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THE SAMOAN DIVISION OF TIME

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THE SAMOAN DIVISION OF TIME.

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BY A MEMBER OF THE SAMOAN SOCIETY.

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**T**HE student of Polynesian life whose survey is extensive as well as intensive must be struck by the puzzle which Samoa will bring into the work. There is met here a homogenous people, inhabiting four relatively large islands, and who yet, in tradition, and culture, and language, have some very distinctive non-Polynesian characteristics—assuming, of course, that a general agreement amongst the other groups of Islands of Polynesia gives us the true Polynesian aspect.

So far as information can be gathered from known traditions, the Samoan is not a voyager from some distant country, but indigenous, springing from the gods; his culture, social and material, is in many points of view quite unique; his language might be called double, seemingly, with its language for chiefs and its common language, a duplication of the double language of Siam, where the King was worshipped as a god, and hence accorded a language of his own.

Now, if we take some particular line of study, as I purpose to do in this paper, we find again this striking contrast between Samoa and many other groups of Polynesian islands, namely, in Samoan Time Divisions. Material for this study is very scarce, but it is a question that might be disputed, whether this material is scarce because traditions have been forgotten, or whether the ancient Samoan really bothered himself little about complicated time divisions. Turner was in a position to acquaint himself with the ancient time divisions, and he actually put on record in his *Samoa, a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before*, certain ancient time divisions, but these are very few and very simple. Was it, then, that even in Turner's day the Samoans had forgotten, or was it that they had little to offer?

Turner states briefly (pp. 203-4) :—

“The moon was the timekeeper of the year. The year was divided into twelve lunar months, and each month was known by a name in common use all over the group. To this there were some local exceptions, and a month named after the god, who on that month was specially worshipped. It is said that of old it was universal to name the month after the god whose worship at that particular time was observed. Among a people who had no fixed astronomical dates intercalation was easy, and the names of the twelve moons kept uniform.”

To give some semblance of uniformity to this study, I shall follow with lists and observations on the year, months, days, and hours—pointing out, for the sake of comparative study, certain features of other Polynesian time-records. I shall place a question or questions when I consider that further study might elucidate a point, and shall take the liberty to theorize from time to time, without jeopardy, however, to the main theme.

#### THE YEAR.

The Samoan word for year is *tausaga*, from the root word *tau*. Originally, Pratt tells us, this word meant a season, a period of six months, corresponding, no doubt, to the Samoan wet and dry seasons. The meaning of *tausaga*, as used to-day, is an adapted meaning.

There is general uniformity over the whole Pacific in the use and meaning of this word, the original root word of the Samoan *tau*. The Maoris, Marquesans, Hawaiians, Mangarevans, all used this word. (It also denoted, at Mangareva, a breadfruit season.) At Java, Yap, Formosa, New Britain, and Madagascar, this same word, either as such or with slight modifications, occurs with the cognate meaning of “to count, to enumerate.” In Samoan we have *fa'atau*, to count. The *fa'a* prefix in Samoan being causative, or denotive of action expressed by the noun to which it is attached.

(To me it seems that this word is one of the very old parent words of the original language spoken by the Polynesian ancestors.)

So much for the word year; but the question arises, when did the Samoans commence their year? Did they have any particular day set apart, or any particular phase of a season set apart, as the beginning for them of their cycle of twelve months?

The Pleiades figure extensively in mythologies of many peoples, and among the Polynesian Islands there is a common agreement as to the name for this constellation. In Samoan it is Mataalii (eyes of the chiefs), in Maori it is Matariki, and receives its explanation in the myth that the seven stars are the eyes of the seven chiefs, who were translated to heaven after death, an eye of each only being visible.

Now, amongst the Maori of the East Coast (North Island of New Zealand) the heliacal rising of Matariki was the sign for rejoicing and merry-making for the commencement of a new year. (For the far North and the South Island, together with the Chatham Islands, the heliacal rising of Rigel, in Orion, was observed.) This, for either manner of reckoning, was about May, the autumn season.

