

# Tui'umi: The Assassin

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## Abstract

*The paper discusses the assassination of Tamafaigā of Manono from the point of view of his family and descendants, the Aiono Faapologaina family of Matavai, Fasitoo-uta. The research approach is qualitative using family oral traditions and written information. This is supplemented by written submissions and subsequent court rulings in family court cases held at the Land and Titles court. The paper makes an important contribution to the discussion on leadership succession in Sāmoa's history prior to the arrival of the Wesleyan and London Missionary Societies in 1828 and 1830 respectively, forerunners of the lotu Toga – the Methodist Church of Sāmoa—and lotu Ta'iti—the Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa.*

*Keywords: assassin, orchestrated, assassination, Tamafaigā,*

## Introduction

Following the death of Tafa'ifa l'amafana of Sa Tupua in 1802, Gilson alleged that Tamafaiga of Manono<sup>1</sup> skilfully played off the Tupua and Malietoa factions and had by the end of the conflict, gained control of the Tafa'ifa titles.<sup>2</sup> It thus enabled Tamafaiga to set up his tyranny regime and indisputably self-possessed and proclaimed himself the King of Sāmoa. Tamafaigā was known as half human and half demon.<sup>3</sup> He was also known as “the ghost” on account of his extreme cruelty.<sup>4</sup> Research into the current literature concerning Tamafaiga prior to the advent of European missions is limited particularly in relation to the assassination of Tamafaiga.

With reference to the most readily available publications of this modern age, most if not all mention the assassination of Tamafaigā as having been instigated by the men of Fasitoo-uta.<sup>5</sup> Another piece of writing claimed that Tamafaigā had been killed by the men of Fasitoo-tai.<sup>6</sup> However, it appears the two different versions by the one author is subject to be questioned given the fact the title Aiono is from the village of Fasitoo-uta, the assassin is from Fasitoo-uta and the assassination of Tamafaiga took place at Fasitoo-uta.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the writings portray the killing of Tamafaigā as a collective effort: “the men” of Fasitoo-uta and Faleasi'u, or “the men” of A'ana. By implication, the writings are therefore claiming that the assassination was collectively accomplished by the “men”. The major omission is the failure to honour the individual courage, the heroism, the bravery and the sacrifice of “the man” who thought out the assassination plan, “the man” who orchestrated the attack, “the man” who sacrificed and used his own daughter as bait to lure in the enemy, “the man” who planned and accomplished the ultimate successful assassination of Tamafaigā by Aiono Ma'ipipili also known as Tui'umi.

Some writings appear to connect the significance of the assassination of Tamafaigā as a clear pathway of the Evangelist John Williams and the Savali o le Filemu<sup>8</sup> mission who brought the Good News and Christianity to Sāmoa, but failed however to acknowledge the man who was the centrepiece for the elimination of the mighty Tamafaigā.<sup>9</sup>

This paper will focus mainly on 'Aiono Ma'ipipili, nick-named Tui'umi, the man who planned Tamafaigā's demise. It will explore and analyse the information contained in the various publications, through comparisons and justifications of the events that occurred, as well as personal testimonies of families and villagers of the named villages in the literature and geographic

descriptions. This paper will further discuss the life and history of Tui'umi—the assassin, who assassinated and destroyed the mighty Tamafaiga.

### Who is the Assassin?

Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi Taisi in his book 'Su'esu'e Manogi,<sup>10</sup> pointed out correctly and clearly that the assassin is Aiono Ma'ipipili, nick-named Tui'umi.<sup>11</sup> Ma'ipipili is the son of Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala of Fasitoo-uta, a true heir to the title Aiono from the Aiono Tuala family in Matailili, a sub-village of Fasitoo-uta. His mother is Tatā from the village of Fogapoa.<sup>12</sup> Ma'ipipili was bestowed the title Aiono when he agreed to render his services to the planning of the assassination of Tamafaiga. Aiono Ma'ipipili was the first of the Aiono Tuala lineage from Matailili<sup>13</sup> to reside at Matavai<sup>14</sup> in Avano,<sup>15</sup> another sub-village of in the centre of the village of Fasitoo-uta, the exact vicinity selected and planned for the assassination and the attack to take place.

