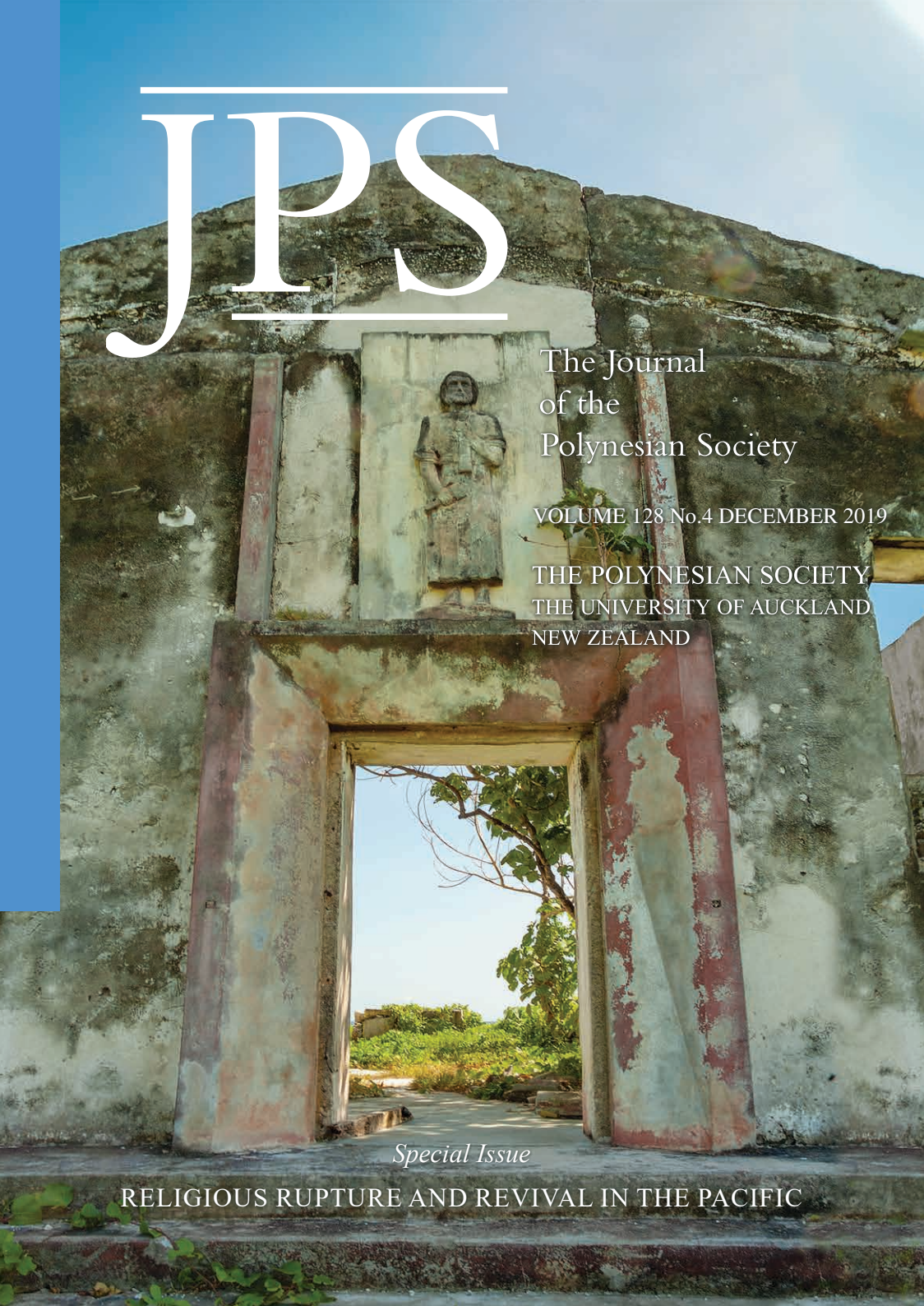

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RELIGIOUS RUPTURE AND REVIVAL IN THE PACIFIC

MISSIONARIES AND OTHER EMISSARIES OF COLONIALISM IN TUVALU

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the similarities and differences between the forms of external rule established in nineteenth-century Tuvalu first by the London Missionary Society and then by the British government through its imperial outreach. These raise the question of whether or not the two forms can be characterised as essentially the same and, if so, what implications are posed for the periodisation of history in Tuvalu and other Pacific societies.

Keywords: Tuvalu, London Missionary Society, colonial rule, governmentality, periodisation

COLONIALISM'S PERIODS

The periodisation of religious and secular forms of colonialism in the Pacific is an underexamined problem. Are they successive or simultaneous moments, and, if they are sequential, does that have any significance? Or is this a non-issue? It could well be argued that externally imposed regimes of either stripe are possibly so similar at base that the terms "missionisation" and "colonialism" are simply taken-for-granted labels for different registers of a common historical process. On that view, any distinction between them is no more than received wisdom. In my view, however, we need to take a closer look.

