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A History of the German Pacific

Introduction

The Islands

The Pacific colonies of Germany were a far-flung post of empire in more ways than one. They were a long way from Europe, by sail three to four months away. They were small; all except for New Guinea, mere dots in an endless sea. And they were separated from each other by thousands of miles of blue, unrelenting ocean: German New Guinea and Micronesia were each composed of a myriad of islands scattered over hundreds of miles. To begin with, let us look at Samoa, a perfect example of isolation and economy of scale.

The Samoan group is a chain of islands stretching west to east about 480 kilometres north-east of Tonga and forming the northern apex of a triangle with Tonga and Fiji, further to the west. It consists of three main islands, Savai'i in the west, with an area of 1800 square kilometres; Upolu across the straits of Apolima, about seventy-six kilometres long and 1036 square kilometres in area; and, 111 kilometres to the east, Tutuila, a steep, densely-forested island of 140 square kilometres, nearly cut in two by the magnificent harbour of Pago Pago. Savai'i and Upolu, with the smaller islands of Manono and Apolima lying between them, form what was the former colony of German Samoa and is today the independent state of Western Samoa. Tutuila is the principal island of American Samoa, which includes the Manu'a group and Rose atoll further eastwards.

Savai'i is the largest island in the Samoan group. It has no good harbours, is rocky and mountainous, rising to over 1829 metres, and has been susceptible to volcanic eruptions, the last from 1905 to 1911. Most of the relatively sparse population lives in the extreme east, on a low, flat, fertile strip of coast across the straits from Upolu.

Upolu has always been the social and commercial centre of Samoa. It is densely populated, the people living in open, airy and well-organised villages along the shorelines, predominantly in the north-west. A mountain ridge topped by the cones of extinct volcanoes runs the length of Upolu like a backbone, but the coast, at least in the north-west, is flat and sandy, gradually becoming rocky and moun-

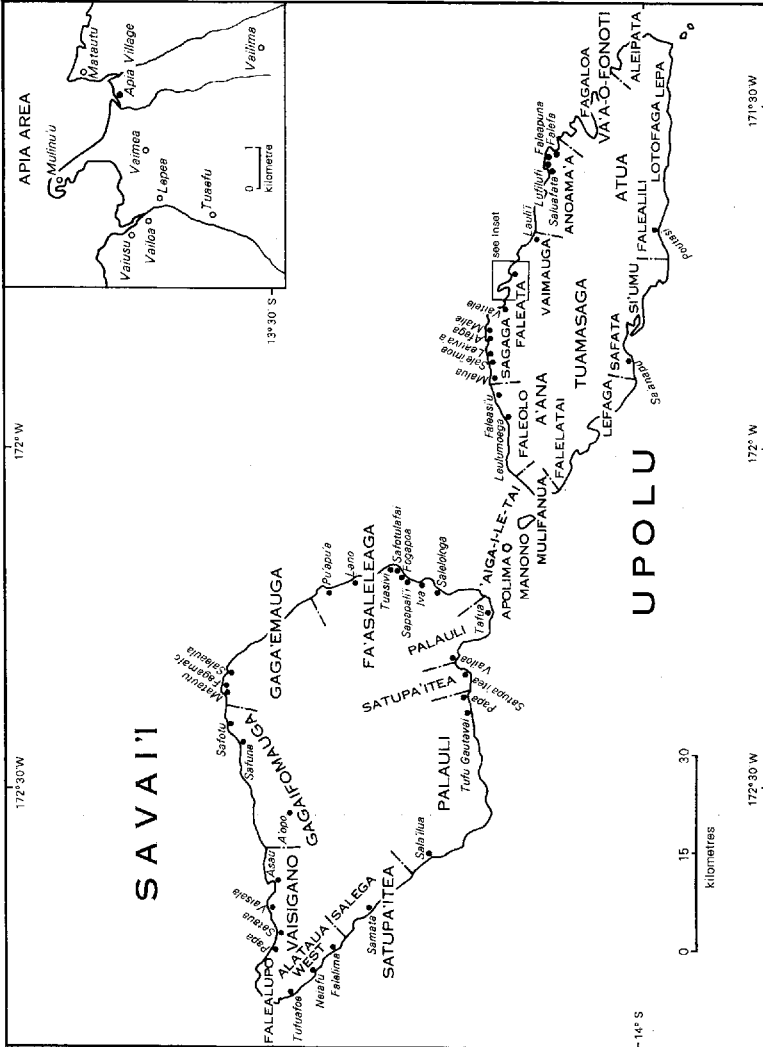
tainous in the east beyond Saluafata. Western Samoa's major port and only large town is Apia, roughly in the middle of the north coast. Today it lies about thirty-nine kilometres from the pleasant airport of Faleolo, which lies in Mulifanua district at the western end of Upolu, along a road which follows the coastline and gives uninterrupted vistas of sea, reef and mountain. The well-surfaced road passes through innumerable villages with their neat oval houses, high roofs of thatch or corrugated iron supported by an open cluster of stout poles, with no walls and surrounded by hibiscus, frangipani and greenery of all kinds. The local church, perhaps paint peeling in the tropical sun, is a landmark in the village, along with the *fale*, the round house for ceremonial meetings.

Apia is a sudden departure from this colour and order. An old port town with dusty roads and patched weatherboard buildings, it fringes the shoreline along Beach Road. The harbour itself provides little inspiration to lift the setting. It is a reef harbour in an open bay, roughly semicircular, and about one and one-half kilometres across. It has no special virtues and can be quite dangerous in the hurricane season with winds from the north-west quarter, a feature which was demonstrated dramatically in 1889 when three German and three American warships were driven onto the shore in a hurricane, with the loss of 210 lives. To the west of the town lies the peninsula of Mulinu'u. For over a hundred years it has served as ceremonial seat of government and figured in all the major political disputes. Today the round, *fale*-inspired House of Assembly occupies a prominent position on the peninsula.

