. In many ways he was treated as a Tu‘i Tonga. He is buried near Lapaha in a tomb known as a *langi* and Queen Sālote stated that Makamālohi was sent a *moheofo*—a practice usually reserved for only the Tu‘i Tonga (Bott 1982: 36). The *moheofo* was the highest ranking and principal wife of the Tu‘i Tonga and also the mother of the subsequent titleholder. Undoubtedly Makamālohi was of extraordinarily high chiefly rank, greater than that of the Tu‘i Tonga of the time. His association with a *palā tavake* is intriguing and may indicate a shift in Tongan politics in the late 18th century.

EXCHANGES WITH THE VISITORS

When Europeans visited Tonga, Tongans made available to them things of great value in both the archipelago and wider Polynesia. Chief among these were items decorated with feathers, especially red feathers. Red was a colour associated with rank and chiefliness throughout Polynesia and it proved to be persuasive inducement in trade all over the region. In fact,

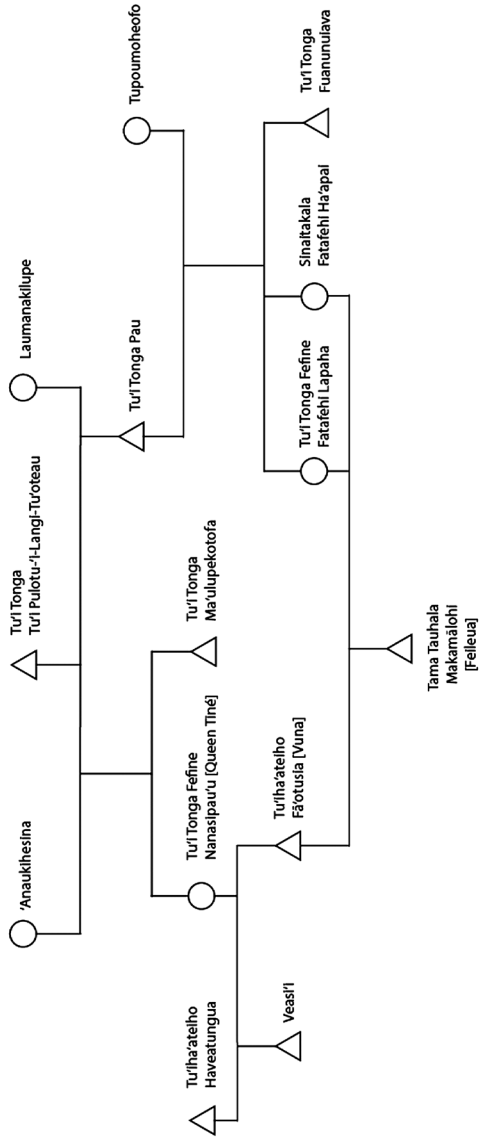


Figure 5. Genealogy of Tu'iha'ateiho Fā'otusia Fakahikuo'uiha and Tu'i Tonga Pau.

it has been suggested that the richness of the collections associated with Cook's second voyage, in particular, was made possible through obtaining and redistributing these red featherwork items from Tonga (Gathercole 2004). Cook had on board with him Mahine, a man from Borabora in the Society Islands, who correctly advised of their high value to Tahitians. They would prove as desirable to Marquesans. To Forster it was indicated "a bit of two inches square, covered with feathers, would at any time, be eagerly purchased with a hog" (Forster 1778: 367). This was a considerable incentive for Cook and his men given their need in the course of their expeditions for fresh food to keep both health and morale high. Significantly, red feathers sourced in Tonga were also traded for other high status objects from other Polynesian islands including at least ten of the now famous "Chief Mourners' Costumes" acquired from Tahiti (Coote and Uden 2013: 235, Gathercole 2004). In Tonga in 1793 the Bruni d'Entrecaseaux Expedition presented Tu'i Kanokupolu Mumui with red cloth, having realised that red was a very desirable colour for Tongans:

The king expressed much thankfulness for them; but, of all that was offered him, nothing so much excited the admiration of this numerous assembly, as a piece of crimson damask, the lively colour of which produced from all sides an exclamation, of eho! eho! which they continued repeating a long time, with an appearance of the greatest surprise. They uttered the same exclamation, when we unrolled a few pieces of ribbon, in which red was the prominent colour. (Labillardière 1800: 357)

They also presented Fuanunuiava, who would later be Tu'i Tonga, with a "scarlet suit of clothes", reserving a blue suit for a lower ranking chief (Labillardière 1800: 340).