The literal translation of the name Ma'ipipili means 'sick and crippled.'<sup>16</sup> The singularity in meaning and origin of the name Ma'ipipili by the people of Fasitoo-uta and the Aiono Tuala family are remarkable because it was coined simply because of his huge size when he was born.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, when he was born, it was generally assumed that he would not be able to walk because of his amazing length and huge size as a new born baby. There was also the fear that his feet would not be able to carry his huge body. From these inferences, based on his huge size, he was thus considered crippled, the sole reason for his being named Ma'ipipili. However, all these presumptions were not to be. Ma'ipipili continued to grow huge and tall, a healthy person nonetheless, thus he was further nick-named Tui'umi, meaning the tallest of the tall.<sup>18</sup>

History records that Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala had disposed of his wife Tatā his wife and colluded with another lady named Taufunaifoia'ana to become his second wife<sup>19</sup>. In accordance with the Sāmoan customs, Tatā was returned forthwith to her family in Fogapoa.

Sāmoa is well known for its ancient customs and traditions that involve the Kings' and Chiefs' courtship relations with a woman or with other women. When the time is called for, a King or Chief is advised by his orators for a change of wife, or a King or Chief is attracted to another woman, the Chief and his orators are obligated to act accordingly and do the honourable thing of returning the unwanted wife back to her family and village.<sup>20</sup> The returning of the unwanted wife warrants the King or Chief and his orators to do traditional presentation of traditional gifts to the family and village of the returned wife,<sup>21</sup> an expensive tradition.

It was generally believed that Tatā understood the impression that Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala had opted for another woman to be his wife instead of her, and she was returned to her family and her village of Fogapoa in Savaii, along with her son Ma'ipipili. Sāmoan women were well aware of the courtship tradition then whereby a King or Chief could change wives at his own leisure.<sup>22</sup>

Ma'ipipili who was then living with his mother's family in Fogapoa at the time was asked by Aiono Lulu<sup>23</sup> the Chief of Fasitoo-uta at the time, whereby his help was greatly needed given the fact that Tamafaiga and the attacks by the people of Manono were overwhelming not only because of lack of opposition, but also causing great fear amongst the people of Fasitoo-uta and A'ana that they fled inland to the forest while Tamafaiga and his men continue to burn the villages and slaughter any A'ana or Fasitoo-uta person that comes in their way.

## Ma'ipipili – True Heir of the Aiono title

The several court cases at the Land and Titles Court of Sāmoa confirmed the lineage to the Aiono Tuala title of Matavai in Fasitoo-uta as contained in the following.

- Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala of Matailili of Fasitoo-uta first married Tatā, a lady from the village of Fogapoa/Savaii - issued Ma'ipipili<sup>24</sup> nick-named Tui'umi. His nick-name connected well with his huge body and height.
- Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala's second marriage to Taufau, daughter of Laumatiamanu of Matanofo/Falelatai and issued - Tuilava'i.
- Tuilava'i married Masu daughter of Touli of Saleilua/Falealili – issued Faapologaina<sup>25</sup> who held the title Aiono after Ma'ipipili.
- Aiono Faapologaina married Luisa the daughter of Faagata in Fagatogo/American Sāmoa – issued Siatiu, Ui, Faausa and Maotua. Siatiu took up the Aiono title after Aiono Faapologaina.<sup>26</sup>
- Aiono Ma'ipipili – the assassin who eliminated Tamafaiga was the first ever Aiono title holder to reside in Matavai/Fasitoo-uta and the child of Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala's first marriage to Tatā, the lady from Fogapoa.
- Aiono Ma'ipipili was succeeded by Aiono Faapologaina son of Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala's second marriage to Taufau, the daughter of Laumatiamanu of Matanofo/Falelatai. The title Aiono of Matavai to date continues with the heirs of the Aiono Faapologaina clan.

