

Aspects of Samoan Literature II

Genealogies, Multigenerational Complexes, and Texts on the Origin of the Universe

John Charlot

Abstract. – Based on the first article in this three-part series, this second article describes the form of Samoan genealogies and describes how they are gradually expanded through insertions of additional material until a new form is developed. The unifying element of the multi-generational complex is the genealogical relationship of some of the characters in the separate narratives. Samoan texts on the origin of the universe and human beings are then analysed into three types: those based on the genealogical model, on the creational model, and combinations of the two. Attention is paid to the tendencies of individual redactors and their use of older materials. [*Polynesia, Samoan literature, genealogies*]

John Charlot, Dr. Theol. (in Religious Studies, University of Munich, 1968). He worked as Scholar-in-Residence for the government of American Sāmoa in 1972–1973 and created a sequence of courses in Polynesian Religions at the University of Hawai'i. He has worked in culture and the arts at the East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawai'i. – Publications: see References Cited.

In an earlier article (Charlot 1990), I described the structure of Samoan single story forms – optional title or titular sentence, introduction, optional transition, narrative, optional conclusion, and optional terminal phrase or sentence – and showed how they could be combined with other stories or materials to form larger complexes. I will now analyse some of the relations between genealogy and narration in Samoan literature, relations indicated by a title such as *Gafa ma tala o Saveasi'uleo und [sic] Nafanua* 'Genealogy and Story of Saveasi'uleo and Nāfanua.'¹ The mutual influence among Samoan literary forms will be demonstrated; for instance, genealogies can be told as narration (Krämer 1902: 105 f.).

1. Genealogies

Genealogies have long been recognized as central to Samoan culture, being used for such different purposes as identifying and praising self and family, arranging marriages, awarding titles, and

claiming rights and lands. Genealogical information is important for understanding society and politics, from particular policies and alliances to an entire polity; for instance, the political divisions of 'Upolu are referred to the offspring of Pili and their interrelations (Stuebel 1896/1973: 169/9; Krämer 1902: 27 f.). Genealogies are used to understand historical figures: the multigenerational history of Tamafaigā – especially the story of his father and the female god – establishes his *itū aitu*, the godly side of his personality and family connections and thus his special power (Stuebel 1896/1973: 175/15 ff.). Purely genealogical connections to powerful gods similarly establish prestige and explain power.

Genealogies are an important means of thought and communication in religious thinking. Like human beings, individual gods or *aitu* can be explained through genealogy. Diverse myths and religious traditions can be unified by arranging gods in genealogical lines, as was done by Hesiod in his "Theogony." Different attributes of Tagaloa can be treated as separate Tagaloas – name plus epithet – producing a large family. Along with creationism, genealogy provides one of the two dominant thought models for discussions of the origin of the universe, as will be discussed below. The word *gafa* can in fact be used for origin without indication of lineage, in all likelihood an extended sense.²

1 Krämer 1902: 104; Hovdhaugen 1987: 92–96. *Talagafa* is to "Recount a genealogy" (Milner 1966: 233). See the taunting line in Krämer 1902: 434 line 52: '*Upolu 'aia 'e te talagafa*' 'Upolu, stop talking about your genealogies.' The connotation of 'talking up' or even 'telling tales about' can be felt. – For technical information on the presentation of texts in this article, see Charlot 1990: 416 f. All circumflex accents in Charlot 1990 should be macrons.

2 Krämer 1902: 120, '*O le gafa o tatau*' 'The Origin of Tattooing'; cf. 331 ff. Krämer 1902: 263 records the odd use of the word in a chant-terminating formula: '*O le gafa ō*, paraphrased *e moni lava* and translated "So ist es!" 'So is it!' – Genealogies are of course tendentious, e.g., Cain 1979: 170; Epling 1970: 164. They must not be conflated