Cook's men traded eagerly for collections of red feathers attached to portions of banana leaf and sections of woven coconut fibre or *kafa*. The highest-ranking feathered items were, undoubtedly, the fanned feather headdresses associated with the rule of the Tu'i Tonga and the feathered waist garments worn by chiefs for "ceremonial dress or dancing" (Kaepler 1971: 211-13). Their acquisition was not easy, yet during their visits to Tonga Cook and his men gathered at least 20 feathered waist garments known as *sisi fale*. These were made from finely plaited coconut fibre and adorned with red feathers and fine shell beads (Kaepler 1971: 211-13). Although greatly desired, the red and white *palā tavake* proved more difficult to obtain and were not acquired until Cook's third voyage. Cook wrote that:

though very large prices were offered not one was ever brought for sale, which shewed [*sic*] they were no less valuable to the people here, nor was there a person

in either Ship that got one but my self [*sic*] Capt Clerke and Omai', and only from the incumbent Tu'i Tonga Paulaho himself. (Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 117)

Part of the issue may have been the notion of bartering or selling. Tu'i Tonga Fefine Nanasipau'u made this distinction very clear to members of the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux expedition in 1793:

She was very careful to let us know that she did not give them by way of barter; affecting to repeat with an air of dignity *ikai fokatau*, and to inform us by the word *doupe*, that she made us a present of them. Indeed the chiefs never offered to barter their articles for ours; they made us presents, and received whatever we thought proper to give. (Labillardière 1800: 354)

Labillardière also reported (1800: 375) that Bruni d'Entrecasteaux was given "as a present a diadem, made with the beautiful red feathers of the tropic-bird, with some other very small feathers of a brilliant red colour". One month later Arcadio Pineada, a member of the Malaspina Expedition, recorded that the "Monarch", whose name was "Vuna" (Tu'iha'ateiho Fā'otusia), "was distinguished [from the populace] by a hat or diadem of red feathers, like that which Cook described when he spoke of Paulajo" (Pineada n.d.). Pineada also noted that Vuna's younger brother (Veasi'i) also wore a diadem that was "a different make" than his brother's and contained both red and white feathers. He also recorded that they were given one of the diadems. It seems likely that the specimen in Madrid came from the Malaspina Expedition. It is odd that the commander of the expedition did not record the acquisition of such a magnificent headdress. However, while compiling the official record of the voyage after their return to Spain, Malaspina was arrested. Upon his release he returned to his native Italy in poor health and soon passed away. Meanwhile, the expedition's manuscript material was seized and placed in the Museo Naval under a one hundred year publication ban. As the preparation for publication was not finished, it is not possible to know whether the final official publication would have mentioned the *palā tavake* received in Vava'u.

POLITICS AND THE REIGN OF THE TU'I TONGA IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

The sole surviving *palā tavake* described here takes on added historical significance given that it is emblematic of crucial social and political changes of late 18th century Tonga. It was a *palā tavake* that distinguished Tu'i Tonga Pau as Tonga's senior ranked elite upon Cook's arrival and it was a gift he specifically made to members of the expedition. Cook's arrival and this transaction coincided with a watershed in Tongan history in several ways. Among the significant events while he was Tu'i Tonga was the said visit of

James Cook and his expedition to the islands. The mark Cook left on Tonga was not one of introduced transformation, for his direct influence on Tongan politics and social life was negligible, although he did introduce a few agricultural crops, some livestock and probably dogs, not to mention venereal disease, to the islands. Cook's greatest impact on Tonga was an historical one. Overall Cook found provisions easy to obtain in Tonga owing to the economic control exercised by the chiefly hierarchy with whom he associated. He visited the islands three times during his Pacific voyages (1773, 1774, 1777) with his final stay in Tonga lasting eleven weeks. With such prolonged contact, Cook and some of his men came to know the Tongans as individuals and, while they did not understand the intricacies of Tongan custom and ideology, they described the situations they saw with the Tongan actors named and, for the most part, identifiable in the Tongan genealogies. In addition to providing a cameo, albeit foreign, of 18th-century life in Tonga, the large amount of accessible manuscript and published material of Cook and his crew provided a framework within which later European visitors observed and wrote about Tonga. Literature from the Cook voyages became essential for libraries of individuals heading to the Pacific, just as they are now indispensable for those interested in Tonga's past. In effect, the Cook Expedition observations, whether right or wrong, became the stereotype for traditional Tongan culture.