## Ma'ipipili – The man

Although Tatā, the unwanted first wife of Folasaitu Ape Tapuvaelala who was returned to her village of Fogapoa in Savaii, her son Ma'ipipili went with her and spent his youthful years in his mother's family and village. However, while residing in Fogapoa, Ma'ipipili still continued to connect and affiliate with his father's family in Fasitoo-uta. Ma'ipipili grew to be a very tall and bulky built young gentleman. Ma'ipipili continued to be known by his nick-name Tui'umi being such a tall person, and a smart young man. He was, however known to his families and others as a quiet, humble and passionate, but never a fearful person. His height is estimated to be about seven feet and three inches.<sup>27</sup>

Ma'ipipili's huge body and height was confirmed when his remains were exhumed and were relocated<sup>28</sup> in early 1991 when the then Paramount Chief of Matavai in Fasitoo-uta, the late Aiono Faapologaina Leulumoega Sofara<sup>29</sup> decided to build the new Maota i Matavai<sup>30</sup> and relocated all the family graves that were scattered on the site and vicinity of the land where the new construction was to be built.

During the traditional ceremony of exhuming of the remains and the relocating of the graves, the Falefitu<sup>31</sup> was responsible for the digging and exhuming the remains which were then passed on from the grave to the ladies of the Aiono in Matavai family. The Sā Fuatinō<sup>32</sup> of the Aiono family in Matavai was responsible for the cleaning and washing (*fa'a-taele*)<sup>33</sup> of the remains which included the remains of Aiono Ma'ipipili. This cleaning and washing involved the use of coconut oil in the process, and the remains were then covered and wrapped separately in a piece of siapo.<sup>34</sup> The

remains were then placed in the centre of the house to await the digging of the new relocated graves while the Falefitu guarded the old Maota at Matavai. The traditional ceremony of *Liutofaga* comes with costs whereby the family will have to present the Falefitu with gifts of fine mats, food and money.

### The Plan

Ma'ipipili accepted and adhered to the request of Aiono Lulu because the people of Fasitoo-uta continued to live in fear of the mighty, the aggressive and powerful Tamafaigā, a human being without a slightest sense or feeling of love, with no heart or mercy at all. The fate of Fasitoo-uta and A'ana now lies in the hands of Ma'ipipili. As a matter of fact, one can infer that after years of torture by Tamafaigā, this was Faitoo-uta and A'ana's last resort and final hope of ever being freed from the maniacal powers of Tamafaigā. Thus, Fasitoo-uta and A'ana's fate was clearly dependent on Ma'ipipili to save them.

The people of A'ana and Fasitoo-uta were aware that Tamafaigā would soon be on his way from his Manono village heading to Laulii and his fleet of 'alias and canoes would definitely pass by A'ana and Fasitoo-uta. The people of A'ana and Fasitoo-uta were aware of his animalistic conduct and the worse feature of Tamafaigā was his demand to sleep and have sexual intercourse with any lady or woman of his choosing. Any opposition to his sexual demands would always end in killings.

Knowing that Tamafaigā would soon travel by Fasitoo-uta, Ma'ipiili planned to capitalize on Tamafaigā's sexual desires by asking her daughter Leuteifuiono while in Fogapoa to come to Fasitoo-uta. Ma'ipipili intended to sacrifice the beauty of her daughter to lure Tamafaigā to sleep with her. This was a key part of the plan for the intended attack. Indubitably, the plan was a tough call by Ma'ipipili and a huge sacrifice by his daughter for the sake of Fasitoo-uta and A'ana to be relieved from fear of Tamafaiga. This young beautiful innocent daughter of the assassin was well versed of the plan and most importantly she was well coached in the sacrifice of giving up herself as the sacrificial lamb by way of having sexual intercourse with Tamafaigā according to plan.

The plan worked accordingly as planned by Aiono Ma'ipipili. The Tamafaiga fleet of war alias and canoes travelled from the western side of the island of Upolu headed eastward and close to the shoreline. It is common for Sāmoan seafarers using alias and canoes to travel close to the shoreline to enable easy access to help if needed or seek shelter when the seas became rough.