Presently there are over 100,000 citizens of Western Samoa, a threefold increase in the population which helped to glorify the German Empire before 1914.

The social structure of Samoa is founded on a number of ranked lineages, within which lesser chiefs and groups must defer to greater, on the basis of inherent societal rank.¹ The descent groups consist of people born or adopted into localised households, as well as their descendants outside the village, all adult members having a network of relations throughout Samoa with whom they have frequent communication in a variety of ceremonial and social activities.

At the local level, the unit of social and political control is the village, consisting of several extended families joined together to deal with common problems. A chief, or *matai*, is at the head of each household, controlling the domestic tasks of its members and taking part in village organisation. Decisions affecting the latter are taken in the formal village council, the *fono fa'alenu'u*. Only *matai* possess a seat and a



Map 2 Samoa

voice in its proceedings and their authority and influence relate directly to their seniority of position within the village hierarchy. Decision-making is not based on majority votes; the authority of one or of several high-ranking *matāi* is the crucial factor. Family heads possess a quasi-consultative vote in discussing a problem prior to an assembly, but during council proceedings a heavy emphasis is placed on at least a public show of unanimity.

Above the village units there was no centralised political institution with control over all Samoans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The problem of maintaining order in the complex of cross-cutting associations fell to the village, which jealously guarded its independence, and acted vigorously against transgressors of its residence rules. Though villages were linked in loose, ascending grades of political association, and sub-districts did develop in former times, based on common village locality and lineage affiliation, these were generally less stable than the village system itself, and were always susceptible to factionalism and disintegration.

Villages were also loosely linked together in wider district organisations. These were rarely distinct and permanent groupings, depending for their shape and definition upon allegiances to one or other 'royal' lineage and support for senior chiefly titles. The most important districts exhibiting this cohesion in the nineteenth century and thus enjoying relatively fixed boundaries were Atua, Tuamasaga and A'ana in Upolu; the combination of Manono, Apolima and Mulifanua; and Fa'asaleleaga in eastern Savai'i.

Districts were not administrative units but spheres of influence grounded in kinship, traditional history and policy. Their politics revolved around questions of family prestige, important marriage alliances and the pursuit of the highest chiefly titles, at the apex of which lay a claim to paramount chieftaincy, and with it nominal ascendancy throughout Samoa. Contention for the paramountcy was to Europeans the most disruptive feature of Samoan political life in the nineteenth century. To understand why, it is necessary to sketch in the structure of chiefly politics and examine the complexities of traditional group alliances in Samoa.

Chiefs with high titles are the elites in Samoa and they are divided into two categories, the *ali'i* and the *tulafale*. The *tulafale* or 'orator chief' was originally a kind of personal assistant to the *ali'i*, who possessed a particular sanctity in Samoan tradition and enjoyed exclusive privileges and the right to special deference. On public

occasions it was the duty of the *tulafale* to proclaim the will of the *ali'i*, and to supervise the ceremonial exchange of food and other goods.

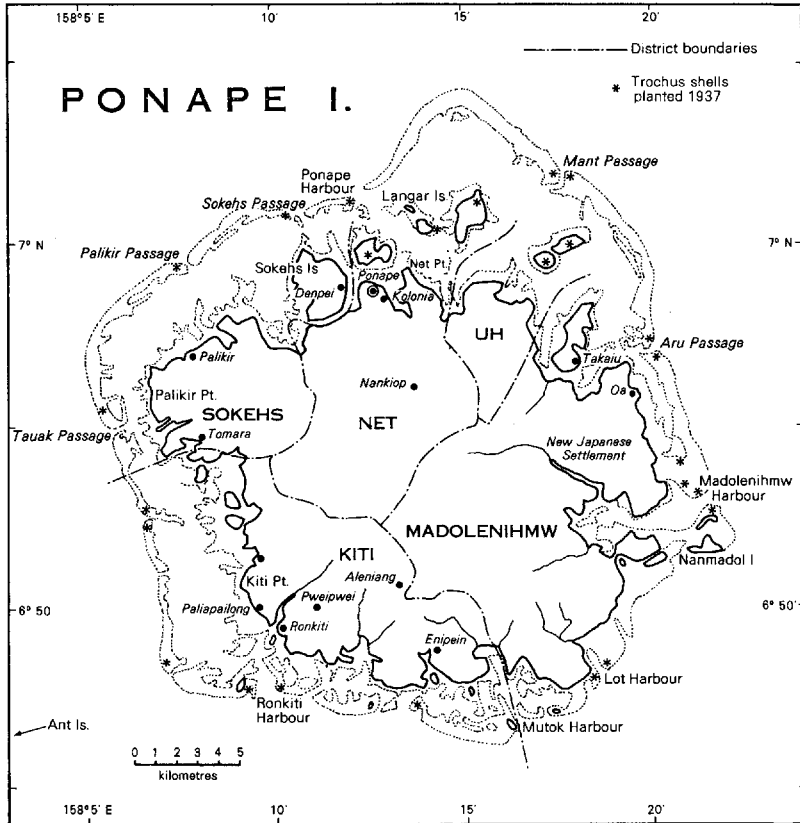
As 'speaker' and as skilful orator, the *tulafale* was in a position to involve himself in all sorts of political affairs, and to exercise influence in areas where he had no formal rights. A shrewd and energetic talking chief might thus arrogate virtually independent power to himself. His most influential role lay in the distribution of fine mats, an event which possessed special ceremonial and ritual value for Samoans and represented a means of payment. Such distributions took place on various family and public occasions, but the most important was the bestowal of titles on a chief, particularly the award of the *Tafa'ifa* titles, the four highest in the land—*Tui Atua*, *Tui A'ana*, *Gatoaitale* and *Tamasoali'i*. The candidate awarded all four titles was designated the paramount chief of the group. Control of these titles was vested in groups of orator chiefs representing confederations of districts; they were, in a very real sense, the 'kingmakers' of Samoa.

