

## Some Uses of Chant in Samoan Prose

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*Chants in Samoan narratives are more stable in form and considered more authoritative than prose. In a single text, prose components may comment on what is told poetically in the chant. The chant and the prose can represent two stages in the development of a single tradition. Aspects of the relationship between the two are demonstrated by an examination of the Stuebel version of the story of Sina and the eel and the Fraser version of the story of Fitiaumua.*

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POLYNESIAN LITERATURES contain a large number of genres in both prose and poetry. Those genres can interact in a variety of ways, which must be understood for the correct interpretation of the texts. I will examine a few of the uses of chant in Samoan prose, but I do not exhaust the subject in this article.

Most simply, Samoan narratives can include chants.<sup>1</sup> A prose genre that regularly does so is the *fāgogo* [night tale], which has been analyzed by Richard Moyle (Moyle 1981:31). The chants used in *fāgogo* are transmitted in fairly fixed form by the oral tradition because they are memorized—and were sometimes sung by the audience (Ella 1897:152), whereas the prose text is varied by each storyteller (Moyle 1981:43). As a result, materials can be found in the chants that are missing in the prose, and actual differences can arise between them.<sup>2</sup>

The distinguishing of older chant from newer prose makes possible the establishment of two levels of tradition with varying degrees of agreement and difference. This is particularly clear in the Samoan genre, the *tūlagi*, prose explanations of chants, useful because of their frequent poetic obscurity.<sup>3</sup> These can provide a short summary of the story, which is then told poetically in the chant (Krämer 1902:361, 428–429, 430–431); a summary of the story to the point where the chant begins, which then provides the rest (Krämer 1902:412–413, 416); or a summary to the point where a chant was sung that was itself a part of the story (Krämer 1902:218, 419–420, and 421). In form, *tūlagi* are obviously short narratives; the word is placed like a title (though this may be influenced by the introduction of writing as practiced in family records); and a sentence can be used to link the *tūlagi* and the chant.<sup>4</sup>

A large narrative complex can also be connected to a chant, as is the case with two of the most important Samoan religious texts: the chant, 'O le Solo

*o le Vā o le Foafoga o le Lalolagi* [The Song of Contention of the Origin of That Which Is Under the Firmament], and the prose complex, *'O le Tala i le Tupu'aga o Sāmoa 'Ātoa Fo'i ma Manu'a* [The Story of the Growth of the Whole of Sāmoa along with Manu'a].<sup>5</sup> The connection between the two was described explicitly in the first publication of the texts by T. Powell, but was ignored in later publications, even though the two texts were compared (e.g., Fraser 1892:167, 181–183, 185–188).

The information included in Powell's little-known article is sufficiently important to be quoted at length. Powell states that a family of Manu'a has had the "office . . . from the time immemorial, to guard these myths," which

were taught to the children of the family with great secrecy, and the different parts of a myth and its song were committed to the special care of different members of the family; so that a young man would have the special care of the prose part, and a young woman that of the poetic part, while to the older members, and especially the head of the family, belonged the prerogative of explaining the meaning of the various allusions of the poetic lines. A single line would often bring out a lengthy piece of history. The following tradition with its song were obtained from this family.

There exists in the native mind a great desire to know these sacred myths, and offers are often made to exchange myths, or, as the natives say, to buy one myth with another. But deception is generally connected with this kind of thing. In such cases, something is often added to or omitted from the original so as to mislead. Sometimes an account is fabricated for the occasion. In order, therefore, to the verification of any mythic piece of history, it is necessary to obtain its SOLO. This is a poetic composition which contains references, somewhat occult, to the leading events of the myth, and which is supposed to settle any point in dispute. A disputant, therefore, may demand from the narrator the recitation of a solo, saying, "Ta mai le soifua," which, given freely, may be rendered, "Demonstrate its life" or right to existence. [Powell 1887:147–148, 155]

The above passage makes the important points that the chant and prose text are connected and that the chant was considered older and more authoritative than the prose. The chant, in fact, authenticates the prose in disputed points, because the possibility of variations, additions, and falsifications in the prose is recognized. The prose in this case, however, is itself a traditional text with a certain amount of archaic language (Powell 1887:170–172).