When passing the peninsular of Matavai in Fasitoo-uta, Tamafaigā's attention was drawn immediately, being attracted to the beauty of Leuteifuiono who was going about her chores of sweeping the back of the house in her dress that covered her lower body only while exposing her breasts, her long hair and her beauty glowed. It was an amazing and an overwhelming seductive act and tempting hot sexy attribute by Leuteifuiono that no man could deny or refuse especially Tamafaigā's hunger for sex and his well-known desires for his female conquests. He immediately gave in because of his sexual desires for her beauty, incognizant of his impending fall into the planned trap.

The lusty hunger to appease his animalistic instincts and desire for sex, Tamafaigā forced himself to spend the early evening with a lady of Faleasi'u village and then spent the rest of that very night with the virgin Leuteifuiono of Fasitoo-uta. An entertainment known as *pō-ūla*<sup>35</sup> was planned in honour of Tamafaigā and his group spending that very night at Matavai. The Fasitoo-uta village and the family at Matavai had been well informed in advance that Tamafaigā would be at Fasitoo-uta

and would be spending that very night with Leuteifuiono which prompted Fasitoo-uta to orchestrate the *pō-ūla* evening. It is important to note that at this stage, the idea and the sacrificial plan by Ma'ipipili leading to the assassination of Tamafaiga was continuing to fall in place as planned.

Late in the night after the *pō-ūla* and being so tired from the classic entertainment, Tamafaigā and Leuteifuiono finally retired to their allocated sleeping spot on the side of the house<sup>36</sup> well covered with *siapo*<sup>37</sup> on all sides being used as partitions to separate their sleeping spot from the rest of the house. The purpose of making the partitions was to allow privacy knowingly and for Tamafaigā to perform sexual intercourse with Leuteifuiono.

### The Assassination

Aiono Ma'ipipili capitalised on the understanding that Tamafaigā had had sexual intercourse with a lady of Faleasiu in the early evening, he stayed up late during the *pō-ūla* entertainment, and then had sexual intercourse for the second time that night with Leuteifuiono which would certainly and without a doubt pose a huge impact on his strength so that he would be overwhelmingly be tired and would definitely not be able to defend himself when the attack takes place.

By implication, it was a wise and well-orchestrated assassination plan of killing Tamafaigā by Aiono Ma'ipipili. Like all men, soon after sexual intercourse and sexual satisfaction, men will always feel weak after using up all energy and strength for pleasure and would certainly need ample time for rest and recuperating to get their strength back, and this was the exact and perfect moment Aiono Ma'ipipili had targeted and was desperately waiting for.

Behind the tapa cloth screens, Tamafaigā was lying awake but without strength. His servants were all asleep after a long day of travel and a long night of *pō-ūla*. Leuteifuiono gave the signal to Aiono Ma'ipipili,<sup>38</sup> the assassin, whereupon he advanced immediately through the tapa cloth screens and speared Tamafaigā on his left side as he was trying to get up. Meanwhile, the *taulele'a*<sup>39</sup> of Fasitoo-uta was beating up the servants of Tamafaigā.

### The end of Tamafaiga

Tamafaigā was gravely hurt after being speared by Aiono Ma'ipipili but he managed to break away from the house in excruciating pain due to great loss of blood. He headed to the seaward side and jumped into the sea causing a huge splash.<sup>40</sup> Part of the land of Matavai was then named *Lepisi* meaning 'splashing sea' where Tamafaigā jumped into the sea. Aiono Ma'ipipili the assassin caught up with Tamafaigā and despite numerous pleas and attempts by Tamafaigā begging for mercy and to spare his life, Aiono Ma'ipipili with one chop of the axe severed the head from the body. Thus Tamafaigā had been killed, assassinated, murdered and his body was taken ashore where he was ceremoniously cut into pieces.<sup>41</sup> It was a victory to Aiono Ma'ipipili nick-named Tui'umi—the brave warrior and the assassin from Matavai of Fasitoo-uta village in the district of A'ana.

