

Part 1: The Pacific in 1500

Unit 1: Samoa in 1500

Asofou So'o

Facts	
Capital	Apia
Main Islands	Savaii, Upolu
Population	219, 998 inhabitants (July 2009 estimate)
Highest Point	Mauga Silisili, 1858m
Date of Independence	1 January, 1962



Figure 1.1. Map of Samoa

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Understand the important role Salamasina played in the history of Samoa as first *tafi'ifa*
- Understand how Salamasina was related to the highest-ranking Samoan families
- Be familiar with the Nafanua Wars and their consequences
- Understand the movement and conferral of *papa*

Why was Salamasina such an important person in the history of Samoa?

One of the most important Samoans in the early 1500s was a woman named Salamasina. She was important for a number of reasons. She was a descendant of Samoa's powerful families and a daughter of Vaetoifaga, the *Tu'i Tonga Fefine* of Tonga.

Events during Salamasina's lifetime resulted in her being appointed as the first *tafi'ifa* of Samoa, a person who holds the country's four highest-ranking titles at that time. Most of the high-ranking families and four of the highest-ranking titles of Samoa today could trace their descent to Salamasina. Those titles are Malietoa, Tupua Tamasese, Mata'afa and Tuimaleali'ifano.

When Samoa became an independent country in January 1962, the holders of the four titles were appointed to the top positions of government. Malietoa Tanumafili II and Tupua Tamasese Mea'ole became the Joint-head of State. Mata'afa Fiame Faumuina Mulinu'u II became the country's first Prime Minister, and Tuimaleali'ifano Suatipatipa was appointed to the office of the Council of Deputies.

A number of customs, which are still practiced in Samoa, started from the time of Salamasina. Samoa's most valued commodity, the fine mat (*ietoga*), is said to have originated from the time of Salamasina.

This chapter tells the story of Salamasina and her influential ancestors and relatives. It examines the four wars that enabled Salamasina to hold the country's four *papa* titles.

Political Divisions of Samoa

Although the Samoa Island group stretches from Manu'a in the east to Savai'i in the west, the political divisions under the influence of Salamasina included the western island only. They were Savai'i, Manono, Apolima, Upolu and Tutuila.

Salamasina lived in Upolu. Upolu was divided into three political districts, as is still the case today. On the western side is the district of A'ana, on the eastern side is Atua district, and between them is Tuamasaga district.

What Is the Significance of The Four Wars and The Titles?

The four titles that Salamasina held were the rewards of victory in war.

The first and second war

The first two wars were fought in the district of Tuamasaga.

On the northern coast of Tuamasaga district are the villages of Malie and Afega. These villages were divided on the issue of who was the next person to hold the Malietoa title. Afega preferred Gato'aitele, a daughter of the previous holder of the Malietoa title. Malie, the village where the holder of the Malietoa title resided, supported another candidate.

Questions and Activities

1. Who was Salamasina?
2. Why is Salamasina important in the history of Samoa today?
3. What were the four titles held by Salamasina?
4. Can you name a woman in another Pacific Island country who holds an important place in that country's history?
5. List the islands of the Samoa group and measure the distance between its most eastern island and its most western island.
6. Sketch a map of Upolu Island and use an atlas to locate the positions of the following places:
 - (a) districts
 - (i) A'ana
 - (ii) Tuamasaga
 - (iii) Atua
 - (b) settlements
 - (i) Apia
 - (ii) Lefaga

Gato'aitele and her supporters appealed for the help of the Tonumaie'a family, a powerful family in Savai'i. Gato'aitele's niece Atogaugatuitoga was married to Tonumaie'a Sauoiga, the leader of the Tonumaie'a family. As a result of the Tonumaie'a family's help, Gato'aitele won the war.

To celebrate victory and to reward the Tonumaie'a family for their support, the name Gato'aitele was made a high-ranking title. It was then taken by the Tonumaie'a family to Savai'i.

The third war

The second war was fought in Safata, a sub-district on the southern side of Tuamasaga district.

Another niece of Gato'aitele was Vaetamasoali'i. Her supporters in Safata were treating her as if she was the Queen of the land. The nearby settlements of Lefaga, a sub-district on the southern side of A'ana district, rejected the spreading authority of Vaetamasoali'i and her supporters.