The first confederation was composed of Atua and A'ana, whose orators controlled the first two titles, together with the politically influential villages of Tuamasaga district in Upolu, which awarded the other two. The second confederation comprised the *tulafale* of six Savai'i districts, the island of Manono and parts of Tuamasaga, which participated in the award of the titles. To the first configuration of districts the term *Tumua* was applied, while those based on the Savai'i districts were called *Pule*. To *Pule* was linked a subsidiary confederation called *A'iga*, which was based on Manono and Apolima.

The historic battle for political supremacy in Samoa revolved, at one level, around the mutual opposition of these two power cartels. But it was complicated by a further level of alliances, those of different districts to two major 'royal' lines which were the focus of political intrigue for the paramountcy. These lines, actually patrilineal lineages, were the *Tuia'ana* or *Sā Tupuā*, and the *Sā Malietoā*, each of which traditionally looked to support from combinations of orator groups in various districts, A'ana and Atua on the side of *Sā Tupuā*, and Tuamasaga, Savai'i and Manono on the side of *Sā Malietoā*. It is little wonder that the representatives of various European Powers in Samoa have been consistently bewildered and exasperated by the intricacies of Samoan politics.

This was especially the case in the nineteenth century when the wars which inevitably resulted from the multi-layered intrigues never resolved the issues along lines that appealed to European conceptions

Pacific Islanders under German Rule



Map 3 Ponape

of victory and authority. For victory by one or other of the major lineages never guaranteed a new level of stability in Samoa. The government of the victorious group (*Malo*) was only an alliance of convenience, with no commitment to principle or 'party' government. Its dissolution after a victory was usually rapid and complete since it interfered constantly in the local affairs of its members; moreover the practice of harassing the vanquished groups at every opportunity, demanding ever more goods and labour, soon led to new alliances and rebellion. Such was the prestige of the *Tafa'ifa* titles that eventual peace only inaugurated fresh disputes and intrigues by chiefs competing to secure them for their various candidates.

Paradoxically, this structured chaos probably saved Samoa from the

straitjacket of early annexation by a European Power. With a strong, continuous central government in Samoa, Europeans undoubtedly would have gained quicker and tighter control over Samoans by funnelling the political and economic forces at their disposal through the 'head of state' or the government. The Powers tried desperately to impose a centralised system of authority on Samoa in the late nineteenth century, but failed; the partition of the islands between Germany and America followed from that failure. Even then Samoans refused to surrender their freedom of action and their political creativity.

By contrast with Samoa, Ponapean social and political structure is more regular and authoritarian, though the political possibilities in some areas are more flexible than in Samoa. Ponape is the largest island of the Carolines group in Micronesia, an island world which is still a Trust Territory of the United States. Ponape lies roughly north-east of the Bismarck Archipelago at longitude 158° east and 6° north of the equator, and, like most of the islands of Micronesia, is isolated, her largest island neighbour being Kusaie, 494 kilometres away to the south-east. Truk is 708 kilometres to the west; to the north-west, Saipan is over 1600 kilometres, Manila 3803 kilometres. In the east only the Marshall Islands lie between Ponape and Hawaii. The distance to San Francisco is 7469 kilometres.

Ponape is a towering volcanic dome, roughly hexagonal in shape, about 23 kilometres from north to south and 26 kilometres from east to west. Mangrove swamps fringe the inner reef around the island and a narrow belt of alluvial land lies between them and the foothills. The interior is extremely mountainous, with eleven peaks rising above 610 metres; overland travel is thus very difficult. Most Ponapeans use shallow canoes for transport around the island, though low tide on the inner reef can restrict movement in many places. There are three main harbours: Langan in the north where the Spanish built the first European settlement, Kolonia; Madolenihmw in the east; and Ron Kiti in the south. The Japanese built a second large town on the eastern edge of Ponape, but during the Spanish and German periods Kolonia was the only centre of foreign occupation outside mission stations. To the west of Kolonia, across a narrow channel, lies the island of Sokehs with the most dominating feature of Ponape's dominating landscape: the enormous Sokehs scarp, which falls away sheer from a height of 274 metres to the sea at the island's northern end. A modern causeway now replaces the rickety wooden bridge which connected Sokehs to the mainland in German times. The effect of the Sokehs scarp, together with

the rugged interior, where the air lies thick and heavy, where dark clouds obscure the matted tops of mountains and thunder rolls uneasily across the valleys, is to give Ponape a sinister and brooding quality which contrasts markedly with that of the low, open and vulnerable atolls of Micronesia.

At the time of German rule, the native inhabitants of Ponape, like most of the Caroline Islanders, were divided into eighteen matrilineal clans which were further divided into sub-clans ranked by seniority.² Political power at district level was based on these sub-clans and their senior individuals rather than on the clans. The clans were distributed throughout the five districts or states into which Ponape was divided during German times: Madolenihmw, Uh, Kiti, Sokehs and Net. Each was territorially distinct from the others and acted independently in every aspect of social and economic life, yet it would be misleading to call them tribes since they all had a series of cross-cutting kinship ties with one another. Ponapean legends refer to a time when the whole island was united under a single ruler (the Saudeleurs), but that era ended with the conquest by the culture hero Isokelokel, when the separate districts of Ponape were founded.

The districts themselves were, in turn, subdivided into a number of geographical sections composed of several farmsteads. These were not villages in the ordinary sense of the word. Households belonging to each section were scattered along the shore and separated from one another by the land holdings of each farmstead. Sections were the units of local political control and were supervised by section chiefs, who were appointed by the principal chiefs of the district and required to keep an eye on the productivity of the various farmsteads as well as regulate tributary offerings to the High Chief.