The Tahitians had two seasons, the Pleiades above and the Pleiades below; the first beginning when these stars appeared on the horizon in the evening, the second beginning when at sunset these stars were invisible. However, the year opened about December, as can be judged from that month's name amongst the Tahitians, *Te Tahī* (The First).

The re-appearance of the Pleiades above the horizon at sunset was a time of great rejoicing at Danger Island and at Penrhyn and Fornander, and the Rev. W. Gill gives us the same tradition as one rather general for the Pacific. Strange, too, on the Continent of South America we find the Adipones of Paraguay, and in Africa we find the Hottentots making much of the re-appearance of the Pleiades above the eastern horizon, the Hottentot mothers taking their children to the neighbouring hills, where they taught them to lift their hands to the friendly stars, while the Adipones welcomed them with shouts and the sound of festive trumpets; their ancestor, they said, was sick, and now is returning, well again. Best mentions in several

places (*Maori Division of Time*) “the ancient Pleiades year of south-east Asia.”

Here, then, among numerous great island groups of the Pacific, and two continents, we have a fair agreement regarding the definite commencement of the year, it being fixed by the Pleiades and attended with ceremonies and rejoicings; but Samoan tradition is silent. The only thing that can be supposed is that the Samoan year began, in a way, with the *palolo* fishing, for the coming of the *palolo* was definitely calculated from year to year, to the very night and without error; and the season of *palolo* was a season of great rejoicing and of presentations of *palolo ofu*\* to relatives and friends who had no opportunity to catch *palolo*.

### THE MONTH.

Having seen a close connection between the Maori and other Pacific groups in the matter of reckoning the new year, we might justly expect some agreement among these same groups as regards month-names also; but even amongst the Maori, the month-names of different tribes vary considerably, with overlappings here and there, and we find this to be true of other groups in the Pacific.

Let us consider the Samoan month-names and point out many similarities that might be found among some other Polynesian groups.

Month-names as found in Kraemer:—

	<i>List.</i>		<i>Turner.</i>		<i>Pratt-Fraser, 1891</i>
December	} Utuvamua (Taumafamua)	....	Utuvamua	....	Tagaloafua
January					
February	} Fa'afu	....	Toeutuva	....	Fa'alele-Ta'afanua
March			....	Fa'aafu	....
April	— Oloamanu	....	Fanoga	....	Leunu (Waldschrat)
May	— Aununu	....	Aununu	....	Ta'afanuatele
June	....	....	Oloamanu	....	Malelega
July	....	....	Palolomua	....	Sina
August	....	....	Palolomuli	....	Vaenoa
September	} Lotuaga	....	Mulifa	....	Laupopo
October			....	Lotuaga	....
November	....	....	Taumafamua	..	Tagaloata'u
December	....	....	Toetaumafa	....	Ite (demon)

\**Ofu* = native food tied up in a leaf.

Month-names as found in Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before*, Macmillan, Lond., 1884:—

JANUARY—

*Utuvamua*, or first yam digging; that is, digging of wild yams before cultivated ones were ripe.

*Utuvamua*, from name of two brothers, Utuvamua and Utuvamuli, who, beaten in heaven, fled to earth and brought the storms.

*Aitu-tele*, or great god, from the principal worship of the month. At another place, Tagalaoa-tele, for same reason.

FEBRUARY—

*Toeutuwa*, or digging again, yam crop now ready; or, following the myth of two brothers, the storms are dug up again.

*Aitu iti*—small gods, for worship of inferior gods of the household.

MARCH—

*Fa'aafu*, the withering, for in this month the yam-vine and other plants wither.

*Taafanua*, meaning to roam or walk about the land, from name of the god worshipped in that month.

*Aitu iti*, also from worship of small gods, who were especially implored to bless the family for the year “with strength to overcome in quarrels and battle.”

APRIL—

*Lo*, from name of that fish, which is plentiful this month.

*Fanonga*, Destruction, name of god worshipped on eastern extremity of group during the month.

MAY—

*Aununu*, or stem crushed, from the crushed or pulverized state of stem of yam at that time. Some suppose many evil spirits to be abroad during the month, and the unhealthiness of the month, as the seasonal transition month, easily led to or gave ground for these superstitious vagaries.