This paper will attempt to shed some light on the entangled issues of religious and political change by looking at how they have played out in a society on the edge of Polynesia. In Tuvalu (or the Ellice Islands, as the archipelago was called from the mid-nineteenth century to 1975), various forms of government replaced or modified existing powers and institutions from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. These changes took the form of a sequence of historical moments which the literature conventionally labels conversion, missionisation, colonial rule, self-government and full independence. The sequence just outlined is somewhat arbitrary, and a truly synoptic account of Pacific history would reveal a number of variations. It may seem counterintuitive for missionisation to come after conversion but it is attested in the case of Tuvalu, just as colonial rule needed to be established before missions could venture into parts of Melanesia, rather than the other

way around in many Polynesian societies. Each of these labels and the sequence they embody warrants critical scrutiny. In addition, they all involve implicit and explicit ideas and practices of "conversion" and "mission" that destabilise conventional boundaries between religion and politics.

The attitude of locals to their own history sheds important light on this issue, both in terms of fact and of ideology. It is something of a truism but the overwhelming majority of Tuvaluans profess a strong attachment to Christianity. To use Ivan Brady's phraseology (1975), it is their "own" culture, something that resides internally. They may not all practise the same form of Christianity—though the Tuvalu Christian Church, the most recent label for the version of Protestantism planted by the London Missionary Society (LMS), still maintains its hegemony on each island of the group—but Tuvaluans overwhelmingly take the continuing presence of Christianity in their lives as an article of faith. To put it another way, there is no mainstream discourse of *religious* "anti-" or "post"-colonialism in Tuvalu.

Over time, the LMS passed control of the mission to the Sāmoa-based administrators of what became the Christian Congregational Church of Samoa, but the place of Tuvalu in that organisation became one of formal equality with all the other local branches, even though Sāmoan was the language of the mission and the scriptures until translations of the New and Old Testaments were completed in the 1970s and 1980s. Tuvalu sent delegates to general meetings of the CCCS and trained many of its own pastors to work not only in Tuvalu but also in Sāmoa and other parts of the Pacific, including Melanesia. When Tuvaluans eventually sought religious independence to form the Ellice Islands Church in 1958, the transition took place smoothly and without rancour. Some pastors continued to receive training at Malua, the theological school set up by the LMS in Sāmoa soon after it arrived in 1830, and church officials have maintained links through common membership of the Pacific Council of Churches.

By contrast, the colonial administration that was imposed two to three decades after the arrival of the LMS was always seen not as "own" in Brady's sense but as "other". This difference found expression most dramatically when Great Britain decided to exit its Pacific territories in the 1970s and Tuvalu opted, against the objections of Whitehall, *for* full independence from Britain and *against* the proposal to maintain constitutional links to the Gilbert Islands. (The conjoined Colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands lasted from 1916 to 1975, having replaced the Protectorate of 1892 to 1916.) This was despite the fact that the Ellice Islanders had experienced a more benign and hands-off form of colonialism than many other parts of the Pacific, perhaps in part because there were relatively few British governmental representatives on the ground by comparison to church representatives. Much of the colonial administration did in fact come from "outside", that is, from Tarawa in the

Gilberts, the Colony's headquarters. But when the time came to cut the cord, it was done with no lingering attachment to the ideology of empire. If anything, anti-colonial sentiment grew after independence because of the way people felt Britain had treated them in the divorce negotiations (Goldsmith 2012). Tuvalu has retained ties to Britain through membership of the Commonwealth and popular affection for the British monarchy (see also Goldsmith 2015), but its recent geopolitical and economic strategy revolves much more around links with a range of other countries.

To sum up, Christianity arrived well before secular colonialism, maintained a certain distance from the latter over several decades and has remained at the forefront of Tuvaluan consciousness, albeit with some fragmentation and institutional change. In contrast, the secular colonial regime began later and came to a formal end, even if it has left traces in the legal, constitutional and political systems of post-independence Tuvalu. And, yet, to treat them as completely distinct amounts to mystification.

A HISTORY OF GOVERNMENT IN POST-CONTACT TUVALU

In discussing Christianity and its intricate relationship to other forms of social, political and cultural control in the Pacific, one of the most useful concepts to wrestle with is "government". Michel Foucault pressed hard to make social theorists reconsider how government works and, through the prism of "governmentality", showed how knowledge (such as the production of statistics) created forms of power characteristic of the early modern state (Allen 1991; Barry *et al.* 1996; Foucault 1979, 1991). In turn those forms came to be applied to methods of control in colonial regimes (Helliwell and Hindess 2002; Kalpagam 2000; Merry 2002; Pels 1997; Scott 1995).

Foucault himself would probably have been the first to acknowledge that his (re)formulation was not a radical overturning of the standard political science conception of government but in some ways an uncovering or rediscovering of ideas of ancient provenance. "Governmentality" may have been his neologism but the terms government and governance have long and overlapping histories, which put the lie to the restricted ways in which they are referred to in much contemporary discourse—for example, "government" as an arbitrarily defined set of institutions and "governance" as shorthand for the efficacy and probity of how those institutions operate (Doornbos 2001; Goldsmith 2000; Larmour 1995).