In the late 1770s Pau was Tu'i Tonga, Maealiuaki appeared to be Tu'i Ha'atalakalaua and Tupoulahi was Tu'i Kanokupolu although, because he was elderly and almost blind, his son, Tu'ihalafatai, exercised the practicalities of actual rule (Afuha'amango n.d.: 5, Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 892-93, Erskine 1853: 128, Thomas 1879: 153). Conflict between the two titular lineages of the Tu'i Tonga and Tu'i Kanokupolu was perhaps inevitable, especially as the authority of the Tu'i Ha'atalakalaua title waned with the establishment of the Tu'i Kanokupolu title. This eclipse can be seen in the shift of the natal lineage of the principal wife (*moheofo*) of the Tu'i Tonga from the Ha'atalakalaua to the Kanokupolu line at the time of the 4th Tu'i Kanokupolu Mataeleha'amea. The relationships of the individuals re-inscribed the relative rank, power and authority of the titles in each generation through this marriage and succession of rule (see Bott 1982: 59-60). These tensions were further aggravated by the ambitions of Tu'i Tonga Pau who desired more secular authority (Erskine 1853: 129, Gunson 1979: 40, Thomas 1879: 172).

This desire may have been prompted by the questionable foundation upon which his own succession was based. Pau was neither his father's eldest son nor his son by the acknowledged *moheofo*. Pau's father had many wives among whom were some very high ranking women, however, Pau was the son of a lower ranking, although still chiefly, wife (see Fig. 5). The first of Pau's father's illustrious marriages produced only one child, a son, who was said to have died young (Bott 1982: 100). His second wife also was called

mohefo (Hala‘api‘api n.d.: 201). She had five children with the Tu‘i Tonga: three daughters (Nanasipau‘u, Fatafehi and Fakaolakifanga) and two sons (Manumata‘ongo and Ma‘ulupekotofa). Pau’s mother was not considered a *mohefo*; however, when the Tu‘i Tonga died it was Pau who succeeded him as Tu‘i Tonga. Some believe that it was the rank of Pau’s grandmother and great grandmother which saw him succeed or that it was the choice of his father’s sister the Tu‘i Tonga Fefine. Others argue that it was because Pau was an able leader and had distinguished himself as a warrior and may even have been called *hau*, a term which signified a challengeable position of secular authority and considerable power (Erskine 1853: 129; Gunson 1979: 29, 39, 2005: 324; Tu‘i‘āfitu 1970; Ma‘afu Tupou pers. comm.). For whatever reason, Pau became Tu‘i Tonga instead of arguably more senior candidates.

An indication of the strain surrounding Pau’s succession to the title appeared during the ‘*inasi* ceremony which occurred while the Cook Expedition was in Tonga in 1777. There is little doubt that ceremony was the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui* when the seedlings of the chiefly yam *kahokaho* were presented to the Tu‘i Tonga to ensure the success of the growth of the yams in the coming season. The Europeans were told that the yams presented “were a portion consecrated to the O‘tooa [*o‘tua*] or divinity” and that the ceremony was called “*natche*” or “*anache*” (Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 916-17, 1308, 1363). However, there also was a suggestion that this was not a conventional ‘*inasi*. Cook and his men were told that the second day of the ceremony was designed to allow Fuanunuiava, the son of Pau, to eat with his father but “as it was only ceremonial... he would just eat a single mouthful [*sic*] of yam and his father the same” (Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 916; see also 913). The prestations of the ‘*inasi* normally occupied only one day and the *tapu* of not eating in the presence of one’s superior was strongly held in Tonga. To break it in relation to the sacred ruler was no small deed. Even the Europeans, with their limited understanding of Tongan custom, sensed the gravity of this action: “His father... either from an ancient custom or perhaps to insure the succession wishes to see it done whilst alive” (Beaglehole 1967 [III]: 916). John Thomas, a Wesleyan missionary who lived in Tonga for many years during the 19th century, described it thus:

Bau [Pau] the King and his son were present on the occasion and it seems it was during the ceremony of the Inaji [‘*inasi*] that the Prince was named to honor equal to his father and from that time was to sit at meals with his father. It was quite a new thing, a violation of Tongan custom and usage. (Thomas n.d.: 11-12)