*Sina*, on one island, from her worship there.

JUNE—

*Oloamanu*, the singing of birds, so named because of the abundant supply of favourite fruit.

JULY—

*Palolomua*, the first month of the half-year (Note this!), the Palolo season, and was so called in contradistinction to the other half of the year, which is called the trade wind season.

(Turner then gives a rule for the coming of *palolo*, based on last quarter of moon—If late in October, *palolo* is found on the day before, the day of, or the day after. If early in October, then *palolo* comes with the November moon; the middle day is the great day.)

AUGUST—

*Palolomuli*, gives no explanation, except after Palolo, and then explains the possible derivative of Palolo—*pa*, to burst, *lolo*, fatty or oily, denoting condition of the worm.

SEPTEMBER—

*Mulifa*, means end of the *fa*, the stem of the *taro*, the sun being hot and scorching leaves only the stem of the *taro*.

*Mulifa*, end of season for catching the fish called *fa*, is another derivative.

OCTOBER—

*Lotuaga*, or rain prayers, for prayers were offered to the gods for rains in this month.

NOVEMBER—

*Taumafamua*, meaning the first of plenty, for fish were numerous in the month. *Palolo* and fly-hook fishing feasts were held, and public dinners in the houses of the chiefs were the order of the day.

DECEMBER—

*Toetaumafa*, the finish of the feasting, food being less plentiful after the December gales or cyclones.

I give this list without any comment but that of the author. It raises questions, which show themselves in the following lists.

A	B
List as found in the <i>Au'auna</i> , Father Gynsbach, Editor.	List given to me by Mr. Curry, Sogi, Apia.
February-March—Fa'aafu.	January—Faaafu.
March-April—O Lo.	February—Utuvamua.
April-May—O Aununu.	March—Toeutu.
May-June—O Oloamanu.	April—Lo.
June-July—Palolomua	May—Aununu.
July-August—Palolomuli	June—Toetaumafa.
August-September—Mulifa	July—Oloamanu.
September-October—O Lotuaga.	August—Mulifa.
Oct.-Nov.—Taumafamua.	September—Lotuaga.
Nov.-Dec.—O Toe Taumafa.	October—Palolomua.
Dec.-January—O Utuvamua.	November—Toe Palolo.
January-February—O Toeutuva.	December—Taumafamua.

NOTE.

A. In first list it will be noted that Palolomua and Palolomuli come in July and August, which accords with Kraemer's list.

In asking of certain chiefs a reason for such, why the two Palolo months should not accord with the months in which the *palolo* were caught, I was told that this was quite sound, for the reason that the Samoans, as they do even to-day, wrap the *palolo* in banana leaves and keep it fresh through the whole year by re-cooking and pouring coconut milk upon it, so that during these months they would take what they had thus preserved and eat it.

- B. In the second list it will be noted that Taumafamua and Toetaumafa are quite separated, as is not done in the other lists. If we begin the year with the *palolo* season, then the first Taumafa, or Taumafamua, would be the first month of plenty, when fish in the season are plentiful, and again, the Toetaumafa would occur at the second month of plenty, when the *malauli*, *sapatu*, and other fish were caught.

List of Ale-Lui, chief of Safata, and one known to be well versed in old Samoan traditions. The explanations are those of this chief.

JANUARY—

*Ta'elo*. This is a bad month, the month of wind and storms. The meaning of *ta'elo* is "very bad." When the new crop of breadfruit appeared, then this month became very bad.

FEBRUARY—

*Lo*, because of the plentifulness of this fish, which comes now for the first time.

MARCH—

*Lotuaga*, so called because of the variety of fish, small fish, such as the *igaga*, *pala'ia*, *ia sina*, *lupo*, etc.

APRIL—

*Fa'aafu*, so called because in this month the *ufi* began to wither. (Note.—Not the wild *ufi*, but the cultivated.)

