

Unit 30: Tonga: Queen Salote- A Woman Ahead of Her Time

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Facts

Location:	South pacific, south of Samoa and east of Fiji
Current Population:	120,898 inhabitants (July 2009 estimate)
Date of Independence:	4 June, 1970
System of rule	Monarchy (with a constitution)
Head of State	A king or Queen

Glossary

<i>Coronation</i>	The ceremony in which a queen or a king receives their crown
<i>Opponent</i>	One who is in the opposite side in a contest or a controversy; an adversary.
<i>Papalangi</i>	A European
<i>Political tactics</i>	A plan or action to achieve desired ends
<i>Prince Consort</i>	The spouse of a reigning monarch
<i>Suitor</i>	One who is courting a desired partner

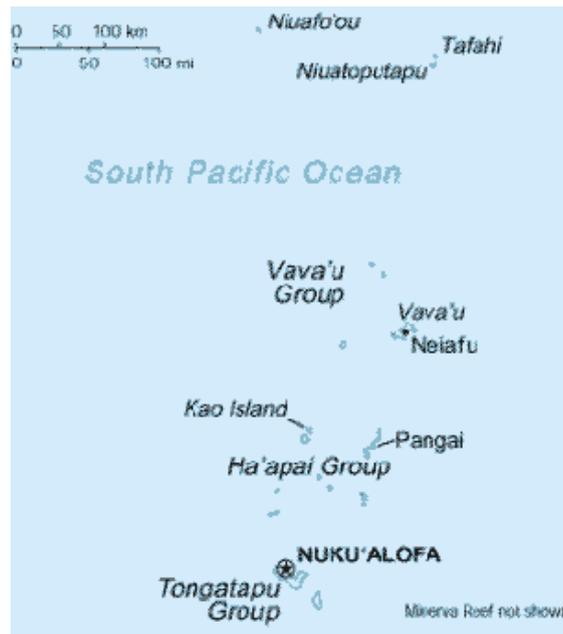


Figure 30.1. Map of Tonga

At the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- describe Queen's Salote background
- describe the struggle of a woman in a society ruled by men
- present a view on why Queen Salote is known as the 'mother of modern Tonga'

Why was Queen Salote 'a woman ahead of her time'?

When the daughter of King George Tupou II and Queen Lavinia of Tonga was born on 13 March 1900, no one present could have known that they had witnessed the birth of Tonga's most famous woman. Indeed, for 47 years, this remarkable woman, Princess Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu, ruled the Kingdom of Tonga. This unit is about a woman, a Queen, who was a woman ahead of her time.

Salote's Early Years

Princess Salote was only two years of age when her mother died on 25 April 1902. Salote was passed back and forth between her father, the King, and her relatives in Kolomotu'a (the village of the Chiefs). In particular, Salote spent a great deal of time with her great-uncle Mateialona, who was the Premier of Tonga between 1904 and 1912.

Among Salote's care-givers were Lesieli Tongamohenoa, who served as private teacher for the Princess; Lavinia Veiongo and Losaline Fatafehi, who taught the Princess in cultural and traditional matters, and the *papalangi* nuns from the Catholic Church. These people all opened their hearts to the motherless child, and helped to lay the foundations for her remarkable life.

Through private tutoring at home, and education at the prestigious Church of England Diocesan School for girls in Auckland, New Zealand, Princess Salote was prepared for adulthood. She went to Auckland at the age of five, and was one of the earliest Tongan students admitted to this elite school. Schooling was under the strict discipline of a British headmistress. Salote remained a student in Auckland for eight years, including most of the First World War.

Salote's father re-married and, in 1912, had two daughters by his second wife, Queen Takipo. But six years later in 1918, Queen Takipo died in an influenza epidemic. As the King and Queen had no sons, Salote became the heiress to her father's title. This happened much to the delight of some, and to the disappointment of others in the Kingdom of Tonga.

Questions and Activities

1. Find the meaning of the following words:
 - *Caregiver*
 - *Papalangi*
 - *Strict*
 - *Elite*

- Heir

2. Critical Thinking: Salote's father wanted her to stay close to her relatives. Give some possible reasons for this.
3. Historical Empathy: Imagine that you were one of Salote's caregivers:
 - a *papalangi* Catholic nun: What kinds of things would you teach the young Princess?
 - Losaline or Fatafehi: What kinds of things would you teach the young Princess?
 - Lesieli Tongamohenoa: What would you teach the young Princess?

Why did Princess Salote's marriage to Viliami Tunji create tensions in the Kingdom of Tonga?

In 1917, just before Salote assumed the Monarchy, the King fell seriously ill. As his health did not improve, there was an attempt by his **opponents** to remove him and appoint Ha'amea, the son of 'Ulukalala, as the Prince Regent. Ha'amea was twenty-five years of age and heir to the 'Ulukalala title. He was one of the potential suitors to marry the young Princess Salote.

However, after consulting with the appropriate Chiefs – and despite the disappointment of Ha'amea's supporters – the King decided the young Princess Salote should marry Viliami Tunji. He was the grandson of Tunji Halatuituia from Hahake. He was chosen to marry Salote partly because of his rank by blood and title, and partly because of his relationship to the King's second wife, Queen Takipo. Much later in life,

Queen Salote claimed that Tunji Halatuituia had named her as his grandson's bride on the day she was born.

