

tough with the French on this nuclear test in our part of the world . . . and — to be really dramatic — sending up a couple of frigates . . .’ McIntosh’s letters are always more cautious than those of ‘that fathead Frank’. McIntosh disliked Middle East ‘irrelevancies’, but saw the commitment as a ‘useful alibi’. The Suez crisis of 1956, when Sid Holland took the old ‘Where she goes, we go’ stance, was regarded by McIntosh as ‘tragic’. On Vietnam, however, he was ruefully clear: ‘We can’t afford to be left too far behind Australia and we can’t afford not to support the Americans — though I have the gravest doubts about their coming out of this with any degree of success’. Sceptical though he was, his advice was that the essential objective was to keep the United States committed to New Zealand’s defence: ‘Any New Zealand Government must obviously be prepared to pay a high price to avoid such a disaster’.

This volume has one major advantage over *Undiplomatic Dialogue* in that the file references in the McIntosh papers are included. However, with four correspondents and the fact that McIntosh’s letters are carbon copies (not all of which were initialled), it is not evident who was writing to whom. Each letter could have had a heading like ‘Corner to McIntosh’. AUP’s earlier volume was printed in New Zealand, sturdily bound, with pleasant soft paper. VUP printed in Singapore, on a heavier paper, poorly bound, and this reviewer’s copy fell apart. VUP also has a quirk of style by which a mixture of Roman and Arabic numerals appears in dates, although, on the cover, they use the normal Arabic system.

These letters, Tom Larkin’s preface, Ian McGibbon’s introduction, and 121 short biographies all contribute to provide a fascinating insight into an era when New Zealand was very prosperous, yet governments were so meanly penny-pinching about representation abroad that Corner contemplated resignation in 1954.

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*Queen Sālote of Tonga: The Story of an Era 1900–1965.* By Elizabeth Wood-Ellem. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1999. 376 pp. NZ price: \$69.96. ISBN 1-86940-205-7.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL GENRE often sacrifices good historical context in its effort to provide an account of an unusually renowned individual’s life. In concentrating on ‘the life’, authors ignore the incidents and circumstances of history and society, except as they relate to the subject. This is not the case with *Queen Sālote of Tonga*, where Elizabeth Wood-Ellem makes a considerable effort to sketch the political and social history of the times. In fact, *Queen Sālote of Tonga* can be said to be a history of the Tongan Islands 1900–1965.

Wood-Ellem is uniquely qualified to offer us such a history. Her association with Tonga began early. She was born there, the daughter of missionary Reverend Dr Harold Wood and Dr Olive Wood, a medical missionary. Her father was well loved and respected in Tonga: he gave the oration at the Queen’s funeral. Although keeping up a personal connection with Tonga, Wood-Ellem, still known as Pesi Wood in the Islands, was a relative latecomer to academia. Not surprisingly, considering her genealogical connections, she chose the kingdom as her area of research for her PhD in history at the University of Melbourne, which she began in the 1970s. *Queen Sālote of Tonga* is largely based on her PhD thesis.

*Queen Sālote of Tonga* proceeds chronologically, beginning with the birth of the

princess in 1900 who would become Queen in 1918. However, in good Tongan fashion, an accompanying account of 'who she was' — her genealogy (*hohoko* in Tongan) also appears early in the volume. This ancestral reckoning is important for, in addition to placing Sālote in a Tongan historical context, the genealogies provide a logical adjunct for the significant relationships, both positive and trying, which the Queen would confront during her lifetime. Indeed, many of the significant incidents of her reign, especially in the early years, are directly attributable to the genealogical positioning of the royal dynasty.

In keeping with this theme, Wood-Ellem devotes a large portion of the book to the early life of Sālote. Fourteen of the 19 chapters deal with the life and times of the Queen before 1945. Unquestionably this was a turbulent period in Tonga's history, when a young and inexperienced Queen, struggling to consolidate her kingdom, dealt with foes from within and without. Wood-Ellem covers these intrigues — from dynastic quarrels played out through politically significant marriages, to looming British imperial interests in the islands — against the life of the monarch as she matures.

The volume is illustrated with a wonderful collection of photographs, gathered from archives, museums and private collections around the world. Many are rare, personal glimpses of the Queen and her dynasty. Others, like the front cover, are simply wonderful photographs, which offer a visual accompaniment to the detailed narrative. Relevant (if not well-executed) maps, and notes on Tongan spelling, chiefly titles and names, as well as a glossary and a helpful 'who's who', are supplied for those not familiar with Tongan history. A series of dynastic kinship figures is also provided; however, the series is lumped together at the beginning of the book. A more judicious spacing, alongside relevant passages of text, would have provided greater clarity.

Throughout the book, the personal is never far away from the political. For example, the chapter on the death of Tungi Mailefihi, the Queen's consort and Premier of Tonga, makes for compelling reading as much for its account of the private grief of a faithful wife as for the inevitable political machinations it caused. Similarly, Wood-Ellem devotes a chapter to Sālote's 1953 visit to the United Kingdom for the coronation of Elizabeth II. This visit, owing to Sālote's popularity with the British public, had eventual political and social ramifications for Tonga. The author's handling of the illness and death of the Queen also portrays this interweaving of a personal life and the political fortunes of the kingdom, as her son, now H.M. Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, increasingly took on the responsibilities of rule.

It is difficult to convey the importance of Queen Sālote in the historiography of Tonga. She was so much more than a political leader to her people. In a traditional Tongan sense she *was* the kingdom. In a more modern sense, Queen Sālote inspired her subjects and gave them a strong sense of a Tongan identity. It is not easy for non-Tongans to appreciate the difficulty in writing a biography of such an illustrious and sacred person. As the author notes, 'truth is what the chief says and history is what the highest chief says' (p.296). As the 'highest chief', Sālote's mana was, and is for that matter, immense and, as such, her reputation and life history, in Tongan belief, are beyond description, comment or challenge. Wood-Ellem has succeeded where, undoubtedly, others would have failed, in providing an intimate glimpse into the life of a beloved leader. In addition she has written a much-needed history of Tonga in the first half of the twentieth century.

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