One's position within a district and section was fixed originally by strict heredity and succession rules. Each district had a theoretically identical series of ranked titleholders in two chiefly lines. Below these were the commoners, bound to a particular section chief by ties of obedience, tributary labour and war service. There is an obvious, though rather loose, analogy here with the medieval European system of royalty, nobility and the common people. Within the district, the ultimate repository of power and authority was the High Chief, or Nahnmwarki, who originally decided what was right and wrong without any distinction between civil and criminal law. Failure to observe proper etiquette, to respond to a call for service, or a deliberate disregard of one's place in the scheme of things could be punished by

the confiscation of land, by the removal of titles, or banishment. In theory, chiefs, especially highly-ranked chiefs, had an unconditional right to appropriate or confiscate the goods and property of commoners.

Land was the most valuable commodity vulnerable to confiscation. The common people did not possess a right to the land where they dwelt and farmed. Ultimately they held it at the will of the High Chief of the district. According to the first German Governor of Ponape, the land of a tenant farmer went back to the High Chief after his death, the Chief reissuing it as he pleased.³ Recent findings by anthropologists however suggest that this is a statement of the ideal rather than what usually happened. Commoners were dispossessed in olden times, even during their period of tenancy, but only in a minority of cases did this occur and then for some unforgivable misdeed. Generally, matrilineal rules of inheritance operated and there was fairly automatic confirmation of the heirs to a plot of land. Ponapean land will play a large part in our story for it lay at the centre of the conflict between the Islanders and their Spanish and German rulers.

Like land inheritance, succession to chiefly titles was also automatic, according to matrilineal seniority in the sub-clan. But, again, this was the theory rather than the practice. In fact, the inheritance principle was modified by several considerations which made the structure of authority more flexible than its hierarchical nature would suggest. Personality, relative age, physical disability, martial exploits, industry and obedience to the Nahnmwarki could all produce differential rates of promotion, while institutionalised forms of tribute and respect to High Chiefs were exploited by aspirants to titles in a form of competition for prestige. The result was a degree of social and political mobility which was certainly greater than the more socially-conservative Samoan system.

Another comparison with Samoa can be made in the relationship between the Nahnmwarki and the Nahnken, the principal chief of the second line of titles in each district. The Nahnken has been likened to the talking chief or *tulafale* of Samoa because he enjoyed frequent, direct communication with the ordinary people of his district. Unlike his Samoan counterpart, however, the Nahnken played a much more consistent role in the administration of daily affairs, since the Nahnmwarki was regarded as holy and remote in a way that the Samoan *ali'i* never was. This did not mean that the Nahnken was the real autocrat of a Ponapean district. Traditionally there was a very close

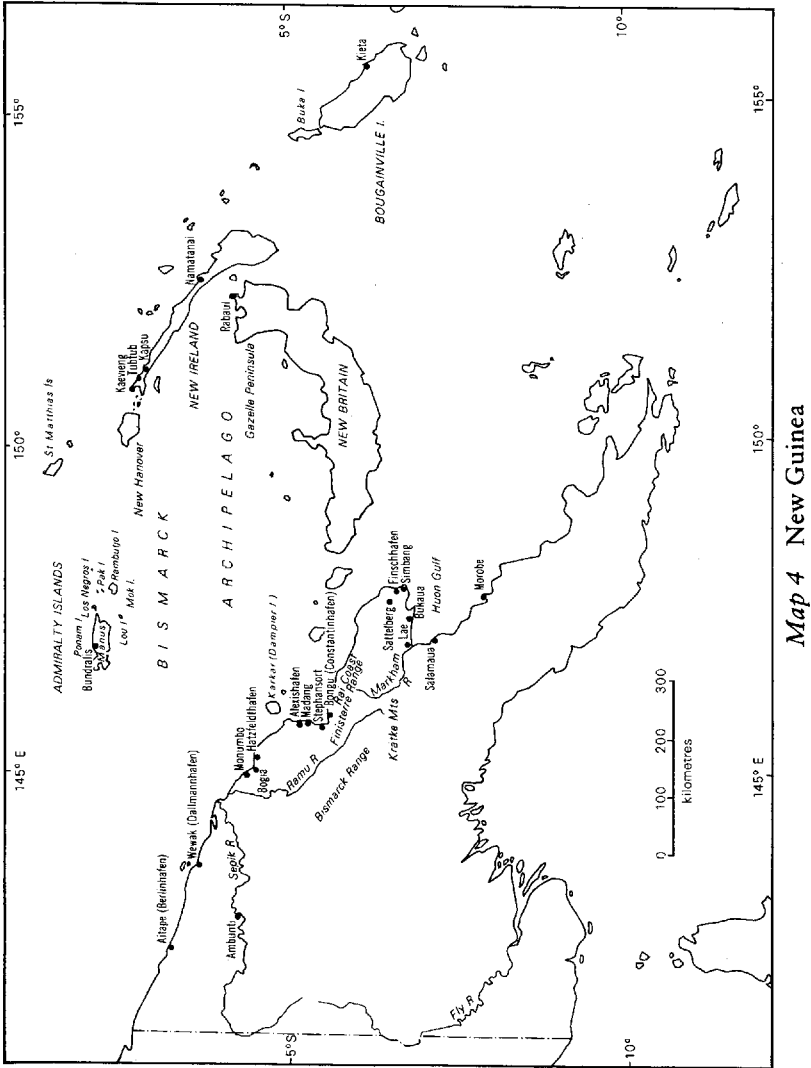
relationship between the Nahnmwarki and the Nahnken, and a state of delicate balance which seldom erupted into open discord. Throughout Ponape great social pressures operated in favour of political conformity, and in public affairs the Nahnmwarki and Nahnken presented one face to the world.