Although the ritual breaking of the eating *tapu* between father and son was most unusual, the presentation of textile and agricultural items to the Tu‘i Tonga was a common ceremony known as *fakataumafa* ‘to provide for’,

in which the people demonstrated their obeisance and fidelity to him with a pledge of continuing sustenance (Spillius [Bott] 1958-1959 [II]: 241-42, Ve'ehala pers. comm.). In a sense, the *fakataumafa* marked the succession to the honour and title, as there was no specific installation ceremony for the Tu'i Tonga. This was yet another instance of recognising and distinguishing the Tu'i Tonga from other chiefly individuals. On the one hand, all the rest of male titles in Tonga were bestowed at a kava ceremony attended by the new titleholder and other chiefs who had significant relationships to the title. On the other hand, the Tu'i Tonga, by right of his ancestry, automatically succeeded his father. The succession came at the time of the Tu'i Tonga's death. While there is nothing unusual in a *fakataumafa* for a new Tu'i Tonga, it was a radical break with Tongan tradition for the ceremony to occur while the incumbent Tu'i Tonga was not only alive, but presiding over the ritual. Many sources assume that Tupoumohefo, the principal wife (*mohefo*) of Tu'i Tonga Pau, was the instigator of this unusual event to secure her son's succession (*fua 'ai hau*) (Bott 1982: 39-40, Cummins 1977: 66-67, Gunson 1979: 39-40, Lātūkefu 1974: 13). However, as has been argued elsewhere (Herda 1987), it appears more likely that it was Pau, not Tupoumohefo, who was interested in securing his son's succession lest it be challenged in his absence.

His fears appear well-grounded as fighting broke out between the *Kauhala'uta* (Tu'i Tonga) and the *Kauhalalo* (Tu'i Kanokupolu), reportedly over the ambitions of Tu'i Tonga Pau who attempted to increase his secular authority (Erskine 1853: 129, Gunson 1979: 83, Thomas 1879: 172). The conflict escalated over time and ended with violent unrest and the death of Pau around 1784 (Novo y Colson 1885: 382, Thomas 1879: 172, Thomson 1894: 321). Members of the Malaspina Expedition were told:

Paulajo... was dethroned and murdered by a conspiracy hatched between Vuna, Monmuy [Mumui], and Tubou [Tupoumohefo], wife of the same Paulajo. The conspirators set out from Tonga with some 20 large canoes; putting into the ports of the Islands of Annamoka [Nomuka] and Happai [Ha'apai]. They passed to Vavao [Vava'u] where Paulajo, as the head of his people, received them. There was a clash which ended with the death of the latter at the hands of Vuna, after these two leaders had fought hand to hand. (Novo y Colson 1885: 382)

The consequences of the death of Tu'i Tonga Pau were far-reaching. Initially there was no successor to Pau appointed, ostensibly because the Kanokupolu people, most likely Mumui and his son Tuku'aho, would not allow Fuanunuiava to assume the sacred duties of the office despite Pau's attempt to elevate his son to the Tu'i Tonga title during his lifetime. It was said that the more recent holders, presumably a derogatory reference to

Pau, were not descended from a *moheofo* as dignity and custom required (West 1865: 55). As a further insult and indictment of his low birth, Pau was buried in Vava'u "not as a Tu'i Tonga, but as an ordinary chief" (Novo y Colson 1885: 382). A successor was eventually named to the title. He was Mau'ulupekotofa, Pau's older and senior half-brother. His appointment would have appealed to the Kanokupolu people as he was said to be an amiable fellow with little or no political interests or ambition (Thomas 1879: 174). Mau'ulupekotofa was Tu'i Tonga for only a few years before he died. During this time, however, he seemed content to perform his sacred duties and not interfere with the secular rule of Tonga by the Kanokupolu chiefs. After his death no Tu'i Tonga was appointed. The sacred duties of the office were thought to have been performed by Nanasipau'u (Labillardière 1800: 376). Nanasipau'u was Ma'ulupekotofa's elder full sister; she was also Tu'i Tonga Fefine. She reported that Pau's son, the eligible successor to the title, was too young to succeed (Labillardière 1800: 376).