Even in a small society like Tuvalu, issues of government and Christianity take some complicated twists and turns. The foundational myth is that Christianity was brought to the archipelago in 1861 by a London Missionary Society deacon from the Cook Islands (Goldsmith and Munro 2002). The canonical version of his name is Elekana and, along with several companions, he was blown off course during a canoe voyage between the neighbouring

northern islands of Manihiki and Rakahanga and then drifted some 1,500 km before fortuitously making landfall at the southern Tuvaluan atoll of Nukulaelae. Having found the local community eager to hear about the gospel, Elekana set up literacy classes for all segments of the population. Such was his success that he was asked to remain as their teacher, but as he was not an ordained pastor, he felt he should travel to the LMS seminary at Malua, which he reached in 1862. The white British missionaries running that establishment were so enthused by his story that in 1865 they hired a ship and sent it with one of their senior colleagues, Rev. Archibald Murray, along with Elekana and some Sāmoan "native teachers" to continue the work he had begun. He and the others were separately deposited at various of the southern Tuvaluan islands (though in an early instance of mission control, Elekana was selected to land not at Nukulaelae but at Nukufetau). Owing to their remoteness, these teachers were subsequently left to their own devices for the next five years, untouched by the annual LMS visitations that were standard practice in Sāmoa and the Cooks. That is, until Rev. Stuart Whitmee made a follow-up visit in 1870.

In a discussion of this episode, Goldsmith and Munro (1992) argued that Whitmee's visit revealed an important distinction between "conversion" and "church formation". Briefly, "conversion" stands for a process in which community members, usually with the approval and example of existing leaders and through various forms of local agency, engage with the arrival of new religious ideas and come to more or less embrace them; "church formation" stands for the process adjudicated by a missionary whereby the population, or selected segments of it, are deemed to have become sufficiently and correctly Christian to allow them to become full members of the church (*ekalesia*). Both processes are deeply political but they are analytically distinct. Conversion is a kind of change that remains perfectly compatible with indigenous theological and political control; church formation represents the imposition of external control, as local applicants have to meet the mission's criteria for admission, which the missionary gauges through examination of their literacy, scriptural knowledge and conformity to church standards of morality. Each process represented a universe-defining moment and the universes so brought into being were parallel but separate in form, if not in terms of their underlying constants.

We can say, perhaps provocatively, that Whitmee's formation of churches during his official voyage of 1870 effectively marked the beginning of colonial rule in Tuvalu. This is not how histories of the group have generally referred to the matter (e.g., Laracy 1983). They routinely take for granted Britain's establishment in 1892 of a joint protectorate over the Ellice Islands and their neighbours to the north, the Gilbert Islands, as the starting point of such control. In so doing, they obscure the reality that for a quarter of a century or so the Ellice group was in many important respects administered

by Malua-based British missionaries for whom these islands, along with the Tokelau group to the east, comprised the Northwest Outstations of a large LMS Pacific empire that, earlier in the century, had come to encompass Tahiti, the Cooks and Sāmoa. It would later extend its reach into parts of Melanesia.

The rest of this paper is largely devoted to sketching and highlighting the essential continuity between the moment of church formation and the later consolidation of British imperial administration. I referred above to the distinction between conversion and church formation as *analytical*. The actual historical processes overlapped in time and space so that it is only at certain moments that the distinction comes into high relief.

The issue of agency also complicates the picture, as shown by the ebb and flow of historiographical debates. The Pacific Islander–centric literature that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s placed new emphasis on the choices and strategies made by local change agents and political leaders in relation to the arrival of new systems of government, both religious and imperial.

Here, for example, is James Boutilier on the "the moment of conversion" in Pacific societies:

> The key element ... was the power broker's appreciation of the utility of [the] missionary presence. Only when the traditional system was sufficiently undermined that a new system was required to legitimize transformed local power structures and to explain the expanded universe did Christianity, in its various forms, make sense and have value. It was the islanders' changed appreciation of the validity of the old order that determined the moment when the scales shifted in the missionaries' favor. This was the moment of conversion. The missionaries were only one set of players in a much larger drama. While they were more committed to change than other Europeans and while the latter did play a part, it was the islanders who determined the success or failure of missionary efforts at conversion. (Boutilier 1985: 52)

There are several characteristic and revealing ideas in this statement. Islanders, rather than being the passive victims of external forces, are able to choose their own destiny. However, they are also treated as a global and homogeneous category, partly through the effect of historical and geographic generalisation and partly though the reduction of island perspectives to those of "power brokers" (that is, the local leaders who negotiated missionary access). Lastly, the backdrop to what Boutilier calls the "drama" of conversion is an implicit presumption of rational decision-making, which in many writings of this type implies that conversion came about through politico-economic calculation. Such rationality may be a factor but it is rarely, if ever, a sufficient or even necessary cause. It also risks reducing conversion to the social conditions that underlie it, though the question of what people actually come to believe and why is rarely straightforward and will not be foregrounded in this paper.