Ponapean political life centred round the pursuit of enhanced status, the capture of titles, and personal competition. The major cause of conflict was the inherent contradiction between theory and practice, in particular between the rules of matrilineal seniority and the effects of personal performance on the promotions system. Between districts, political vainglory played a large role in the frequent collisions. Each district guarded its independence and power fiercely and worked to have them acknowledged by other districts. A balance of power had gradually crystallised, so that by the time of German rule hostilities had been fixed for some years: the northern districts of Sokehs and Net against the rest. Clan members of different districts enjoyed much less contact than in Samoa. For a commoner, travel into another district was always dangerous unless a message had been sent ahead by the Nahnmwarki. High Chiefs themselves never travelled unless accompanied by displays of men and equipment sufficient to maintain the frail peace. It was this situation, fraught with instabilities and worsened by the Ponapean experience of Spanish colonisation, that Germany inherited in 1899.

As for New Guinea, it would be impossible here, as well as pointless, to describe fully the area's physical and cultural characteristics. It will suffice, first, to establish the scale of the colonial enterprise in which New Guineans and Germans were involved and, second, to give a broad and superficial description of those social features which most influenced relations between the two communities.

The protectorate of German New Guinea consisted of the north-east quadrant of the mainland of New Guinea together with about 600 islands stretching east through the Bismarck Archipelago to the western fringes of Polynesia. With its most northerly point less than 80 kilometres from the equator, the protectorate ran south to the border with Papua and the British Solomon Islands protectorate, and from the Dutch border in the west to Nukumanu in the Tasman Islands—740 kilometres from the northern extremes to the southern, and 1770 kilometres from west to east.

The mainland is 181 299 square kilometres in area and extremely mountainous, a feature it shares with most other parts of the protec-



torate. The Bismarck, Kratke and Finisterre ranges rise to over 3048 metres, forming a massive cordillera covered with thick tropical jungle lying between the thin coastal belt and the western Highlands. Extensive plains on the coast are few, concentrated around the lower reaches of the Sepik and the Ramu rivers, on the Astrolabe/Maclay coasts and in the lower Markham River valley. As for rivers, only the Sepik and Ramu were navigable during German times. Nearly a quarter of the total population of the old protectorate lived in the Sepik area. The rest of the coast was populated only in patches. The Germans never reached the western Highlands where almost a million people dwelled.

Of the archipelago's islands, New Britain is the largest, with an area of 33 670 square kilometres. Still-active volcanoes exist around Wil-laumez Peninsula in the west and at Blanche Bay on the east coast of the Gazelle Peninsula, where over half of the island's people live. The largest population group in the Peninsula are the Tolai, a comparatively light-skinned Melanesian people inhabiting the coasts and hinterland in the north and east. In the north-west lie the Baining Mountains where there dwells a racially distinct group of the same name, perhaps the original coastal dwellers who were driven into the mountains by the Melanesians who emigrated from New Ireland. During German times the Baining lived in small, dispersed hamlets in the mountains and practised a backward, shift-and-burn type of agriculture. The other large islands to which the Germans devoted their attention were New Ireland and Bougainville, but they will only briefly concern us in this work.

The social and political scale of population groups in German New Guinea was the most obvious difference from those in Micronesia and in Samoa. In New Guinea, the Germans rarely came into contact with corporate groups whose immediate range of authority was more than 100 people. Local kinship-residential groups were common, and consisted of a small village or a cluster of hamlets which were roughly equal in political terms and were tied to each other economically. Within these, New Guineans enjoyed a variety of political forms, including matrilineal and patrilineal descent groups, cognatic groups, men's clubhouses, secret societies, or a combination of these.

Social and political authority in these societies did not reside permanently or institutionally with one person or body. On those societies with which the Germans had most dealings there is little ethnographic work that dates to the time of earliest contact; and German sources, both official and unofficial, are silent or unreliable about the authority

structures that were in operation when the Germans first made contact with the New Guineans. Nonetheless, from the records of travellers, administrators, scholars and Papua-New Guineans themselves over a hundred years we can make a number of general observations about leadership which hold true for the range of groups with which the Germans came in contact. There did exist individuals in each group who were recognised as wielding greater powers of initiation and organisation than others. They were men who, through martial renown and/or economic enterprise were able to attract a personal following, which they then manipulated to aggrandise power and resources for themselves and for their group. By paying bride price for younger men, by debt collecting, or by cultivating new land and dependants, such men were able to establish a coterie of followers and mobilise their productiveness for prestige-building through public distribution of resources; they became the 'big men' of their societies, though the social range of their influence remained limited. Their primary social roles seemed to be as the focal distributors of wealth, as initiators of large-scale economic activities, and as spokesmen in inter-village affairs.

Tolai leaders were perhaps the nearest thing to an indigenous elite with which the Germans came in contact.⁴ Traditional leadership was based on the *lualua*, the senior male member of a lineage or clan in a particular district, and successful Tolai leaders during German times tended to be natural products of the social system, controlling at least the landholdings of their lineage or clan. Yet sources of power other than seniority also operated. Personal initiative was important, perhaps through prowess as a warrior, and a dynamic personality or special entrepreneurial abilities were requisites for someone aspiring to be a *ngala* or a 'big man'. In the end, quality of performance determined one's continued influence.

With the coming of the Europeans, individual 'big men' were able to arrogate increased power to themselves, selling land on behalf of the descent group, cultivating support from one or other mission, and promoting inter-district solidarity through war alliances and monopolies on white people's goods. But this new, expanded position never became institutionalised, even after the Germans introduced a system of government appointees.