With this information, the interpreter of the texts is assured that the prose has been composed by someone acquainted with the older chant. The two texts can, therefore, be safely compared, and an accurate assessment can be made both of the prose author's dependence on the earlier work and of the amount of other traditional or original elements he has introduced, as well as any misunderstandings he might have had. For instance, large amounts of material can be found in the prose that are absent from the chant, and the creationism of the later text is much more extensive than that of the chant. That is, the chant and the prose represent two stages in the development of a single tradition, two stages in the religious thought of a certain school.

Not surprisingly, chants can influence the wording of prose. For instance, in a story collected around 1835, the prose, *Ona tulei lea o Tafa'i le fafine i le*

*vanu loa* [Then Tafa'i shoved the woman into the long ravine], is based on the chant, *Ua tului a'u i le vanu loa* [I have been shoved into the long ravine].<sup>6</sup>

The influence of chant on prose can be extensive, as seen in the Stuebel version of the famous story of Sina and the eel,<sup>7</sup> a version remarkable for its literary value and concentration on the erotic relationship between the two principals, with its suppression of personages and fabulous incidents extraneous to that relationship.

The story is cast in traditional form: title, *O le tupuga o niu o Samoa uma* [The origin of coconut trees of all Samoa]; introduction with stereotyped presentation of characters and location, *O le ulugalii . . . o Sina*; narrative, *ua maua o Sina . . . ona mate ai lea o ia*; and conclusion with stereotyped *ona [fai] ai lea* [Therefore]. According to the conclusion, as opposed to the title, the story is told as the description of the origin of the chant about Sina. Within the narrative can be found traditional devices. Two series are constructed with similar language: a five-part series on the growth of the eel and Sina's moving it to ever larger receptacles (note the similar language, *ona avane*, etc., and the use of the word *toe*, used conventionally in series) and a three-part series on Sina's traveling and being followed by the eel. Within the narrative is placed an episode, *e oo mai i gauta . . . o le i'a i gaga'e*, with a traditional episode conclusion on the origin of the name Laloata, *ona igoa ai lea . . . lafoia atu i gaga'e*.<sup>8</sup>

Since the author in his conclusion quotes a chant connected to his story—a typical and easily recognizable example with short lines and rhymes (compare Moyle 1981:33–35, 311)—the two can be compared and their relationship defined. Moreover, certain prose sections of his story are connected to sections of another chant or chants that he does not cite but that can be identified from other texts or reconstruction. Still other prose sections of his story have, however, no basis in chant and are traditional components of the prose alone, authenticated by their appearance in other versions.

The chant in the conclusion addresses Sina, whereas the prose refers to her in the third person. The chant provides the name of one parent, Pai, but the prose uses that name for both (see below). The prose introduction provides the location of the story, missing in the chant. In fact, the prose regularly provides place names connected to the story. The discovery and growth of the eel is present in all prose versions—and is based on a story motif (compare Herman 1955:6)—but is omitted by the chant, which begins with the episode by the pool. A peculiarity of the Stuebel version of the story is its concentration on Sina herself to the exclusion of her parents, who play a larger part in other versions; for instance, one or both can discover the eel and give it to Sina (Turner, Sierich, Herman, but not Reinecke).

The prose is connected again with the chant at the episode of the mating in the pool, and the author bases his language clearly on it. First, the author explicates the chant by describing the tree from which Sina will pick the *pua* mentioned in it: *le tasi laau matagofie o ona fua o lona igoa o le Pua* [a beautiful tree, the name of the fruit of which is the Pua]. Line 2 of the chant reads, *Toli au*

*pua ma lafo i le vai* [Twisted off your *pua* and threw them in the water]. The prose text follows closely, *toli mai fua o le laau ma togi i le vai* [twisted off the fruit of the tree and tossed them in the water]. "The fruit of the tree" has already been identified by the sentence mentioned above.