### The emergence of Lepisi

On the night of the assassination, Tamafaiga, badly wounded fled and jumped into the sea causing a huge splash. That piece of land next to the sea thereafter was named Lepisi<sup>42</sup> and is part of the land of Matavai. The land Lepisi as part of the land of Matavai was confirmed by the Land and Titles Court of Appeal in its decision of 20<sup>th</sup> May 2009.<sup>43</sup> The legal issue that was determined by the Court of

Appeal in this case concerned who held the authority (pule) over the land of Lepisi at Fasitoo-uta.<sup>44</sup> The Land and Titles Court of Appeal in its decision also confirmed that the name Lepisi had emerged following the assassination of Tamafaigā.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the Land and Titles Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the First Respondents led by the author of this article whereby the Court confirms that the land in dispute is part of Lepisi ruled by (pule ai) Aiono Faapologaina.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At birth, he was named Ma'ipipili on the assumption he was sick and crippled. Born as huge new born baby, it was presumed by his family that he might not survive life to become an adult person. Apparently, all these presumptions were not to be. Ma'ipipili continued to grow huge and tall, a healthy person and was nick-named Tu'umi, meaning the tallest of the tall. He had to leave Fasitoo-uta with his mother Tata when she was returned to her family at Fogapoa/Savaii when his father opted for the Falelatai woman as his wife.

However, responding to the request of his village of Fasitoo-uta, Aiono Maipipili proved himself a true warrior, a person of courage and bravery, a leader who sacrifices himself and his family to save the people of Fasitoo-uta and A'ana. Aiono Maipipili went in for the kill, and it was mission accomplished. The elimination and death of Tamafaiga was a significant moment in the history of Sāmoa that A'ana is being saved from his mighty ruthless powers, powers of a giant King and a Maniac.<sup>47</sup> The devil is dead but a historical moment in the history of the Church. Tamafaiga is killed and A'ana is saved, so as the whole of Sāmoa. The legacy in history is set of the assassin, none other than Aiono Ma'ipipili also known as 'Tu'umi.'

### Endnotes:

1. Manono is one of the inhabited islands of Sāmoa
2. R. P. Gilson, 1970. *Sāmoa 1830 to 1900, the politics of a multi-cultural community*, Melbourne, OUP, 71. At the time, the *malo* had been in the hands of Sa Tupua since the reign of Salamasina from about the late 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Sa Malietoa did not gain prominence until 1830 when Malietoa Vainu'upo was the first Malietoa to have gained all of the papa titles by conquest.
3. Tamafaiga was known as the Aitu Tagata or Itu-lua which means part of him is human and at certain times he is a ghost or demon.
4. Tu'u'u, M. (1999) 'Malietoa, Superior Warrior of Sāmoa' (GP Print, Petone, NZ) 203
5. Meleisea, M. (1987) 'Lagaga' A Short History of Sāmoa. [https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=Gt\\_RrCAkctwC&pg=PA56&lpg=PA56&dq=who+killed+tamafaiga&source=bl&ots=\\_biqD5ONIL&sig=-b1FTwfkUUz\\_wGlpY-](https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=Gt_RrCAkctwC&pg=PA56&lpg=PA56&dq=who+killed+tamafaiga&source=bl&ots=_biqD5ONIL&sig=-b1FTwfkUUz_wGlpY-) (Accessed 05/08/2017)
6. Meleisea, M. (1987) 'The Making of Modern Sāmoa' (Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.) 23
7. Interview with Leusogi Taalo 09 September 2017. Leusogi is the Tu'ua of the Falefitu in Mata-Avano-Fasitoo-uta.
8. Translation: Savali o le Filemu means Messenger of Peace—the name of the boat used by John Williams.
9. Sunia, F. (2016) 'O Usuga ma Aumoega a Tamalii o Sāmoa.' (International Multimedia Inc.) 213
10. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, (1995) 'Suesue Manogi' in Search of Fragrance, (Centre for Sāmoan Studies, National University of Sāmoa, 2008) 45.
11. Ibid
12. Heritage confirmed by the Land and Titles Court Decision - Gafa o Aiono and Ape: LC 815 P26 – P28 Mataupu: Suafa Aiono i Matavai/Fasitoo-uta. 26 April 2013.
13. Mataiilili in Fasitoo-uta is the original place emerged the Aiono title known in Sāmoa as 'Paepae o Aiga' before splitting to become 'Itu Paepae o Aiga.'
14. Translation (Matavai) 'Eye of the Water.' To date, the pool still exists.

