

THE TONGAN HISTORY ASSOCIATION (THA)

THA is an international association of scholars and others interested in Tonga, in the South Pacific. It was established in 1989, at the second Tongan History Conference, and the founding president was Rev. Dr Sione Latukefu, the first Tongan to be a professional historian. The first conference, held at the Australian National University in 1987 was planned as a workshop but quickly became an international conference, with scholars of Tonga from many nations enthusiastically participating. The proceedings of this conference were published in 1990 as **Tongan Culture and History**, edited by Phyllis Herda, Jennifer Terrell and Niel Gunson (Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History, ANU).

This initial conference was followed by other conferences in Tonga (1989,1993), New Zealand (1990, 1995), Hawai'i (1992) and Australia (1997), and the next will be held in Tonga in 1999. Conference volumes are in progress for the 1993 and 1997 conferences. At each of these conferences a wide range of papers has been presented, reflecting the diverse membership of the association. At present there are nearly 100 members, mainly from Tonga, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and Europe. These members include scholars from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, history, political science, education, development studies, philosophy, law, ethnomusicology, linguistics and volcanology. There are also ministers of religion, directors of cultural centres, representatives from the Tongan government, a librarian and a film-maker, and an increasing number of members who are simply interested in Tonga and see this association as a useful point of contact. One of the major strengths of the association is that of the total membership approximately 40 are Tongan nationals; this ensures that the THA has ongoing collaboration between the Tongan and non-Tongan members and provides a support base for Tongan tertiary students both in Tonga and overseas.

With such scattered membership, the main form of communication between members is the twice-yearly newsletter, which reports the activities of members, announces relevant conferences and publications, provides reviews of books and films, and other information. The THA also has a web site, established by Dr Latukefu's son, 'Alopi, which describes the history of the association, gives registration details to prospective members, lists current members and includes a number of early THA newsletters. Linked to this site is a discussion forum, on which members and others interested in Tonga can discuss issues and exchange information.

The URL for the main web site is:

<http://www.sunsite.anu.edu.au/spin/PACASSOC/TONGHIST/tonghist.htm>

and for the forum is:

<http://www.pacificforum.com/kavabowl/tongahistory>

A constitution for the THA was ratified in 1997, to formalise its organisation and objectives. The association has an executive committee consisting of a President, Vice-President, two Secretary-Treasurers (Tongan and Overseas), and up to three ordinary committee members. Following the untimely death of Dr Latukefu in 1995, Professor 'I Futa Helu, founder and director (to 1997) of the independent 'Atenisi Institute in Tonga, became President. The current Vice-President is Dr Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, well-known historian of Tonga; the Tongan Secretary-Treasurer is Mrs Salote Fukofuka, director of the Tongan branch of the University of the South Pacific; Overseas Secretary-Treasurer is Dr Helen Morton,

anthropologist; and the two current committee members are Mrs 'Eseta Fusitu`a, Deputy Secretary to the Tongan government, and Mrs Meredith Filihia, a PhD student in history. The constitution states the objectives of the association to be:

- 1) To encourage the exchange of information amongst individuals, institutions and organisations interested in Tongan history, anthropology and related disciplines.
- 2) To encourage the study, discussion, writing and publication of material on Tonga.

Communicated: *25 June 1998*

By: *Helen Morton*