The author has inserted *ona alu atu lea o Sina ma . . .* [then Sina went and . . .], between his *Pua* and *toli*, an obvious prose redactional addition. He uses the similar connection, *ona alu ifo lea o Sina* [then Sina went down] (from the tree), to move to line 3 of the chant: *Sa e tufi auau ai* [You gathered, swimming in the water]. The prose again follows this wording closely: *ua aau i le vai ma tufi mai ana pua* [swam in the water and gathered her *pua*] (note the second use of *mai*). The poetically short *ai* of the chant is explicated in the prose by repeating the phrase *i le vai* to which *ai* referred.

Line 4 of the chant is the concentrated *Faiaiga e le apeoai* [Mated by the tail] (of the eel).<sup>9</sup> The prose expands this, *ona ta ane lea o le apeoai o le tuga ona faiaiga ai lea o Sina e le apeoai* [Then the tail of the eel struck, and Sina was thus mated by the tail].

The rendering of the chant into prose is smooth and clear, and the style blends easily into the previous section, which was independent of the chant. The next section, the anger of Sina and her flight from the pursuing eel, is also independent of the chant, but a traditional part of the story, found in all other versions cited. However, the author narrates none of the fabulous episodes found in the other versions that involve the parents, but concentrates on the two protagonists effectively to express the traditional theme of the unrequited love of an animal for a human being and the motif of its pursuit.<sup>10</sup>

The episode of the origin of the name Laloata is also a traditional part of the prose (Turner 1884, Herman 1955), but not conventional material for chant. By comparison with other texts, the author can be seen to have integrated the story with finesse.

The following section on the community decision to kill the eel and the preparation of the poisonous drink is also found in the other versions and is prose, although some of the short clauses ending in—*a —o le fono a Fuata/ e fasi ia o le i'a/ ona o ai lea o tagata*—may ultimately be based on an unknown section of a chant, expanded by explanations similar to those described above.

A clearly prose section describes the eel's awareness of the nature of the drink, *ua vaai atu le i'a o le a aumai le mea oona na te inuina e pe ai* [the eel saw they were bringing the poisonous thing for him to drink in order to die]. The first words of the eel's *māvaega* [parting words], echo this passage: *ua ou iloa o le a aumai le mea oona ou te inu ai o leni* [I know they bring the poisonous thing. I will drink this], and emphasize the eel's free choice. This traditional element of the story, here given special emphasis, has been prepared in the earlier, carefully composed sections of the eel's growth and pursuit of Sina. The eel's love is now climactically characterized as heroic and self-sacrificing.

The rest of the *māvaega* is printed in Stuebel and Sierich as prose, which in all likelihood indicates that the informants spoke the section rather than chant-

ing it. The lines can, however, easily be arranged colometrically and are so published in Nelson and Herman. That is, the *māvaega* is a chant, and a prose version does not exist; the *māvaega*, as in numerous other cases of the genre, is an earlier text inserted into a later one. The variations and obscurities of the available texts argue for its antiquity. The *māvaega* could, however, be presented orally either as prose or poetry: it could be either recited or chanted. Moreover, the *māvaega* is not a part of the chant quoted at the end of the complex under discussion; in all versions, the rhythm is different. The author has, therefore, worked with a variety of materials to compose his complex.

The author ends his narrative with an abrupt statement of the eel's drinking the poison and dying. No account is given of the growth of the coconut from the eel's head, as in other versions. The author thus maintains his concentration on the erotic relation between his principals, further emphasized by making the conclusion of the story the origin of the song about the two.

The Stuebel version of the story of Sina and the eel is a masterful example of traditional and creative Samoan storytelling. The author bases his work on earlier materials: a prose tradition of the story—which included an episode of the origin of a place name and a poetic *māvaega*—and a separate chant about the two protagonists. He has integrated those materials smoothly into his complex, for instance, by basing his prose where possible on the relevant chant. The author has placed his personal stamp on the complex by selecting and emphasizing those elements that serve to express his chosen theme: the relation between the two principals. The drama is centered on Sina and the eel. The episodes are few and telling, and the story ends at its climax. In the simpler story thus created, the author can develop clearly ironic contrasts usually buried under other details: the feeding of the little eel at the beginning of the story is contrasted with its poisoning at the end; the beautiful tree from which Sina picks *pua* is contrasted with the tree from which the poison is extracted. The balancing of such elements helps give the text its remarkable esthetic unity.