15. A sub-village of the village of Fasitoo-uta and is located at the centre of the village.
16. Translation: (Ma'i) means sick and (pipili) means crippled.
17. Interview with members of the Aiono Tuala family in Matailili/Fasitoo-uta.
18. Above n 10
19. Taufauaifoai'ana was the daughter of Laumatiamanu Toleafoa of Safata and Tutumanu Tagaloa-Fasavalu of Falelatai. See A. M. Tuimaleali'ifano, 2008. *O Tama-a'Aiga*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, p. 49. According to the Falelatai genealogy, Taufauaifoai'ana lived in the late 1600s. Her son from Lilomaiava – le tama a le aitu ma le tagata of Palauli – was Tuita'alili, the progenitor of the Tuimaleali'ifano family in Falelatai. He lived from about 1700 to 1750.
20. Fofu liga Iosefa Sunia in his address in the launching of his book: "*O Aumoega ma Usuga a Tamalii Sāmoa' at SSAB/Apia on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017 said that Usuga ma Aumoega a Tamalii Sāmoa o se aganuu mamalu. E le gata e le tasi se aumoega, ae mafai ona sili atu nai le lua, ona o aga a tulafale, ae o le mamalu ina ia lautele ai gafa o aiga. O se isi vaega taua o le mamalu o le tele o usuga, o le toe momoli lelei o le tamaitai i lona nuu ma lona aiga.*"
21. *Fine mats, mats, food of pigs etc.....*
22. Above n 5
23. The Chief of Fasitoo-uta at the time of Tamafaiga's reign.
24. Above n 28
25. 'Faapologaina' literally means 'in life of suffering.' This name is particular to Aiono family in Matavai/Fasitoo-uta to commemorate the suffer life of A'ana including Fasitoo-uta but all relieved when Tamafaiga was assassinated by Aiono Ma'ipipili.
26. Above n 28
27. Witnessed by Fuatino Toelaulofi Lealiifano Poleki of Matavai during the exhuming of remains from his grave in 1991. The relocated grave of Aiono Ma'ipipili is notable long in length.
28. A traditional ceremony of Liu-Tofaga was conducted at Matavai when the graves were dug and the remains were exhumed and relocated, including the remains of Aiono Ma'ipipili.
29. Susuga Aiono Leulumoega Sofara held the chiefly title of Aiono Tuala Faapologaina of Matavai/Fasitoo-uta from 1982 – 2010 when he passed on.
30. Maota i Matavai. Family meeting house of Aiono Faapologaina family at Matavai/Fasitoo-uta.
31. The Falefitu refers to all orators of Fasitoo-uta collectively.
32. Sa Fuatinō refers to ladies of the Aiono Faapologaina family in Matavai/Fasitoo-uta.
33. The ladies (Sa Fuatinō) clean and wash the remains with coconut oil.
34. Tapa cloth.
35. Entertainment by hosting village for its visitors and can continue on till late night and also involve Dirty dancing by exposing the entertainers private parts. This Sāmoan *poula* entertainment was condemned by the Missionaries and no longer practiced to date.
36. Tala o le fale
37. Above n 49
38. Above n 13
39. Untitled men
40. *Ibid*
41. *Ibid*
42. Splashing seas
43. Faamasinoga o Talosaga, Faamasinoga o Fanua a Suafa Sāmoa. LC 5437 P1 – P7
44. LC 5437 P1 – P7 MATAUPU NA SUESUEINA: 'E uiga i le pule o le fanua o LEPISI i Fasitoo-uta.
45. Vaega 4 (4.1) o Mafuaaga o le Faaiuga. 'Ua matauina le mafuli o mau i le lagolagoina o le taofi e faapea faato'a maua le igoa LEPISI ma faaigoa ai le tolotolo lenei o loo ogatotonu i ai nei fefinaua'iga, ina ua uma le fasiga o Tamafaiga. LC 5437 P1 – P7
46. LC 5437 P1 – P7 'Ua faamaonia o le fanua ua finau ai o se vaega o Lepisi e pule ai le suafoa Aiono Faapologaina.
47. Above n 10