Vaetamasoali'i, like her aunt Gato'aitele, appealed to the help of Tonumaie'a Sauoiga who was married to her sister Atogaugatuitoga. Vaetamasoali'i won the war. Her name was made a high-ranking title which the Tonumaie'a family took back to Savai'i as a reward for their effort in the war.

Vaetamasoali'i's son was Tama-a-le-lagi. While Tama-a-le-lagi was a baby, two high-ranking orators (or *tulafale*) of A'ana district brought him to Leulumoega, the capital village of A'ana district, where he was raised to adulthood.

Tama-a-le-lagi and his supporters appealed to Tonumaipe'a Sauoaiga for help. The Tonumaipe'a family willingly offered their support. In reward for Tama-a-le-lagi's victory the Tuia'ana title was taken to Savai'i by the Tonumaipe'a family.

The fourth war

The last war was fought in Atua district. The origin of the war was a dispute between the holder of Atua district's paramount title, Tuiatua, and her daughter. The husband of the Tuiatua had taken his stepdaughter as a lover.

The dispute spilled over into the issue of who was the rightful holder of the Tuiatua title. The mother and her supporters appealed to the help of the Tonumaipe'a family. They won the war. As a reward for their help in the war, the Tonumaipe'a took the Tuiatua title to Savai'i.

The four highest-ranking titles of Upolu Island were now in the custody of the Tonumaipe'a family on Savaii.

The goddess of war

Samoa had many gods. The most important god in times of war was the goddess Nafanua. One oral tradition tells of how Nafanua made a special journey from Puluotu to relieve the suffering of her Samoan people. On arrival in Samoa, Nafanua defeated the war party of those who enslaved her people on the western side of Savai'i.

Nafanua became the god of the powerful Tonumaipe'a family of Savai'i. The four wars that were fought on Upolu Island which resulted in the four *papa* titles being taken to Savai'i were called Nafanua's wars. The Tonumaipe'a family believed that their strength in war originated from their goddess.

Return of the four titles to Upolu

Tonumaipe'a Sauoaiga and Atogaugatuitoga had three children. The boys names were Tupa'i and Tau'ili'ili, and their sister's name was Levalasi, but was also called So'oa'emalelagi.

So'oa'emalelagi, against her wish, eventually married her first cousin Mata'utia who held the Tuiatua title. The influential men of Atua district had planned for So'oa'emalelagi to marry Mata'utia. Later they succeeded in plotting the death of Mata'utia.

Now that her husband was dead, So'oa'emalelagi decided to go and stay with her first cousin Tama-a-le-lagi at Leulumoega where she could care for Tama-le-lagi's young daughter Salamasina. It was at that time that Tupa'i and Tau'ili'ili wanted the four titles in their custody conferred on their sister.

When So'oa'emalelagi learned about her brother's wish, she requested her brothers to have the titles bestowed on Salamasina instead, whom she was treating as her own child. Despite their initial reluctance, Tupa'i and Tau'ili'ili eventually obeyed their sister. So'oa'emalelagi made this decision because she was aware of Salamasina's strong political connections, among her other qualities.

What were Salamasina's Political Connections?

Salamasina was a direct descendant of the Malietoa and Tuia'ana titles of Upolu Island.

She was a fourth-generation descendant of the Malietoa La'auli. Her father was Tama-le-lagi who held the Tuia'ana title. Gato'aitele, whose name had now been made a high-ranking title of Upolu Island, was the sister of her great grandmother Gasoloaiaooelagi.

Vaetamasoali'i, the name of her grandmother, was now being made another high-ranking title of Upolu Island. Mata'utia, her father's first cousin, once held the Tuiatua title. Mata'utia's mother was a direct descendant of the Tuiatua line.

Through her great aunt Atogaugatuitoga, Salamasina was also connected to the Tonumaipe'a title, one of the highest ranking titles of Savai'i Island. Salamasina's grandmother Vaetamasoali'i was married to Selaginato, who was a son of the holder of the Tagaloa title – one of the highest-ranking titles of Savai'i.