Leadership is one of the most rewarding areas of study in the story of Pacific Island adjustment to government by Germany. It will become plain that changes were rung on the character of Island leadership which

are perhaps some of the more enduring results of Germany's thirty-year reign in the Pacific.

The Germans: Commerce, Colonies and Control

The beginnings of European enterprise in the Pacific are obscure. Precious stones, metals and whales were the object of the earliest voyages. The harvesting of tropical products began relatively late; German participation in it even later. The Hamburg firm of J. C. Godeffroy und Sohn had been trading in Latin America since the 1830s, and by the 1850s operated a network of commercial agencies around the rim of the Pacific: in Chile, California, South-East Asia and Australia. In 1855 the company's agent in Valparaíso, August Unshelm, was sent out into the South Pacific to capture for Godeffroys a share in the rapidly-expanding coconut oil trade. Unshelm chose Apia in Samoa as the base for his operations, and, with the firm's wide variety of ships plying the Pacific, Godeffroys very soon succeeded in seizing the bulk of the trade in the south-west. By the time of Unshelm's death in 1864, forty-six stations had been established throughout the islands, as far north as the Marshall and the Caroline islands.

But the real expansion took place under Unshelm's successor, Theodor Weber, merchant, innovator and empire-builder extra-ordinaire. Weber is credited with discovering that it was more efficient and profitable to export copra in sacks, and then to refine it in Europe, than to carry coconut oil in leaky barrels, and in 1865 he established the first large-scale plantations in Samoa. Under him the company tightened its grip on trade in the Marshalls and Carolines and moved into the New Guinea islands with a trading post at Matupit in 1874. Here they were joined by Robertson and Hensheim, a small trading firm with its headquarters in the islands north of New Guinea.

Such was the extent and strength of German trade by 1875 that German warships were thereafter regularly dispatched to the Pacific to provide official support for the growing commercial empire. Treaties of friendship and commerce were concluded between 1876 and 1879 with various island groups—Tonga, the Gilbert, Ellice and Marshall islands, parts of the Society Islands, and Samoa. In 1878 the harbours of Makada and Mioko in New Britain were purchased on the initiative of a German warship captain, von Werner, in order to reinforce the claims of Germany's traders in the area. By 1879 official sources claimed that German business houses were currently exporting over six million marks worth of products from the South Seas.⁵

During these years, agitation was growing in Germany from economists and publicists in favour of overseas expansion for the Reich, and a number of associations were founded to promote the idea of colonies. Their hardest task was to win over the Iron Chancellor, Bismarck, who regarded colonies as a waste of time and a danger to the new nation's resources. With strains on the economy from rapid industrialisation, Bismarck was keen to secure overseas markets, but his vision was of a free-trade empire, with no formal territorial attachments. That he reversed this 'no colonies' policy is now well-known and it is not necessary to detail his reasons here: that is a continuing debate. Suffice it to say that, from 1884 on, Bismarck sponsored colonial annexations which expanded the Reich to Africa, the Pacific and the Far East, and that commercial interests in the Pacific provided a great deal of the pressure on the Chancellor to change his mind.

Despite the image of prosperity which German Pacific business conveyed in the late 1870s, there were a number of seeming threats to its position. Already in 1874 the Spanish had tried to obstruct German traders in the Philippines and the Carolines by demanding customs duties, and in the same year Germans in Fiji had most of their land confiscated when the British government annexed that group. The following year the United States obtained a privileged position over German commerce in the Hawaiian Islands, and in 1881 the French annexed the Society Islands where a subsidiary of Godeffroys, the *Société Commerciale de l'Océanie*, had been enjoying a large share of trade. Then, in 1879, Godeffroy's European investments deteriorated and new capital could not be raised for a company to take over the Samoan interests. Bismarck, with an eye to the potential of the Pacific trade, came forward to support the idea of a guaranteed government dividend for a new firm, the *Deutsche Handels-und Plantagen-Gesellschaft der Südsee Inseln zu Hamburg* (DHPG), to replace the projected successor to Godeffroys. But, in a celebrated confrontation between the Government and its enemies in the Reichstag, the Samoan subsidy bill was defeated. The DHPG was rescued only when Berlin and Hamburg financiers agreed to reconstruct it with private capital.

As successor to Godeffroys, the DHPG dominated trade in Samoa. In spite of increased financial backing its difficulties did not disappear after 1880. Its plantations in Samoa suffered from constant civil wars over the paramountcy question, while increased competition added a new threat to its sources of Pacific Island labour. Furthermore, the Germans had to face strong agitation from New Zealand interests for

annexation of the group, and the reigning chief, Malietoa Laupepa, made clear his preference for things English.

The DHPG faced the same situation in New Guinea, its main centre for labour recruitment and an increasingly important trade and plantation area. Here there was pressure on Britain, from the Australian colonies, to annex the entire eastern half of the island as a bulwark for their defence. All these dangers led German companies in the area, and imperial representatives in Australia and the islands, to inundate Bismarck with information about the extent of German enterprise and to urge annexation of Samoa, New Guinea and parts of Micronesia.

They had their reward. A promise of State protection for a Chartered Company to colonise north-east New Guinea was one of Bismarck's first decisions in favour of colonial expansion. Annexation of the mainland and the offshore islands took place in November 1884. In early 1885 the Marshall Islands were annexed. The Carolines group was to be next on the list, but Spain protested on the grounds that western Micronesia was already part of an overseas Spanish empire dating back to the sixteenth century. The question was submitted, at Bismarck's request, to Pope Leo XIII as international arbiter, and he ruled in favour of Spain's claim.