I suggest, first, that we are not dealing with a unified phenomenon. The several decades after the beginning of sustained contact with Westerners were temporally marked by ruptures or breaks that force us to reconsider the periodisation of Tuvaluan history. The early years of missionisation were marked by clashes between competing political authorities and value systems. Diverse actors spoke in terms of different agendas, used different models of society and employed all manner of rhetoric to justify their actions.

There is clear evidence of Tuvaluans hearing about Christianity well before LMS intervention, either through their own travels, through visitors from other islands or through traders and beachcombers. In many cases, the news inspired social and religious experimentation. The most striking illustration of this was recorded by the first official LMS expedition led by Murray in 1865. He found on at least two islands that churches and chapels had been built before his arrival. He seems to have accepted this remarkable fact as convenient evidence that the islanders were avidly awaiting LMS teachers. He remarked of Nui that "[t]hey have a very good place of worship, and a school-house in addition" (Murray 1865: 343). At Nukufetau "[t]hey have a chapel, a very decent place, about forty-five feet long by forty broad, which is kept neat and clean. Poor people! thus have they gone on year after year, worshipping God according to their little light, and waiting and longing for some reliable guide" (p. 341).

For a few years, between the first inklings of the new religion and the missionary triumph, the situation was fluid and the possibilities relatively open. A genuine struggle was taking place between indigenous religion (both "traditional" and "syncretic") and mission Christianity, and concomitantly between different sections of the community who supported each. It was in the interests of the LMS to win that struggle as quickly as possible since open conflict could lead to a breakdown of the social unity on which the mission's work depended. Social division not only impeded the process of gathering converts but also threatened church contributions and created possible openings for other missions, especially the reviled Roman Catholics.

That the LMS missionaries saw this period as transitional is reflected in their own language and in their care not to offend established authority. The delicate balance of power and sensibilities is best revealed by the contrast between an account of the conversion of one particular island, Nanumaga, and the missionary records of church formation throughout Tuvalu (drawing on the contrast mentioned above).

Nanumaga, it should be noted, came under LMS influence in the 1870s, along with the other more northerly islands of the group. As in the more southerly islands, conversion preceded church formation. The conversion scene at Nanumaga was comparatively well recorded by the Sāmoan teacher Ioane, who facilitated it (Munro 1982: 131–32). About three weeks after he

landed at the island in September 1875, the chiefs decided to formally abandon their old religion. Ioane's powers of persuasion may have been an important factor in this decision but they are unlikely to have been sufficient. The speed with which events happened suggests that the step had been discussed for some time beforehand, as a result of LMS persistence, the bringing of a deputation of Christians from Nanumea, and so on.

At the request of several of the chiefs, Ioane set about nullifying the power of the old gods and their symbols (see Sissons this issue). At a public meeting, he removed the chiefs' sacred necklaces and suffered no ill effects from the transgression of *tapu* 'sacred, restricted' that this entailed. He was therefore permitted to go and break up the ancestral shrines in which skulls and bones were kept. But this was not an act of simple desecration: he made sure to wrap the remains carefully in *siapo* (bark cloth from Sāmoa, known elsewhere in the Pacific as *tapa*), and these were buried with ceremony and respect along with other paraphernalia of the old religion. The incident was clearly one in which Ioane was dependent on the wishes of the chiefs, in which he was used as a vehicle for the neutralising of sacred power, and in which the people rejected the complete replacement of one system by another. For example, they refused to allow any of the ancestral shrines to be used for Christian worship.

The contrast with the atmosphere surrounding the eventual establishment of LMS-approved churches is remarkable. On Nanumaga the first officially sanctioned church probably came into being in 1877, though the records are tantalisingly vague on this point (Goldsmith and Munro 1992: Table 1). For most of the islands, however, the officiating missionary left a record, most famously Whitmee's report (1871), following the 1870 voyage devoted to checking the work of the teachers landed in the southern group five years earlier. Four islands received this treatment. The scene at Nukulaelae has already been discussed in detail elsewhere (Goldsmith and Munro 1992) so the analysis here concerns two of the three others, omitting Nui, which Whitmee's account treats in cursory fashion (1871: 20). The two remaining cases in question are the acts of church formation at Vaitupu (7 October 1870) and Funafuti (3 October 1870).

At Vaitupu, the missionary found "abundance of work":

> [T]here were 157 candidates for church membership, with whom I had to converse. This occupied till eleven o'clock at night, and the greater part of the next day. The [resident Sāmoan] teacher and I decided on admitting 103 to membership to the church about to be formed. All of these had a clear knowledge of the Scriptural truths all important to salvation, and were all reported well of by the teacher as to outward deportment. The whole 157 candidates had been from two to four years enquirers; and I might without difficulty have admitted a greater number, but I thought it would do them no harm to wait another year. (Whitmee 1871: 15)

The pattern is clear. The visiting missionary had the power to bestow or withdraw the sanction of the church. If time ran out or he did not wish to make admission seem too easy, he withheld his approval. He worked in conjunction with the "native teacher" whose day-to-day influence may have been greater and whose recommendations were crucial but who could not confer the status of communicant. Moreover, as Whitmee demonstrated at Nukufetau, missionaries had the authority to remove teachers (Whitmee 1871: 17). While local people had some influence over individual outcomes, they were not allowed to put the final seal on matters in the absence of a missionary.