Viliami was a Great Chief in the traditional sense, by rank and power. He was educated for a few years at the Newington College in Sydney, Australia, and worked as a tutor at the Tupou College in Tonga. He had visited England, and had been the Governor of Vava'u since 1912. Viliami had many supporters throughout the Kingdom of Tonga. The descendants of his high-ranking ancestors included his mother's people in Kolomotu'a, and his grandfather's people from the Hahake districts.

Salote and Viliami were married on 19 September 1917. However, as the King had foreseen, the Tongan Kingdom became divided because of the marriage. The defeated faction, who had wanted Salote to marry Ha’amea became enemies of Salote and her husband.

On 17 April 1917 – less than seven months after the wedding – the King died. Just a few hours after King George Tupou II passed away, Salote was proclaimed the Queen of Tonga. After six months of national and family mourning, arrangements were made for the **coronation** of Salote. The traditional royal *Kava Ceremony* was held on 9 October 1918, on the palace grounds. Nobles and talking chiefs from different parts of the Kingdom attended. The Christian ceremony was held in the Royal Chapel, two days later on 11 October 1918.

Salote and her husband, called the “Prince Consort“, were married for 23 years. Despite the opposition by Ha’amea’s supporters, the Prince Consort was greatly respected and admired for his strong sense of justice and compassion. Viliami was concerned for the welfare of the ordinary people so his sudden death, on 20 July 1941, came as a shock to the people of Tonga.

Questions and Activities

4. From the text you have just read, on the early life of Queen Salote, complete the chart below.

Salote’s Birth Date	Her Mother and Father	Her Care givers	Her school

5 Find the meaning of the following words and make a sentence with each of them:

- *proclaimed*

- *ceremony*

- *defeated*

Why was there so much resistance to Queen Salote's rule?

During her rule in Tonga, Queen Salote faced resistance from the supporters of Ulukalala, the father of the unsuccessful suitor, Ha'amea. She also faced resistance from the *papalangi* cabinet ministers, who often tried to interfere with her decisions.

Because Salote was only eighteen years of age many saw her as just a school girl who could not possibly know how to rule a country. The nobles, or great landowners and aristocracy of the Kingdom – most of whom supporters of 'Ulukalala – often tried to block decisions made by Salote and her Prince Consort.

Following a visit to Tonga in November 1920, the British High Commissioner reported his fear that the young Queen Salote would never be able to control her rebellious chiefs. But Salote turned out to be a strong ruler, and insisted on her constitutional right to rule as Queen of Tonga. She informed Parliament that, as Queen, she could even make decisions about appointments to cabinet.

There was also resistance to Queen Salote's rule from the *Free Wesleyan Church (FWC)*. Its leaders refused to accept her as the temporal head of the Church, even though Salote's great-great grandfather, Tupou I, and her father, Tupou II, had this role.. Shortly after, in a speech delivered during a meeting at the Royal Chapel in September 1923, Salote reminded the nobles, chiefs and cabinet ministers that as Tupou's heiress, she was also head of the Church.

Challenges to Queen Salote's rule gave her the opportunity to develop her own **political tactics**. She continued to pass laws that benefited the people of Tonga, on social, political and religious matters. Among Queen Salote's achievements were the creation of the Tonga Medical Health Department; involvement in the establishment of the Fiji School of Medicine; the construction of roads to villages on Tongatapu, and improvements in Tonga's communications system.

Questions and Activities

- 6 Find the meaning for the following words:
 - *Challenge*
 - *Parliament*
 - *Cabinet*
- 7 With a classmate, read and then discuss the passage above on the opposition to Queen Salote's rule;
 - Why was there resistance to the Queen's rule?
 - Who were the people who resisted her rule?
 - How did the Queen react to this opposition?
- 8 . Historical Empathy: Imagine that you oppose, or support, The Queen: describe your feelings;
 - A Tongan noble: explain why you oppose the Queen.
 - A Queen's supporter: explain why you support the Queen.

Why was Queen Salote so popular overseas?

Not only was Queen Salote loved by her own people, but she was also admired outside Tonga. During her life, she received a number of important titles. In early 1923, she was given the *Order of the Dame of the British Empire (OBE)* from King George V of Britain. It was the first time that a Pacific Islander was granted this title.

Twenty years later, in 1941, King George VI awarded Queen Salote the *Knight of the British Empire (GBE)*; and in 1965, she was awarded the *Knight of St Michael and St George (KMG)*.

In 1953, Queen Salote was invited to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II of Britain. During her visit to England, she proved to be very popular, especially for leaving the hood down so people could see her, even though it was raining and everyone else stayed under cover. A British columnist said: '*She came, she saw, she conquered*'.

In the same year, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visited Tonga, tightening the ties of friendship between the two nations. In 1958 the Treaty of Friendship between Tonga and Great Britain was renewed.

Queen Salote of Tonga died peacefully on July 30 1965 in a hospital in New Zealand. Tonga mourned the loss of their beloved Queen. For the people of the Kingdom of Tonga, Salote had become a symbol of selfless humanity and a defender of ordinary Tongan people's rights. She was dignified and compassionate, and she ruled in a most harmonious way, as the 'Mother of Modern Tonga'.

Questions and Activities

- In chronological order, list all the important titles that Queen Salote received outside Tonga.
- What did the British columnist mean when he wrote 'She came, she saw, she conquered'?
- Paragraph writing: Explain in 100 words why Queen Salote is said to be the 'Mother of modern Tonga'.
- Historical empathy: If you were Queen Salote's speech writer, how would you go about writing a speech, to be delivered publicly, thanking the people of Tonga for their support, in say 1958 (at least 200 words, or more).