

Extract from ~
Quest for the Real Samoa
by Lowell D. Holmes
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ISLANDS AND PEOPLE

The Samoan archipelago, consisting of nine inhabited islands, lies in a general east to west line at 14° south latitude and between 168 ° and 173° west longitude. The group is divided politically into American Samoa and Western Samoa. The American portion is a territory of the United States administered by the United States Department of Interior and consists of the islands of Tutuila (with the port of Pago Pago), Aunu'u, Ofu, Olosega, and Ta'u, the latter three islands being collectively known as the Manu'a group. Western Samoa is a sovereign nation, having gained its independence from New Zealand in 1962. This nation is made up of the islands of Upolu, Savai'i, Apolima, and Manono. The inhabitants of the entire archipelago are remarkably homogeneous culturally, linguistically, and racially. Ninety percent of the 135,000 inhabitants of this island chain are classified as fullblooded Polynesians and the majority of them practice the traditional economic pursuits of subsistence agriculture and occasional reef and deep-water fishing.

Ta'u village, the focus of this study as well as Margaret Mead's in 1925-26, lies 60 miles east of the American Samoan island of Tutuila. The village, with a population of over 700, is actually two villages. That is to say, it recognizes civic subdivisions known as Si'ufaga and Luma (see Figure 3.1). There are two other villages on the island, Faleasao, situated on the next bay to the north, and Fitiuta, some five to six miles over mountain trails to the east. Ta'u, like all the islands in the Samoan chain, has low coastal areas with sand beaches (where the villages are located) from which the land rises sharply to highland ridges. Mount Lata on Ta'u has a summit 3056 ft. above sea level while the island of Savai'i boasts a 6000-ft. peak; Matafao, on Tutuila, has an altitude of 2141 ft. Nearly all of the coastlines are fringed with coral reefs with breaks only where freshwater streams enter the sea.