The Vaitupu case highlights another aspect of church formation. At the service which followed Whitmee's interviews of the candidates, "[t]hose about to be united in church fellowship, amongst whom was the king of the island, occupied one side of the building, while the rest of the population occupied the opposite side" (1871: 15). This opposition neatly symbolises one of the most important consequences of missionisation, the creation of strict social boundaries by means of which control and discipline could be exerted in Tuvaluan communities over the next several decades. True, the boundaries have always been policed as rigidly by local members of the church hierarchy as by the visiting LMS inspectors. Indeed, as Whitmee himself argued, sometimes the locals were much stricter; but this is arguably not a reflection of their power so much as an expression of their desire to entrench the new dispensation. The new mode of control did not require constant outside supervision, precisely because it produced an internalised government of the self as well as external control.

This point becomes even clearer in the description of the church formation at Funafuti. Whitmee decided to admit 28 of 47 candidates for membership:

> These were all well informed on vital doctrines, and had preserved a consistent outward deportment for four years. I found a strict system of discipline had been carried out by this community of enquirers during the time they have been left to their own resources. (Whitmee 1871: 13)

The missionary went on to gently chide them for this severity (pp. 13–14), but his comments were those of a man secure in his authority and judgement. As in the other cases, it was he who had the final word in accepting the applicants into the church.

Church formation marked an important step in Tuvaluan history and social organisation. It masked the contingency of the conversion process, which was neither uninterrupted nor inevitable. At the beginning of the process of religious transformation we can see manifestations of cultural crisis; as time goes by, we see increasing signs of institutional routinisation. Conversion in the Pacific sometimes stemmed from the quest for cultural autonomy

and creativity but this impulse must be distinguished from the imposition of pastoral power (Foucault 1980). While the process of conversion may have been hastened and eased by cultural affinities between Tuvaluans and the mostly Sāmoan evangelists sent to live with them, the form that the religion took was ultimately the result of managerial imperatives. Religious transformation in Tuvalu and elsewhere in the Pacific involved a contradictory mix of consent and control. That was also true of secular political transformation, though control tended to outweigh consent to a much greater extent. By analogy with the religious moment, empire was all about "church formation" as opposed to "conversion" per se. It is to this political moment that I now turn.

IMPERIAL STATE FORMATION

From May to August 1892, the British naval steamship *Royalist* under the command of Captain Edward Davis sailed from Fiji, the headquarters of the Western Pacific High Commission, to the Gilbert, Ellice and Marshall Islands. In many ways, it was a routine expression of gunboat diplomacy. Davis already had a mandate to proclaim a protectorate over the Gilberts but had authority only to sound out the possibility of doing the same in the Ellice group.

Why did the British Colonial Office approach the two archipelagos differently? The canonical sources emphasise international rivalries and strategic calculations (Macdonald 1982: 70; Munro 1982: 293–96; Munro and Firth 1986). I would argue that mission politics also played a significant, if tacit, role. The LMS had an almost total grip over the Ellice Islands (in effect placing them solidly within the British sphere of influence) while the Gilberts were the scene of contestation between the Roman Catholic Marist brothers and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a Hawai'i-based Protestant evangelical body. Neither of those could be trusted to foster the interests of the British Empire. The two archipelagos were also acknowledged by Germany to be part of the British sphere in the Pacific, but until they were bestowed with protectorate status, that hegemony could be challenged by German and American traders as well as by French and American missionaries. The Gilberts were the more pressing problem but the Ellice Islanders would be a necessary footnote.

The narrative that follows draws on Davis's daily log ([1892] 1976), which contained narrative summaries of his findings (pp. 30–33), as well as the synoptic descriptions he added to his overall report (pp. 67–69).

Davis briefly visited a couple of islands in the Ellice group on his voyage north to the Gilberts (Nukulaelae on 18 May and Vaitupu on 19 May), but on the return leg of his journey he visited every island in the group and compiled

more complete records. His responsibilities included getting counts of the inhabitants, determining their religious affiliations and assessing their general state of development and health. Almost certainly, he did not have time to conduct even rudimentary demographic and religious censuses himself and so would have relied on the church record books on each island, a fact that he did not acknowledge. Those record books, with their statistics on births, deaths and marriages, marked the bedding in of governmentality and were vital precursors to later colonial-era censuses.

Davis also summed up the state of the leadership and law enforcement on each island and whether or not there was political instability. Wherever there was trouble and discord, he routinely attributed it to Christian missionaries: not, I hasten to add, to those posted by the LMS but those who had previously worked in mission fields elsewhere and who wanted to establish personal theocracies either back in their natal communities or because they saw opportunities in new ones. Davis had no compunction in either removing such men or threatening them with punishment by future visiting naval commanders if they did not shape up.