MAY—

*'Aununu*, so called because in this month the stem of the *ufi* became scorched (*manunu*). Then was begun the digging up of the *ufi* of this year.

JUNE—

*Utuvamua*, so called because the holes for the *ufi* (yams) are dug now for the first time. Also, the grass begins to sprout at this time.

JULY—

*Toeutu*, so called because sea-water is now drawn or fetched in preparation for the Falealii (chiefs' feasting customs). *Utu* means also, besides digging for yam, to fetch sea-water. (Explanation seems a little forced.)

AUGUST—

*Taumafa*, so called because now, for the first time, the *palolo* preserved from the year before would be eaten, at the time of the Falealii customs.

SEPTEMBER—

*Toetaumafa*, so called because now the *palolo* would be all eaten (that left over from preceding month, that is, the *palolo toe*—left over) is eaten.

OCTOBER—

*Palolomua*, so called because *palolo* is first caught in this month in Savaii.

NOVEMBER—

*Toe-Palolo*, so called because there would be *palolo* again this month; this time, however, in Upolu.



DECEMBER—

*Tiotala*, a month of rain, and the Tiotala cries this month. When the Tiotala cries then one knows that it is going to rain.

SOME REMARKS ON THE ABOVE LISTS.

These lists show us a certain amount of agreement and a certain amount of difference. However, there is no such general disagreement as one may find in the various Maori names of months. The general disagreement here is in regard to place more than in regard to the names of the months.

It is to be noted that in Ellis's list of Marquesan names of months July is Paroromua, and August is Paroromuri. These months are for July and August, and we find a Samoan list, in fact two, with this particular change from the other lists submitted. Again, the Marquesan list has Fa'aahu for January and part of February, and is marked as a month of plenty.

We find this word again in one Maori list, Whakaahu, but surely it has lost its meaning now and is considered as the name of a star. Best notes that Futuna also has this word for a month name, Fakaafu, but notes that it is a star name. We find this same thing with one other Samoan month, as found in the list of Ale Lui. He gives Ta'elo as the month of January, and states that it means a very bad month, though how the derivation is worked out is hard to see. Now we find this same name in Hawaii, but here it becomes Ka'elo, the name of a star. The Maori, too, have this word, "Takeru," the name for a star (Best, p. 20).

We note, too, that the Samoans were not troubled much about intercalation. Is it that we have lost the original traditions on this question? It seems strange that the Maori and the Hawaiians and other islanders should have figured on this, while the Samoans did not. We might consider that the Samoans were the most ancient and perhaps not affected by new waves of immigrants, who brought some of the problems that were confronting their peoples in the ancient Asiatic world, but then we should expect to find a ten-month year, instead of a twelve-month year, for this was a rather general thing at one time in the Pacific and among certain Asiatic races; even the Romans at first had it.

## THE WEEK.

I merely pass over this with a few reflections. Ale Lui gave me the name *uite*, but this is evidently a corruption of our "week," and brought into the language at so early a date that some Samoans, with their odd spelling of it, are apt to forget about its introduction. But the question might be raised for all Polynesian peoples: why did they not have a week in their calculations? since the week was a customary division of Southern and Eastern Asia. Our own week, with many of the names for the days, comes from their attributing days to the planets, as they knew them.

## THE DAYS OF THE MONTH.

The days of the month I take as I find them in Kraemer. They are merely, though not all, phases of the moon.

1. *Masina le'ale'a*—One night after full moon, the word *le'ale'a* meaning something young.
2. *Masina fe'etetele*—?
3. *Masina atatai*—The moon at full, because it sets after daylight.
4. *Masina fanaele'ele*—The moon as if rising from the earth just after full.  
*fanaeilele*—Fourth day from full moon, on which land crabs are caught.
5. *Masina sulutele*—The moon after first quarter, shining bright. (Stair—*Poolesa*, the night of *lesa*. Perhaps *Po o lesa*—Night of the *sa* = Prohibition.)  
*tofilofilo*—Second night after appearance of crab.
6. *Masina mauna*—The waning moon. (Stair, *Popololoa*—Long night.)
7. *Masina matofitofi* (from Mr. Curry)—Last quarter of moon.
8. *Masina usunoa*—First day of the appearance of the *palolo*, not much obtained; *usu*, scoop; *noa*, in vain.
9. *Masina motusaga*—First real appearance of *palolo* (broken up).
10. *Masina tatelega*—The striking or the great scooping up of *palolo*. (Note.—*Salefuga*, Pratt; *Violette*, third day of *palolo*; Mr. Curry, first day of *palolo*, for they are scattered about.)
11. *Masina punifaga*—New moon, or nearly full, called from manner of fishing at that time; *faga*, bay; *puni*, closed; bay closed with coconut leaves for trapping fish.
12. *Masina tafaleu*.
14. *Masina tafaleu*.

