




NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



This document is made available by The New Zealand
Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.



GERMAN COLONIAL OBSERVATIONS ON WALLS AND HOUSE SITES IN THE INTERIOR OF UPOLU, SAMOA

Dirk H.R. Spennemann
Charles Sturt University, Australia

Today the bulk of the population on Western Samoa lives in villages clustered along the shore. This, however, is an artefact of the past two hundred years. As work by Davidson (1974) and Holmer (1980) could show, the remains of Samoan house sites and stonewalls, thought to represent roads, can be found as high as 130m above sea-level, thereby confirming observations and discussion by Watters (1958a; 1958b), that the pre-European contact population in Samoa mainly lived more in the interior of the islands. However, the remains of these inland settlements were observed much earlier.

The following observations were made by German agricultural specialists in 1903 and were published in German (*Voss'sche Zeitung* 22 May 1903) and Samoan (*Samoanische Zeitung* 16 May 1903) newspapers at the time as well as an account of the agricultural development potential of Samoa (Wohltmann 1903). These accounts were encountered on occasion of archival context research on a very different topic (Spennemann in prep.)¹. As they illustrate the first published notice of Samoan inland settlement and the first, albeit very brief, assessment of their antiquity, I would like to place them, in translated form again on record.

"The soil, too, allows for the development of a strong jungle. That it is absent, however, is caused by the fact that in the past the interior of the island had been extraordinarily densely settled and farmed, much more than today. Firm evidence for this is provided by the innumerable stone walls, which may have served as boundary markers or defence walls, as well as the abandoned village locations. These stonewalls can be found on the entire northern shore of

Upolu, not only in the lower areas near the coast and on the flat basalt plateaus, but also as high as 300 m. And wherever they occur the forest is still young and weakly developed. In the higher regions the forest increases with greater stem diameter and overall height. ... Since the island is covered with old cultural places which, as one can assume, once provided a large population with food, the soil is no longer virginal and has been exhausted due to the taro and banana plantings of the Samoans." (F.Wohltmann in *Voss'sche Zeitung* 22 May 1903).

It should be pointed out that the German colonial records abound with information on the environment and land use of the German (1900-1914) and pre-German periods; however, only rarely do they make reference to archaeological or anthropological information. The German files are government, and thus land management, files after all.

Notes

¹ Contained in: [Imperial German] Auswärtiges Amt, Kolonial Abteilung, Akten betreffend 'Landwirtschaftswesen Samoa.' Allgemeines Bd. 1 November 1891 to 1914. Landwirtschaft I (Pflanzenbau) 1f file n° 7820. National Library of Australia, Canberra, Microform N° G8615.

REFERENCES

- Davidson, J.M. 1974. Samoan structural remains and settlement patterns. In: R.C.Green and J.M.Davidson (eds), *Archaeology in Western Samoa* Vol. II. *Bulletin of the Auckland Institute and Museum* 7. Auckland: Auckland Institute and Museum. Pp. 225-244.
- Holmer, R.,N. 1980. Mt. Olo Settlement Pattern Interpretation. in: J.D. Jennings and R.N. Holmer (eds.) *Archaeological Excavations in Samoa. Pacific Anthropological Records* 32. Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum. Pp. 93-104.
- Spennemann, Dirk H.R. (in prep.) From disaster to disaster...The efforts of the German colonial administration in Micronesia to mitigate the effects of the typhoons of 1905 and 1907. ms. in prep.
- Watters, R.F. 1958a. Settlement in Old Samoa. *New Zealand Geographer* 14:1-18.
- Watters, R.F. 1958b. Cultivation in Old Samoa. *Economic Geography* 34:338-351.
- Wohltmann, F. 1903. *Landwirtschaftliche Erkundung nach Samoa*. Berlin, Kolonialwirtschaftliches Komitee e.V.