By contrast, even if Davis may have questioned the effectiveness of some of the approved LMS pastors (by this time, the native teachers had been allowed the status of ordination), he refrained from commenting on their performance. Indeed, he hardly mentioned them at all. The archives tend to show that only in the most egregious of cases would a British officer have directly intervened in the workings of the LMS-appointed teachers. While this may remind us of Protestant missionary societies in the Pacific entering into comity agreements among themselves to rationalise their efforts in defined spheres of influence, there is a crucial difference. In the British Empire of the late nineteenth century, the representatives of secular and spiritual power largely avoided direct intrusion into each other's respective areas of authority; if any intervention took place it was by the secular actors. There was a tacit hierarchy in place in which the navy trumped the mission when push came to shove. Davis was also cautiously scathing about the financial burden placed on the islanders by church commitments. For one island, which he refrained from naming but which from internal evidence was either Nukufetau or Funafuti, he calculated that the upkeep of the pastor and the requirements to purchase Bibles and other publications such as hymn books meant that "the adults have to pay about 8/- [each] per annum for the privilege of being a Protestant" (p. 54).

Tensions clearly arose between church and state from time to time. Nevertheless, whether in reports of deputational visits by mission ships or of gunboat diplomacy on behalf of Queen Victoria, the language that each set of colonial practitioners employed to describe the conditions they encountered was often eerily similar in terms of reference to cleanliness and order (or their

opposites) (Goldsmith 2016). In terms of historical sequence, missionisation may have preceded imperialism but the two systems also worked in parallel. Moreover, the emissaries of imperialism were always Christian by background, even if they disagreed with specific aspects of missionary rule.

After his tour of the Gilberts, Davis proceeded to the Ellice Islands. At daylight on 27 July, he arrived at "Nanomea" (i.e., Nanumea), the northernmost island. His report mentions that he spoke about the proposal to the "King": "Before leaving he said the inhabitants would like to be placed under British protection, the same as the GILBERT Islands" (p. 33).

He left at noon the same day and reached "Nanomana" (i.e., Nanumaga) by 6:00 pm. "I landed and saw the King. […] They asked me to hoist the British Flag. I told them I could not—but I would ask for it when I arrived at FIJI" (p. 33). Davis spent barely an hour on land and reached Niutao at daylight the next day, 28 July. He wrote: "It is eleven years since a Man-of-War visited this Island. The King said he wished the British Flag hoisted. I told him I would try to obtain this request" (p. 33).

Departing at 2:00 pm, Davis proceeded to Nui, landing at 8:00 am the following morning, 29 July: "The King who appears to be a rather weak man, asked for British Protection which I promised to apply for" (p. 33). The report also refers to a man named Tukaike, who seems to have been dismissed as a missionary at Onotoa in the Gilberts and returned to Nui, only to stir up trouble in the "Kaupuli" (i.e., *kaupule* 'island council'), wanting trade to be "tabooed" and to become ruler. Davis considered that Tukaike had no right to be in the kaupule and "told the King he should be guided by him no more".

Once more, Davis left at 2:00 pm in order to arrive at "Oaitupu" (i.e., Vaitupu) by 9:00 am the next day, 30 July: "The King was anxious to have the British Flag hoisted over his Island, but he did not want a white man to come with it." Again, a troublesome former missionary with ties to Vaitupu had returned from Tamana in the Gilberts and was trying to usurp control of the island. David was told that this man, Zachia, had sailed for Nukufetau that very day.

Davis left Vaitupu at noon and arrived off Nukufetau at 6:00 pm, landing a boat ashore at one of the *motu* 'islets' where he encountered a "pilot" who happened to be carrying Zachia in his vessel. "I landed and saw the King. He said he would like the British Flag hoisted. He thought I had come for that purpose." Davis later admonished Zachia for his actions on Vaitupu and warned him of punishment should there be subsequent reports of misconduct.

He left for Funafuti at 8:30 pm, arriving there at 8:30 am the next day, 31 July. Funafuti, because of its accessible and protected anchorage in the lagoon and its potential as a coaling station, hosted a longer stay by *Royalist* and its crew and so received a more detailed description. Interestingly, in his summary report, Davis did not mention any conversations about British

protection, but the more detailed synoptic report does so ("The King said all the people wanted British protection", p. 69). Both sections of the report clearly show the captain taking the opportunity to display his imperial power: "I landed. It being Sunday every one was at Church. After Service I saw the King and Missionary. I decided to remain here two days to clean the boilers and on the following day I carried out gun practice from the boats and landed small arm men and Marines, and Field gun crews for exercise. After which the natives, who were very glad to see the ship here gave a dance in their native costume. Nearly all the inhabitants on the Island visited the ship" (p. 32).