Therefore, Salamasina was either a direct descendant or closely connected to the two highest ranking titles of Savai'i (Tonumaipe'a and Tagaloa) and the five highest titles of Upolu (Tuia'ana, Tuiatua, Gato'aitele, Vaetamasoali'i and Malietoa). Salamasina was also the daughter of Tama-le-lagi and Vaetoifaga, the Tu'i Tonga Fefine of Tonga.

Strong political connections were an asset in times of war. Most importantly, Salamasina was connected to all the powerful families of Samoa. When the four titles in the custody of the Tonumaipe'a family were bestowed on her, Salamasina became the first *tafa'ifa* of Samoa.

Questions and Activities

7. Explain the relationship between the following people
 - (a) Tupa'l, Tau'ilili and So'oa'emalelagi
 - (b) So'oa'emalelagi and Tama-a-le-lagi
 - (c) So'oa'emalelagi and Salamasina
8. Explain why the four titles were returned to Upolu
9. Why were the titles conferred on Salamasina?
10. Why were political connections important?
11. What was the relationship between Gato'aitele, Vaetamasoali'i, and Tuia'ana
- 12 Why were genealogies important to the Samoans?



Figure 1.2. A Samoan Meeting House, designed in the same way as the early meeting houses for Samoan Fono (Parliament);at the National University of Samoa 2000.



Figure 1.3. Stores of pandanus bark strips, used in making the 'ie toga (Fine Mat)

The Tafa'ifa

The four titles of Gato'aitele, Vaetamasoali'i, Tuia'ana were bestowed on Salamasina. The four titles were called *papa*. A person who held all the four titles (*papa*) was called the *tafa'ifa*.

The name *tafa'i* referred to the men that sat on either side of the titleholder when each of the four titles was conferred. The *tafa'i* of the Gato'aitele title were Fata and Maulolo. The *tafa'i* of the Vaetamasoali'i title were Fuga and Mauava. The *tafa'i* of the Tuia'ana title were Umaga and Pasese. The *tafa'i* of the Taiatua title were Tupa'i and Ta'inan.

The term *tafa'ifa* means four *tafa'i* and referred to the four pairs of men associated with the four titles that make up the *tafa'ifa*.

The conferral of the titles

The *papa* titles, like all other Samoan titles, are conferred in a special ceremony. Among other things, the ceremony involves the performing of certain rituals. These rituals are performed by certain orator groups.

- In Atua district, the orator group (called *Lufilufi*) resides at Lufilufi village, the capital village of Atua district. They confer the Tuiatua *papa*.
- In A'ana the orator group (called *Leulumoega*) resides at Leulumoega village, the capital village of A'ana district. They confer the Tuia'ana *papa*.
- The Gato'aitele *papa* is conferred by Tuisamau, the orator group of Afega village.
- The Vaetamasoali'i *papa* is conferred by Alataua, the orator group of Safata sub-district.

Traditions since Salamasina

A number of Samoan traditions, which still survive to this day, can be traced to the time of Salamasina. The *papa* titles are still conferred by the same orator groups and at the same places. The latest *papa* title to have been conferred is the Tuiatua. It was conferred in 1986.

Except for a few occasions in the nineteenth century, holders of the *papa* after Salamasina have always been the descendants of Salamasina. The two *tafa'i* of each of the four *papa* titles also have remained to this day. The *ietoga* is still the most treasured traditional commodity of Samoa (see *Figure. 1*).

Questions and Activities

13. Explain the meaning of the following Samoan concepts

- (a) *papa*
- (b) *tafa'i*
- (c) *tafa'ifa*

14. Name the two *tafa'i* for each of the following *papa*

- (a) Gato'aitele
- (b) Vaetamasoali'i
- (c) Tuia'ana
- (d) Tuiatua

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15. Which orator group conferred the following *papa*?
- (a) Gato'aitele
 - (b) Vaetamasoali'i
 - (c) Tuia'ana
 - (d) Tuiatua
16. Name one Samoan custom which is still practiced today whose origin could be traced to Salamasina.
17. Either:
- (a) Write a poem to depict any of the events, or number of events, during this period of Samoa's history
- OR
- (b) Compose a song around the events of this period of Samoa's history
18. Get together with your class members and choose an episode from the above events and turn it into a play.