As for Samoa, during the 1880s Bismarck entertained the hope that he could acquire the group by negotiations with Britain. But he was thwarted here too. Continual diplomatic gaucheries by his consuls in Apia turned opinion against the idea of German sovereignty in Samoa, and the United States adamantly resisted all attempts to negotiate a partition of interests.⁶ In the end Bismarck had to be satisfied with a co-protectorate over the group, in which all three Powers were involved. It was not until 1899, with the complete breakdown of European control and the effects of a particularly ferocious civil war, that the three Powers were able to agree on a realistic solution to the imbroglio: the western islands were then delivered into German hands, the eastern into America's. When, the same year, Germany purchased the Caroline, Palau and Mariana islands from Spain in the wake of the Spanish-American war, the German trade and plantation empire in the Pacific was complete.

Bismarck had not pursued an offensive *Kolonialpolitik* in the Pacific in the sense of staking out new spheres of influence for Germany. The colonial empire was based on already-existing trade and plantation holdings in whose administration Bismarck wished to engage the government as little as possible. He looked to the Hansa cities to

promote material and political development overseas, through *Frei-briefen* or Charters for private enterprise on the model of the British North Borneo Company, and he even tried, unsuccessfully, to enlist Hamburg merchants as colonial directors in a new Imperial Bureau which would remove responsibility from the Foreign Office.

Bismarck's hopes did become reality in the Pacific when the New Guinea Company, founded by Adolf von Hanseemann in 1884, was awarded a far-reaching Charter on 17 May 1885 to administer the new protectorate of north-east New Guinea. On condition that it erect a governing apparatus at its own cost, the Company was given the exclusive right to regulate the internal administration of the colony, to levy taxes and duties, to take possession of all unowned land and to conclude contracts for land and labour with the local inhabitants. Only four years later the Company surrendered the reins of government to the Reich, though it continued to pay the costs of administration. It resumed control in September 1892, but was never able to overcome the conflict of interest between its public and private policies. Company expenditure increased steadily without any proportional return as a number of subsidiary companies rose and fell on the New Guinea mainland. In 1895-96 the New Guinea Company entered into negotiations for the permanent transfer of control to the Reich, and this finally took place, after some domestic opposition to the terms of the treaty, in April 1899. Up to that time the Company had lost a total of nine million marks in New Guinea.⁷

In only one area of the Pacific was Bismarck's model of Charter Government successful—the island sphere north of New Guinea. The DHPG and the firm of Robertson and Hernsheim, both of which controlled trade in the Marshalls (as well as in the Carolines under Spanish rule), founded a joint company in late 1887, the Jaluit Gesellschaft, which was given an Imperial Charter on 21 January 1888. The treaty gave the firm the right to take possession of all unowned land in the Marshall, Brown and Providence islands and to extract their guano deposits, while the actual administration remained in the hands of an Imperial Commissioner whose costs were borne by the Jaluit Gesellschaft. After the Carolines became part of the empire, the Company was granted a trading and plantation monopoly there also. The smallest of the privileged firms in Germany's colonies, the Jaluit Gesellschaft was also the longest lived and the most successful. In 1906, when the Company became a purely private business, it was already paying a dividend of twenty per cent. In that year the separate status

of the Marshalls protectorate was abolished and it was united with the Carolines, Palau and Mariana islands, which had been administratively a part of the New Guinea protectorate since their incorporation into the empire.

As these events were occurring, changes were taking place in the machinery of colonial administration at home, changes that affected directly the policies adopted in the Pacific. In the early years, Bismarck's open dislike of government involvement in the colonies meant that decisions about them were taken within the political section of the Foreign Office. Bismarck was determined that colonies would not become a new avenue of growth for the all-enveloping Imperial Civil Service; the activities of officials like the Samoan consuls only reinforced his conviction that inflated bureaucracies and petty despotism were the real fruits of overseas empire. But the concerns of the colonies grew rapidly after 1885, and, though he was disenchanted with the whole enterprise, Bismarck was forced in 1889 to ask for help in administering them.⁸ A year later, after he had already been replaced as Chancellor, a special Colonial Department was created within the Foreign Office.

Independence in policy making did not come with this arrangement. The new Department remained the responsibility of the Foreign Office and under the jurisdiction of the Chancellor. More importantly, the Department in its policy deliberations always had to reckon with articulate public discussion of colonial issues, and with pressure from the Reichstag. Unlike colonial organisation in most countries (Britain, for example, where the House of Commons had no direct authority over basic administration in the colonies), the German Reichstag was empowered to review each year the budget submitted by the Colonial Department. As an important weapon in its struggle to strengthen parliamentary control over Germany's political life, the Reichstag guarded this right jealously, examining every aspect of colonial affairs rigorously, both in the House and in its Budget Commission. Because the various parties represented large-scale pressure groups, those interests with the most patronage in the colonies or in Berlin exerted a great deal of influence on colonial politics, especially after the so-called Hottentot elections of 1907.

Though criticism of the Colonial Department and its ways built up steadily after 1890, no major structural changes were made, except to incorporate the administration of colonial troops, post office and

treasury affairs into the system and set up a Colonial Council (*Kolonialrat*) of 'experts' to advise on matters of trade, shipping, settlement, etc. Charges of excessive legalism and incompetence, of brutality and criminal misbehaviour by officers in the African colonies culminated in the Herero-Nama war of 1904 in South-West Africa and the Maji Maji rebellion in East Africa the following year. These produced a great crisis in Germany's domestic politics. In the elections of 1907 the parties of the Right—Conservatives, National Liberals and *Freisinnige*—gained power, and hence the interests of right-wing pressure groups, virtually identical with commercial interests in the colonies, commanded even greater authority in colonial policy making.