Davis left Funafuti at 2:30 pm on 2 August and sailed for "Nukulailai" (i.e., Nukulaelae), which he reached the next morning at 8:30. "I landed, and found affairs in this Island were in a bad state again owing to an ex missionary. These men are without doubt the cause of the most trouble in the Ellice Group." This time the offender was "Lutello", a Tongan who had worked in "Pele" (possibly Palau in western Micronesia, sometimes called Pelew in accounts of the time) and who had deposed the "King" of Nukulaelae. Davis decided to return the Tongan to his homeland and reinstated the King "with the unanimous consent of the inhabitants. […] The King was anxious that the British Flag be hoisted on his Island and I promised to try and effect this for him" (p. 33).

The *Royalist* weighed anchor at 4:00 pm and by next morning stood off the southernmost island in the group, "Nurakita" (i.e., Niulakita), where it proved impossible to land because of sea conditions, and no one came off. Davis observed buildings, including a church, but the only natives he saw had the effrontery to display an American ensign. He did not comment on the significance of this and one can only speculate on the locals' motive, but without doubt they knew that their flag presented a challenge to the Union Jack flying on *Royalist*.

When Davis returned to Fiji, the plan to establish a protectorate over the Ellice Islands along the lines of the one he had proclaimed in the Gilberts quickly fell into place. Within a remarkably short period of time, another ship was despatched to the Ellice group to formalise this arrangement. It was the *Curacoa*, under the command of Herbert Gibson. This follow-up visit took place in August–September 1892 and proceeded in just as peremptory a fashion as the earlier one. The resulting narrative has the air of a mopping-up exercise, and my extensive quotations of very similar accounts at each island (Gibson 1892) are intended to convey the sense of repetitive banality that was crucial to the outcome.

Arriving at Vaitupu on 9 September, Gibson wrote, "On landing I proceeded to the King's House, who assembled the inhabitants. Through the medium of a German trader named NITZ, who kindly acted as interpreter, I

asked the King if he would like a British Protectorate, he and the people were unanimous in wishing it, I accordingly read the declaration of Protectorate and presented the King with a copy and a Union Jack. […] After remaining on shore about three hours I returned to the ship and proceeded."

The next stop was Niutao on 10 September: "I landed and with Mr. BUCKLAND an English trader here, visited the King and the Missionary. I explained to the King the object of my visit was to declare a British Protectorate. He expressed his willingness to the act, and summoned a meeting of the people in the official House. I there told the people that I had come to declare a British Protectorate, and after a considerable amount of palaver, I asked if they were agreeable to it, and on their replying in the affirmative, I read the act declaring the Protectorate and gave a copy to the King, after which we adjourned to the beach, hoisted a Union Jack, and the ship saluted with 21 guns."

Arriving at Nanumea at 8:30 am on 11 September, Gibson recruited as interpreter an English trader named Duffy, who accompanied him "to the official Government House, where I was received by the King and members of the Government. I informed them the object of my visit, and on asking them and the assembled people if they were agreeable to a British Protectorate, was answered in the affirmative. I then read the declaration, and presented a copy to the King after which we adjourned to the beach and the Union Jack was hoisted. I then presented it to the King." Later the same day, the *Curacoa* reached Nanumaga at 4:30 pm. Gibson "landed and interviewed the King and Government, and told them I had come to declare a British Protectorate and asked them if they would like it, to which they replied in the affirmative. The Proclamation was then read and I gave a copy to the King. We then adjourned outside and the Union Jack was hoisted, and I presented it to the King."

At Nui the next day (12 September), Gibson "landed about 9.30 am. and proceeded to the Court House, where I met the King and people. I informed the King that the object of my visit was to hoist the British Flag, and enquired if he and the people wished it. Being answered in the affirmative I read the Proclamation, and hoisted the Flag, delivering a copy of the proclamation and a Union Jack to the King."

It was almost an exact replay at Nukufetau next day (13 September) when the *Curacoa* arrived at 9:00 am. "I proceeded on shore and interviewed the King and people at the Court House. I asked if they would like a British Protectorate, and being answered in the affirmative I read the Proclamation and hoisted the Union Jack and delivered a copy of the Proclamation and the Union Jack to the King".

Ditto at Funafuti on 14 September where Gibson "proceeded to the King's house and informed him of the object of my visit. We adjourned to the Court House and a meeting of the people was called and I explained to them

what I had already told the King, and on they and the King and the Kaupuli expressing their willingness for a Protectorate, I read the proclamation and gave it to the King, after which we adjourned outside and planted the Union Jack, which I subsequently delivered to the King."

At Nukulaelae on 15 September, Gibson "landed about 9.30 and interviewed the King and told him the object of my visit; he expressed his willingness to a British Protectorate. I asked him to call a meeting of the people which he did and we adjourned to the Court House, and I there explained to the people what I had already told the King. They expressed their willingness to the Protectorate, so I read the Proclamation and hoisted the Union Jack, afterwards presenting it to the King, to whom I also gave a copy of the proclamation."

Things were somewhat different on 16 September at Niulakita, where Gibson managed to get ashore and found no Ellice Islanders but rather a small group of people from other parts of the Pacific working to collect guano for an American who had apparently purchased the island from a German firm. This sheds light on Davis's sighting of the American ensign a few weeks earlier, but if that had been an assertion of independence from the Empire, it was to no avail. "There was no evidence of the Island being under American Protection, so I read the declaration of British Protectorate, and hoisted the Union Jack and delivered it and a copy of the declaration of British Protectorate to the head man."