It is not clear why Nanasipau'u claimed that Pau's son, presumably Fuanunuiava, was not of age. Cook and his men witnessed the unusual *fakataumafa* conducted by Pau to insure his son's succession when he was estimated to be between 12 and 15 years old some 15 years earlier, so the boy would have been an adult in 1793. Members of the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux expedition met Fuanunuiava in 1793 and described him as an adult (Labillardière 1800: 336). Mariner (Martin 1817 [I]: 133) estimated him to be about 40 years old around 1806. It may be that he was unable to succeed while his father's sister, the Tu'i Tonga Fefine Nanasipau'u, was alive. Queen Sālote indicated that strict protocol would not usually allow this to happen (Spillius [Bott] 1958-1959). However, as previously mentioned, much that occurred at this time was not according to Tongan custom and it seems more likely the political ambitions of the Kanokupolu and the Tu'iha'ateiho people that prevented Fuanunuiava from being called Tu'i Tonga at this time. The French and Spanish expeditions that visited Tonga in April and May of 1793 indicated that Fuanunuiava was not an eligible successor. The Bruni d'Entrecasteaux Expedition recorded a slighting remark that a chief of the Kanokupolu people made about Fuanunuiava that "everybody passed themselves off for chiefs (egui ['eiki])" (Labillardière 1800: 340). Malaspina's men were told in Vava'u that Fuanunuiava had "either been assassinated or was living confused with the lowest common people in Tongatabu" (Novo y Colson 1885: 382). Despite these incongruities, Fuanunuiava was eventually named Tu'i Tonga in 1795. Tu'i Kanokupolu Mumui directed his succession in an attempt to restore political order in Tonga (Spillius [Bott] 1958-1959).

POLITICS AND FEATHERWORK IN TONGA

The details of the three references to *palā tavake* in the European explorer literature help to explain the connection between the feathered diadems and the sacred Tu‘i Tonga title, as well as the social and political transformations surrounding the title in the late 18th century. *Palā tavake*, as previously mentioned, were acquired by the Cook Expedition in Tongatapu in 1777, the Bruni d’Entrecasteaux Expedition in Tongatapu in 1793 and the Malaspina Expedition in Vava‘u in 1793. Items of wealth index the realm of status, authority and power in Tonga and the individuals associated with *palā tavake* suggest a time of dynastic rivalries and political transformation in the archipelago in the late 18th century. The gifting of *palā tavake* to visiting Europeans can be seen both as a means of cementing a relationship between elites as well as a way of positioning the political ascendancy of the giver to the wider world.

Tu‘i Tonga Pau gifted three *palā tavake* to Cook and his men on his third visit to Tonga; two of these three were later traded within Polynesia. Pau’s title and status fit with what is known about *palā tavake* and their standing as sacred feathered regalia in Tonga. It was said that Pau’s *palā tavake* was made at a time when the knowledge of how to create them was in danger of being forgotten. Pau, reportedly, offered a *matapule* ‘chiefly attendant’ title to anyone able to make one (Kaeppler 1971: 214, Ko e Makasina ko e Lo‘au 1970). The title he established was “Helu” which means ‘comb’ in Tongan. A man from Foa created an authentic *palā tavake* and received the title which was passed to his descendants. The gravestone of a later Helu who died in 1884 commemorates this honour: “Helu who made the comb (helu) called PALATAVAKE” (Helu 2014).

The suggestion that the creation of *palā tavake* in the 1770s may have been a revival of an earlier practice is intriguing. It may be that Tu‘i Tonga Pau in an effort to secure his own line’s succession, and to increase his power and the secular authority of the title, sought the re-creation of sacred feathered regalia to evoke the sole rule of the Tu‘i Tonga in times long past. Pau’s association with the *palā tavake* is also commemorated in the carving on a war club given to Cook and his men which depicts the Tu‘i Tonga wearing a feathered headdress (Kaeppler 2010: 169, 252; Mills 2009). This harkening back to a time of exclusive and pre-eminent rule, as well as the commemoration of Pau’s prowess as a warrior, makes sense considering his tenuous genealogical right to the title.

Members of the Bruni d’Entrecasteaux Expedition were given a *palā tavake* during their visit to Tongatapu in April and May of 1793. The headdress was presented by “Feenou” [Finau] whom the French identified as “chief of the warriors” and “whose body was covered with scars in

various places... received by spears in different battles against the people of Feejee” (Labillardière 1800: 334). The French spent a large amount of time with “Feenou”. He was most probably Fīnau ‘Ulukālala-‘i-Ma‘ofanga. Fīnau was a renowned warrior who travelled to Fiji and fought alongside the Tui Nayau earning himself an envious reputation both in Fiji and Tonga. (Hocart n.d: 242, Spillius [Bott] 1958-1959, Deryck Scarr pers. comm., Fergus Clunie pers. comm.).