The reform of colonial administration in 1907 and the elevation of the Department to the status of a Ministerial Office did not diminish the influence of the Right. If anything, the trend was reinforced. Bernhard Dernburg, the new State Secretary for Colonies, was a Berlin banker, hand-picked by Chancellor Bülow to bring a new broom to the Wilhelmstrasse. In a matter of months, Dernburg rose from political obscurity to the centre of public attention. In the elections of 1907 he took upon himself the colonial cause and proved an untiring and inspiring advocate. He brought immense energy, imagination and decisiveness to his task of cleaning up the system, and the reforms he engineered were real and far-reaching. A purge of the ranks of Berlin officials was Dernburg's first move. Then he turned to the tasks of arranging more coherent planning for the long-range development of Africa and the Pacific; of streamlining financial practices; of revising colonial law to incorporate local custom; of encouraging private investment.⁹

This last was the crux of the matter. Dernburg was at heart a mercantilist. His vision was a materialist one: the colonies were chiefly sources of raw materials and outlets for investment capital. True, he envisaged a reciprocal program in which Germany would bring civilisation and technology to the colonised peoples, and he attempted a number of liberal reforms aimed at improving relations between the colonies' native peoples and their German masters, such as eliminating forced labour and the use of the whip. But his efforts were curtailed in extent and depth by the opposition of large, colonial, settler interests which would not accept radical interference with their commercial objectives and put pressure on Dernburg through the Reichstag. Dernburg initiated an economic take-off in Germany's colonial empire, but the consequent material growth and the intensified pressures on the

native populations posed enormous difficulties for those responsible for a humane native policy.¹⁰

These last were the men out in the field, the bureaucrats, civilians and soldiers who organised the day-to-day communication of German policy to Africans and Pacific Islanders. In the Pacific, the isolation of island colonies one from another and from the mother country, their insignificance in the larger German empire, and the relatively moderate level of investment at stake all resulted in a minimum of supervision from home and more freedom of action for local administrators. Unlike the older British, Spanish and French empires, the Germans followed no 'system' of colonial rule in the Pacific in the sense of a standard pattern of administrative attitudes and actions based on abstract theory or predetermined by long experience. There is in the records a striking absence of instructions from the Colonial Department to the Governor of Samoa; the Governor of New Guinea, too, was generally left a free hand to determine the way he would handle things, though the presence of powerful settler groups and large corporations meant that he had to proceed more cautiously.

Within the colonies themselves, isolation threw decisive responsibilities onto individual station officers, and often dictated the pattern of racial relationships. On mountainous, forested Ponape, small boats were the chief means of transport around the island. It took up to seven hours to reach the southern district of Kiti from the European settlement on the northern shores. It could take five hours to sail from Upolu to Savai'i in Samoa: the isolation of Savai'i proved a major factor in the problems the Germans encountered in Samoa. In New Guinea, district stations such as Aitape, Morobe, the Admiralties and Kieta were often isolated from the main planting and trading communities, and communication was dependent on desultory visits by the one government steamer or an occasional recruiting ship. District officers were thus left very much to their own devices. They were not required to seek approval from headquarters before opening up new country or taking action against local villages, and the tendency to one-man rule was reinforced by the absence of European subordinates, the personal loyalty of coloured police troops, and the New Guinean preference for social relationships of a personal and reciprocal nature.

These practices were to prove more arbitrary and militaristic in Africa, where soldiers seconded from the metropolitan army provided the bulk of field officers for the colonial service into the 1900s. The Pacific colonies were staffed mainly by civilian personnel, both at higher

executive levels and out in the field. This did not mean that the relations between rulers and ruled in the Pacific were free of all violence, but the civilian tone of German rule, particularly in Samoa and early Ponape, did make for more flexible responses in the face of island opposition.

Unlike Africa, too, the regimes in the Pacific were not supported by large military forces. None of the colonies had a special colonial troop (*Schutztruppe*), and only New Guinea boasted a considerable police force, over 800 men by 1914, which was also used to open up new territory. Ponape got by with fifty Melanesian and Malay police, Samoa with a mere thirty young Samoans. Compared with the size of the security forces in Africa, these numbers were trifling. German East Africa, for example, could call upon a troop of 230 white and 2500 African soldiers; the Cameroons on 175 whites and 1550 Africans. The largest force of all was in South-West Africa, where there was an all-white force of 2500, and 500 African police late in the German period. During the Herero wars some 21 000 soldiers had been stationed in the colony.¹¹ Only France among the Powers in Africa possessed a colonial army larger than that of the German Reich.

Since, in an island empire the size of the German Pacific, land-based security forces were too expensive and inefficient to maintain, the Pacific administrations leaned heavily on the German navy for support. This created a special set of difficulties, for so jealously did each side guard its prerogatives of authority, that the exact function of the navy within the framework of colonial rule was the subject of frequent disagreement between administrators and ships' captains; the impotence of the navy in land exercises and the infrequency of naval visits added to these difficulties. Nonetheless, because of chronic lack of finance, and the extensive perimeters of the island colonies, the navy remained the most important sanction of the Pacific administrations right up to 1914.

But the nub of the German navy's activities lay elsewhere. When, in 1914, war was declared, none of the three colonies could count on naval protection against the invasion of enemy forces. In the event, Samoa and Ponape fell into Allied hands without resistance; New Guinea fell after a token encounter between German settlers and Australian troops. It was not just that the Reich's two small Pacific cruisers, even with Graf Spee's Far-East Cruiser Squadron, were hopelessly outnumbered by the range of battle craft which Britain and her dominions could deploy. The reason was more that Berlin's priorities lay closer to home. Well before 1914, Admiral Tirpitz's strategy for a battlefleet to counteract the

British in the north Atlantic demanded that the colonies be abandoned in the event of war.¹²

Such were the instruments of imperial policy in the colonies. This book aims to add a further dimension to the story—that of the Pacific Islanders and their reception of German rule—and to show how the conflict between Berlin's objectives, the local administrative possibilities, and the aspirations of Islanders was handled in the colonies themselves.