Here, again, the same remarks must be made that were made at the outset. Where there is a fair agreement between many other groups of Polynesian Island records of days, where they all figure on thirty days to the month, even where the names might vary, Samoa has very little to show. Why should the Maori and the Hawaiians, while differing, yet agree as to number and certain names, and Samoa be found quite different?

Had there been something in the past traditions of the Samoans, would they have so totally forgotten it all?

Again, the two names, Rongo and Tane, names of powerful gods who ruled the days, and whose names appear in other lists, do not even occur in Samoan mythology, at least, with any importance attached. Tregear states that Rongo, Longo for Samoa, is a Samoa god, but Kraemer is silent here, so is Pratt, so is Turner.

One has but to read Best, *The Maori Division of Time*, to see what a great place these two deities held in their mythology, and how much they had to do with the division of time.

With these brief reflections, which might be extended, we pass now to the names of the hours of the day.

#### NAMES OF PARTS OF TIME OF SAMOAN DAY.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Tafa o ata</i> , dawn.   | 10. <i>Lafoia ata o le afiafi</i> , shadows of evening cast.          |
| 2. <i>Vaveao</i> , early morning.  | 11. <i>Tu'olo le la</i> , standing, but preparing to go.              |
| 3. <i>Segisegi</i> , twilight.   | 12. <i>Afiafi</i> , evening.  |
| 4. <i>Taeao</i> , twilight, late.  | 13. <i>Tagi alisi</i> , crickets cry.                                 |
| 5. <i>Taeao</i> , morning.   | 14. <i>Popogi</i> , somewhat dark.                                    |
| 6. <i>Fanailupe le La</i> , eight o'clock.   | 15. <i>Tagai malamama</i> , evening fire lit.                         |
| 7. <i>Taupaletu o le la</i> , nine o'clock.  | 16. <i>Fa'ataoto moega</i> , beds let down.                           |
| 8. <i>Tutotonu le la</i> , noon.   | 17. <i>Mafuta moe afiafi</i> , eleven o'clock, early sleepers awaken. |
| * <i>Aoauli</i> (Pratt), before noon.<br>Syn. <i>aoatea</i> , yet both words in derivation denote noon.<br><i>auli</i> , unmixed, pure; <i>atea</i> , open, as <i>vaatea</i> , open expanse. | 18. <i>Tulua po ma ao</i> , between night and day.                    |
| 9. <i>Faliu le la</i> , sun turning.   | 19. <i>Vivini moa</i> , first cock crow.                              |

\*I have been told since that *aoauli* really denotes forenoon, but is also used for noon.

There are also other names for hours of the day, which I give here, thus:—

1. *Afiāfiao* = evening, before sunset.
2. *Afiāfimalama* = evening, after sunset.
3. *Afiāfipo* = evening, at dusk.
4. *Afitulia* = about 8 or 9 p.m., when lights are out.
5. *Atamatua* = early dawn.
6. *Itupo* = a part of the night, hour of the night.
7. *Ituao* = a part of the day, an hour of the day.
8. *Itula* = an hour as used to-day.

It is an interesting study to enter into the manner in which the ancients divided their day. Our present twenty-four hour arrangement comes from the East, and was used in Babylon, with seven planet-names to give the hours of the day; and, curiously, their days were called after that planet which began the first hour of each day.