The speed, efficiency and managerial insouciance of this major territorial enlargement of the British Empire is remarkable. Gibson's description of the procedure at any one island could have stood for the whole but to have restricted my description in that way would have robbed the reader of a chance to be struck by its truly Pythonesque logic. In principle, the Ellice Islanders could have objected to the imposition of imperial rule, but it is hard to see how they could have resisted by any practical means. The outcome was predetermined in ways that missionaries could only envy, even though their contribution to this mopping-up exercise was crucial in maintaining a veneer of local agency.

One more general point about Davis's and Gibson's encounters with Ellice Islanders needs to be addressed. The British captains report meeting the "King" of each island, and this term requires some analysis. For a start, it probably papered over any differences among the leadership positions present in each island. The well-known British doctrine of indirect rule required a paramount leader, however reluctant, token or incompetent, to act as a conduit for naval orders. Reconstructing the 1892 political system of each island from this distance is hard but the evidence we have suggests there was considerable variation within the Ellice group at that time and earlier. More detailed accounts, such as those by LMS missionaries drawing on what they

had learned from the native teachers, point to a system based on collective decision-making by chiefs and/or elders representing kin groups. There may have been genuinely hereditary paramount chiefs (or "kings") on some of the islands but in other cases the men Davis assumed had overarching authority were likely to have been temporary or elected incumbents of that role. Of Nukufetau, he noted, "The King [is] no better in appearance than anyone else on the Island" (p. 68) and of Nui he remarked that, "The King appears a weak man easily led by others" (p. 68). Though the log entries tend to single out the role of one leader on each island, the fuller reports include references to "Kaupuli" (i.e., *kaupule* or island councils) and to the people in general in agreeing to British rule or other decisions Davis had made. Indeed, at Nukulaelae, the "King" who had been deposed was "re-instated … with the unanimous consent of the inhabitants" (p. 33). In short, use of the term "King" simply reflected the default image of monarchy that most naval men adhered to, operating as they did under the British Crown and the "Flag of Queen Victoria" that was the most potent symbol of imperial rule. Interestingly, if the voyage records are accurate, submission to the British monarch does not seem to have been mentioned explicitly by either Davis or Gibson. Perhaps it was just taken for granted (Victoria had been queen for some 55 years by this time so feasibly she represented "ground" rather "figure") but I am inclined to think that the proclamation of a protectorate (rather than, say, annexation) points to a wariness of imposing direct rule where it was more efficient to use existing and/or newly created forms of control through local authorities.

* * *

Reviewing the sequential and/or overlapping religious and secular moments of colonialism in Tuvalu and elsewhere in the Pacific is important for several reasons. First, even with all the usual provisos about arbitrariness and ethnocentrism, dates in the Gregorian system serve as useful signposts, both for historians in the Christian literary tradition and for those who entered into alien calendrical systems as a result of missionisation. Consequently, they become entrenched as cultural understandings of past, present and future. For Tuvaluans and many other Pacific Islanders (see McDougall this volume), the symbolic commemoration of annual and centennial dates has become a powerful statement about the transition from paganism to Christianity and so from "tradition" to "modernity". In Sāmoa, to take one example of this path, *pōuliuli* 'the time of darkness' has become a potent and contested cultural marker of a time when ancestors and spirits were once banished and relegated to the margins to one where they have been given new force. In Tuvalu, that break was even more dramatic. Unlike Sāmoa, *aitu* 'spirits' and

lingering pagan practices are a less salient feature and so their (re)valorisation is more problematic because of the totality of conversion, the desire for island ideological unity and the loss of ancestral knowledge through blackbirding (Maude 1981). Perhaps paradoxically, that means the boundary between pōuliuli and the era of *te lama* 'the light' is an even more trenchant call to mark the distinction between the periods in question. This also lends weight to the notion of Christianity being a more internal part of local culture than colonial government: while Pacific nations such as Tuvalu make great play of anniversaries of national independence, to my knowledge, anniversaries of the arrival of colonial rule are never commemorated.

In a sensible critique of Jacques Le Goff's *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, J.G.A Pocock sums up the issue well. It is not a question, he argues, of whether we "must" periodise; rather it is a question of discussing "who has done so, with what results; what is meant by doing so; and what results it may yield" (Pocock 2018: 331). If religious and political conversion can be construed as "events", then the sequence of other events leading up to and from those events may help to make sense of them. Whether those events are similar or radically different, it may be productive to work out how they get entangled and disentangled. As Pocock notes, "[i]t seems worth entertaining the proposition that, around a certain time, something happened in a certain culture which had widespread results and that these may be pursued until we see that something else has happened that changed the narrative we have been pursuing. The danger is—as we have always known but often disregarded—that we may hypostatize the period between the two, so that the changes during it have a common explanation and may be said to have changed everything" (p. 331). The religious and secular forms of conversion in the Pacific illustrate that conundrum perfectly.

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