

Te Aso Fiafia: Te tala o te Kamupane Vaitupu. By Tito Isala and Doug Munro. Tuvalu Extension Services Centre and the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1987. viii, 92pp. NZ price: \$39.95.

THIS BRIEF book is based on an article, 'The Rise and Fall of the Vaitupu Company', published in the *Journal of Pacific History* (1985) by Doug and Teloma Munro. For this edition Tito Isala, a USP administrator currently studying in Brisbane, has provided new material and a translation. The authors have adopted the Tuvaluan government orthography, which reflects broadly the pronunciation of the southern group of dialects, including Vaitupuan, but which does not actually mark such features as vowel length. The small but discerning readership for this book, not being linguists, will find it presents no difficulties.

The title deliberately highlights the 'Day of Celebration', when Vaitupuan annually commemorate their release from debt to the trading company of H.M. Ruge & Co. More particularly, it focuses on the first *aso fiafia* (25 November 1887), on which the last instalment on a total of \$13,000 was finally paid off. This book has therefore been timed to coincide with the centenary of that event, as the authors acknowledge (p.1). The deadline, plus the accident of their both being in Queensland at the same time, acted as the spur to take on the time-consuming task.

The Vaitupuan perspective implied in their conceptual starting-point links this account of the *kaitalafu* 'debt' to oral versions recorded by Doug Munro in 1978. The traditional story uses events such as the annual celebration for mnemonic purposes, thereby establishing a cultural 'charter'. In contrast, historians of the written word tend to see the Vaitupu debt as an episode in the history of Tuvaluan trading relations. A tension exists between the two approaches which is not always easy to reconcile.

The book consists of 12 short chapters (pp.1-32) and a selection of relevant historical documents translated into Tuvaluan (pp.33-92). The opening chapter summarizes the overall story, brings forward some of the conclusions of the 1985 article, and discusses both Doug Munro's fieldwork and the archival sources.

Succeeding chapters deal with European traders in Vaitupu from 1877; the Vaitupu Company established by Thomas William Williams; dissension between Company 'shareholders' and other members of the Vaitupu community; the role of the Church, especially the LMS Samoan pastors and visiting European missionaries; attempts to create a shipping service; the carelessness of the manager of the company store, Kalepou; the British government's interest in the activities of Williams; Williams's unloading of his debts to Ruge on to the people of Vaitupu; and the 'moral' of the story (lessons reiterated each 25 November).

There are some changes in content and emphasis from the earlier article. Vaitupuan interest in boats is recognized in the form of more information on the trading schooner *Vaitupulemele*, which figured importantly in Williams's scheme. Names are now more detailed or revised: Peni, a pastor made anonymous in the original, has his name restored; revision has decreed that Kalepo become Kalepou; and Palagi are identified by their first names as well as their surnames. These changes may indicate a subtle change of emphasis towards 'character', consonant with Tuvaluan tastes and ways of doing history.

As a further concession to non-academic readers, most references and footnotes have been omitted or incorporated in the text. An important addition to the text, however, is the section of verbatim extracts from relevant documents. In fact, these texts, or *lipoti*, 'reports', amount to two-thirds of the book. They are not included simply for padding. They provide most people of Vaitupu with their first direct access to the sources of the Palagi version and therefore set a valuable precedent for other historians. They may also

cause some controversy among their intended public, since they differ in some details from local renditions. The Vaitupuan tradition has a distinctly political tinge: it plays down LMS involvement, it justifies the selective veneration shown to certain ancestors, and it helps to explain a special relationship with the people of Funafuti, who helped pay off the debt.

The question of which, if any, history is authoritative therefore becomes contentious. That may be the reason why the oral accounts collected by Doug Munro are not published along with the translated article and documents. Even though they have been used as source material, they are the one incomplete element in this innovative piece of historiography.

The Vaitupuan must have the final say. The achievement they commemorate each year is a substantial one. While the actual size of the debt is difficult to calculate in modern currency, it must have seemed enormous at the time. Yet a resource-poor community of no more than 4-500 people, working in bursts over five years, cut enough tons of copra to repay the debt by the due date. All at a time of steadily falling copra prices. No wonder they celebrate!

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Fiji's Economic History, 1874-1939: Studies of Capitalist Colonial Development. By Bruce Knapman. ANU National Centre for Development Studies, Pacific Research Monograph No.15, Canberra, 1987. 153pp. Australian price: \$15.00.

FROM AN historiography that is overwhelmingly divided between 'Fijian' and 'Indian' issues, it is refreshing to read a recent publication that is firmly directed towards a discussion of issues on a thematic, national basis. In examining the history of Fiji's colonial economy — 'the spread, functioning and impact of capitalism in Fiji' — between 1874 and 1939, Knapman both documents the past and elucidates Fiji's troubled present.

Fiji's Economic History does not attempt a comprehensive history but, rather, is a collection of six case studies sandwiched between an introduction, in which Knapman deftly sketches the broad outlines of British colonial policy and the background to the colony's economic development, and a concluding general chapter that addresses the broader issues of how far the Fiji situation fits into the theoretical debate on the causes of colonial underdevelopment. The case studies deal with the dominance of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in export growth; continuity and change in the non-capitalist economy; the demise of the white sugar planter; the nature of the colony's dependence for shipping on the Union Steam Ship Company and the Australasian United Steam Navigation Company; competition and collusion among the major merchant firms, and exchange rate policy during the depression.

Readers who have not been educated in the technology and sacred lore of the economist may find models of production, calculations of profitability, the intricacies of exchange rates, and, quite simply, the quantity of statistical material, to be heavy going, off-putting perhaps, but persistence will be rewarded because Knapman provides valuable insight into many features of Fiji's colonial past. The author has drawn on a wide range of sources, many of them unused by other historians, and the work is fully documented.

In his discussions of export growth and the dominance of the CSR, Knapman clearly demonstrates the factors that enabled the CSR to prosper against international trends. These included the the backing of Australian capital, the capacity to keep the price to