Why Fīnau ‘Ulukālala-‘i-Ma‘ofanga had the *palā tavake* is a mystery. He was not Kauhala‘uta (the Tu‘i Tonga’s people) nor did the French record that he wore the headdress. There is no record of him taking part in the battles between the Tu‘i Kanokupolu’s people and Tu‘i Tonga Pau, but it is entirely possible that he was involved. He was politically ambitious and, as mentioned, had a reputation as a fierce warrior. If he was in Tonga at the time of the battles, it is not hard to imagine that he would have participated. If he was directly involved with Pau’s death this may explain why he was in possession of the *palā tavake* and why he chose to gift it to the French. He certainly called himself *hau*, indicating that he ruled because of his success in battle, and he may have acquired the feather diadem as a battle trophy. Gifting such an item would have enhanced his status.

The third European description and acquisition was from Vuna to members of the Malaspina Expedition in 1793. If Malaspina’s “Vuna” was, in fact, Tu‘iha‘ateiho Fā‘otusia Fakahikuo‘uiha, it is not out of the question that he wore a *palā tavake*. As mentioned, Fā‘otusia was of exceedingly high rank. In addition the Tu‘iha‘ateiho title originated with a Tu‘i Tonga Fefine and, therefore, was regarded as being Kauhala‘uta or on the same ‘side of the road’ as (i.e., intimately related to) the Tu‘i Tonga. It may be that Fā‘otusia was attempting to raise himself or his son, Makamālohi, to the Tu‘i Tonga title. Pau’s less than illustrious genealogy would have emphasised the stellar rank of Makamālohi, as previously mentioned, the very highest ranking individual in all of Tongan history. It may be that some felt him a more worthy holder of the title or it may be that Fā‘otusia sought to supplant the title with the Tu‘iha‘ateiho title. Vuna [Fā‘otusia] was said to have been part of the conspiracy against Tu‘i Tonga Pau:

The chiefs Eyguis Buna [‘Eiki Vuna] and Mumui, gathered their forces in Vabau [Vava‘u], home of the queen [Tupoumoheofo] who was a Tubou [Tupou]. Paulajo [Paulaho] with all his authority, accompanied by his son Fatafegui [Fatafehi Fuanunuiava] (the same one that Captain Cook saw crowned) marched against Hapay (Ha‘apai), attacked and held it. He defeated Anamuka [Nomuka]; but was unhappy in Vabau [Vava‘u]. The conspirators repelled the landing and, in particular, the combat between Paulajo [Paulaho] and Buna [Vuna] left Paulajo [Paulaho] defeated. (Pineada n.d.)

If Pau had been acknowledged as *hau* then his defeat in combat by Tu‘iha‘ateiho Fā‘otusia would entitle the latter to be Pau’s successor. Indications based on records from the 1793 European visits to the archipelago suggest that the aim may have been to supplant the Tu‘i Tonga. Fā‘otusia’s mother, Nanasipau‘u, was performing the duties of the Tu‘i Tonga on Tongatapu at the same time the Spaniards heard about the “revolution” in the islands. They were told that Vuna’s [Fā‘otusia’s] son, Feileua [Makamālohi], was “heir Prince to Vavao [Vava‘u], Happai [Ha‘apai], and Annamoka [Nomuka]...[eventually at age] the rights of Feileua would be extended to Tongatabu [Tongatapu]” (Novo y Colson 1885: 383). The denigration of Pau’s son, Fuanunuiava, in Tongatapu intimate that those in league against Pau and his son were, at least in part, successful. This suggestion is further supported by the evidence that Makamālohi [Feileua] was treated like a Tu‘i Tonga with the presentation of a *moheofo*. The absence of a *palā tavake* being worn by Fuanunuiava, a clear successor to the Tu‘i Tonga title, in Tongatapu, at the same time that Vuna [Tu‘iha‘ateiho Fā‘otusia] and his younger brother [Veasi‘i] are wearing them in Vava‘u, suggest the usurpation of ritual authority if not political power of the Tu‘i Tonga. The rank of Fā‘otusia was exceedingly high; that of his son was unmatched in Tongan history. That they would position themselves and their title as more suitable and viable sacred rulers of Tonga is not out of the question. It also seems probable that the splendid headdress in the Museo de América was most likely the one worn by Vuna [Fā‘otusia] or his younger brother [Veasi‘i] in Vava‘u in 1793 and brought back to Madrid by members of the Malaspina Expedition. *Palā tavake* were magnificent adornments, beautifully created and regally worn. Undoubtedly, they were designed to impress.