Why the ancients should have divided their night into night and day, and not have made the distinction simply between night and day, is hard to say. The Egyptians started their day at midnight, and we notice that the Samoans did likewise. The *Tulua po ma ao* is simply “standing between night and day.”

These scattered items of information leave many questions unanswered.

When did the Samoan year start?

Did Samoans use stars at all in reckoning? Are not the Samoans, as a matter of fact, very poor in their knowledge of the stars?

Did Samoans have thirteen months, as did so many of the other Polynesian Islanders, for the purpose of intercalation?

In my mind, one thing stands out from a consideration of Samoan Divisions of Time, and that is, that there can be very little consideration given to the theory that the ancient Hawaiki of the Maori was Savaii. There seems to be some slight contact between the two peoples, but so very small that at the most we can conclude that possibly a boat or two from Samoa reached New Zealand, but never a colonization from Samoa.

## TIME DIVISIONS OF THE TOKELA'U ISLANDS.

The following, obtained from a Tokela'u Islander, may be of interest:—

## THE MONTHS.

January = <i>Palolomua</i> .	July = <i>Oloamanu</i> .
February = <i>Vainoa</i> .	August = <i>Tuluasiliga</i> .
March = <i>Tuluapalolo</i> .	September = <i>Vaipalolo</i> .
April = <i>Fakaafu</i> .	October = <i>Toesiliga</i> .
May = <i>Fakaoga</i> .	November = <i>Kaununu</i> .
June = <i>Toepalolo</i> .	December = <i>Mulifa</i> .

It will be noticed that some names of months accord with the Samoan names, while others are not found on the Samoan list; also that the *palolo* comes in for mention four times, which is surprising in this respect, that while the *palolo* comes up at the group, the natives of Tokela'u have not the same relish for the worm as the Samoans; they do not eat it, though, to-day, some who may have remained in Samoa for a length of time will interest themselves in it on their return to the Tokela'us.

## THE NAMES OF DAYS.

1— <i>Fakatahi</i>	11— <i>Fakatasi</i>	21— <i>Magafulu</i>
2— <i>Fakalua</i>	12— <i>Fakalua</i>	22— <i>Poiva</i>
3— <i>Fakatolu</i>	13— <i>Utua</i>	23— <i>Povalu</i>
4— <i>Fakafa</i>	14— <i>Malama</i>	24— <i>Pofitu</i>
5— <i>Fakalima</i>	15— <i>Fakatahi</i>	25— <i>Poono</i>
6— <i>Fakaono</i>	16— <i>Fakalua</i>	26— <i>Polima</i>
7— <i>Fakafitu</i>	17— <i>Fakafulu</i>	27— <i>Fanouluata</i>
8— <i>Fakavalu</i>	18— <i>Fakafa</i>	28— <i>Fanolotoata</i>
9— <i>Fakaiva</i>	19— <i>Fakalima</i>	29— <i>Matekiluga</i>
10— <i>Magafulu</i>	20— <i>Fakatutupu</i>	30— <i>Fanoloa</i>

If this list be studied it will be seen that there is a break at the tens. By break, it is not meant that there is no change in the other days, but that a new order is commenced, and I was distinctly told by my informant that the old Tokelauans had weeks of ten days. This will not be surprising when one remembers Loeb's experience at Niue. The name for week there is *tapu*, and in an ancient story the same name occurs as applying to a division of days, and when questioned the natives answered that there was a week, too, in the olden times, but that it consisted of ten days. Loeb notes in parenthesis that a week of ten days

was probably known in Hawaii. Anyway, the Greeks had a week of ten days, and that is where the French Revolutionists got the idea.

I did want to have time to go over the vocabulary of Mariner in the history of Tonga, to see what names he possibly might give for Tonga. Casually glancing over his list, I find that there are names for months included, and that they decidedly differ from the Samoan names for months. However, with Mariner's spelling, it would need an interpreter to figure on the exact spelling as used to-day. There are Tongans in Samoa, and I shall get in touch with them later.

This I send to show that the work has proved very interesting to me and that I shall pursue it further.