* * *

While the accepted accounts of Tonga’s past have, by and large, been portrayed as absolute and unchanging, it is increasingly clear that power relations within Tonga were more fluid and competitive than received traditions suggest and the late 18th century proved to be a time of intense dynastic rivalries in the archipelago. The possible revival of the feather headdress known as *palā tavake* by Tu‘i Tonga Pau signalled a shift in the history of Tongan politics, as the sacred ruler may have attempted to extend the authority of his title to political as well as sacred power. His goal was only temporarily realised, ending with his death and the denigration of the title by dynastic rivals which included Tu‘iha‘ateiho Fā‘otusia. It appears that Fā‘otusia attempted to name himself or his son as the new sacred ruler of Tonga adopting the *palā tavake* as a symbol of this conquest.

They may have been the last to wear the feather headdress in Tonga. By the turn of the 19th century, the dynastic rivalries would explode into 20 years

of civil war in Tonga. The archipelago would not be fully united again until after 1845 which saw the installation of Tāufa‘āhau as Tu‘i Kanokupolu. Significantly at this time Tāufa‘āhau was also crowned King Tupou I: the first monarch and the beginning of the modern Tongan royal line. The new rule favoured the new Christian religion so the old ways of the gods in Tonga and their association with divine chieftainship, including its sacred regalia, were replaced. The rule of the Tupou Dynasty was further strengthened when Tu‘i Tonga Laufilitonga died in 1865 and Tāufa‘āhau ordered the sacred title to be abolished. The establishment of the modern Kingdom of Tonga heralded an era of political centralisation and unification that still exists today.

Today the *palā tavake* is regarded as a symbol of ancient chieftainship in Tonga. The discovery of a surviving example in Madrid will be welcomed by Tongans as a link with that distant past. It is recalled in contemporary Tongan poetry, textile design and visual art (see Fig. 2) where it is inextricably linked with the sacred ruler of Tonga who held the title Tu‘i Tonga. These works proclaim and reclaim the sacred chiefly regalia as part of an ancient, enduring and unified political past. However, rather than embodying a peaceful time of political unification the appearance, possible revival and subsequent disappearance of the *palā tavake* reveal a history of intense dynastic rivalries with the transformation and eventual end of the sacred Tu‘i Tonga title in Tonga.

NOTES

1. The headdress in Madrid was uncovered by Maia Nuku, University of Cambridge, with Beatriz Robledo, Museo de América, Madrid in November 2011. It was conserved by Mercedes Ramos Amezaga, also of the Museo de América (Amézaga Ramos and Cerezo Ponte 2013).
2. Paulaho roughly translates as ‘large scrotum or testicles’ and is somewhat offensive to modern Tongans who prefer the nomenclature Pau.
3. See Campbell (1982) and Herda (1995: 43-45) for a discussion of establishment of the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua title.
4. The ceremony at the time of planting was known as the *‘inasi ‘ufimui*. It acknowledged the part of the goddess Hikule‘o and the Tu‘i Tonga in the fertility of the land and invoked the continuation of that fertility. At the time of the harvest the first portion was likewise consecrated to Hikule‘o through the Tu‘i Tonga. This first fruits ceremony was known as *‘inasi ‘ufimotu‘a*. Clunie (2013: 187) contends that the *‘inasi* offerings were presented to Kaloafutonga rather than Hikule‘o.

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ABSTRACT

Palā tavake were sacred regalia, feather headdresses, reserved for the traditional sacred ruler of Tonga, the Tu'i Tonga. Recently a fanned feathered headdress whose materials and construction are commensurate with 18th-century Tongan objects was uncovered at Madrid's Museo de América. This paper considers the feather headdress located in Madrid, its probable historical context and connections—both Tongan and Spanish. In addition we discuss the association of *palā tavake* with the Tu'i Tonga, the sacred ruler of Tonga, and the changing nature of the title in the late 18th century.

Keywords: *palā tavake*, feather headdress, sacred regalia, Tongan political history, Tu'i Tonga, Western contact

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