The influence of chant on prose can, however, be so extensive that the prose appears in fact to be based on the chant, a narrative explication, as it were, and could be to a degree a reconstruction from it: that is, a mere transposition of the chant into prose. A possible example of such a reconstruction can be found in a connected chant and story of Fitiaumua published by John Fraser.<sup>11</sup> Line 33 describes Fitiaumua as *Tama a Sa-le-Āmāli'e* [Son of Sa-le-Āmāli'e], otherwise unidentified (Fraser's note on the line is simply based on the prose). The prose storyteller, however, identifies Sa-le-Āmāli'e as a parent of Fitiaumua's parents and is thus able to push his genealogy back a generation.<sup>12</sup>

A further examination of the above two texts reveals how closely they are related. The author of the prose knew the chant and tried to accommodate it in his own work, but experienced certain difficulties in doing so. Firstly, unlike the author of the Stuebel story of Sina and the eel, this storyteller seems uncomfortable with poetry. He leaves untouched the first four lines of the chant, which are of remarkably high quality with striking onomatopoeia, as

well as the allusive speech in lines 51–55 (also 56–57), and drops all poetic repetition in his summaries of lines 8–19, 25–26, and 44–45.

Line 7, *A fau le va'a, fau tutu*, [If lashing the vessel, lash it standing], I would argue, alludes poetically to the fact that the pregnant woman of the preceding line wants the forbidden taro for the well-being of the child she is carrying. Puzzled by this boat that plays no further role, the prose author merely mentions that it was being built at that time by members of the chief's family, one of whom will inform him about the taro thieves. The boat building may be the author's explanation of their presence in the uplands where the taro is found, but this would not account for the imperative form of the line. That is, the prose author may have misunderstood the poetic character of the line and attempted to create a place for it in his narrative.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, he includes in his prose materials that will render the chant more accessible to the nonspecialist audience. He provides a full explanation of why the taro should not have been eaten (Fraser 1900:128). He explains that the *la'au* [wood], of line 20, is a club: *o uatogi na ta i le toa* [clubs cut from the *toa* tree] (p. 129). The rare *'u'umau* of line 31 is replaced by the common *mau*. The bald *fasia* [was struck and killed], replaces the oblique line 76, *Ua le iloa Fiti-au-mua* [Fitiaumua is forgotten] or [unknown] (so Fraser 1900:131).

The dependence of his prose on the chant is obvious. Lines 20–21:

*Tofi ai ānā la'au e lua  
Fa'atausāpai i lima e lua*

is turned into the prose, *Ona ta lea ana la'au e lua, ta'itasi i lima* (p. 129). Lines 22–23:

*I asiasiga o lona fanua;  
I le moliga a ona mātua;*

is transformed into, *Ona o lea ma ona mātua e asiasi i lo latou fanua*. Lines 28–29:

*Tulia sisifo, tulia sasa'e;  
Tuleia Fiti-au-mua*

is turned into, *fetuliai, tulia sisifo [sa Tufu-le-Mata-afa] tulia sasa'e [sa Fiti-au-mua lea] tuleia*, with explanatory insertions marked by the publisher with brackets. Lines 30–31:

*Pau le la'au agavale  
'A'e 'u'umau le tasi;*

is expressed more fully in *pā'ū le la'au i le lima tauagavale a e mau pea le la'au i le lima taumatau*. More such material has perhaps been omitted from the prose text, as indicated by the "&c." (the interrupted sentence is completely omitted from the English translation, p. 132).

This dependence can be seen also in the author's summarizing of the chant, which is achieved largely by omitting materials, not by freeing the prose from its formal dependence on the chant. The parallelisms of lines 46–50 are in fact intensified. The prose, *tuuta i le Mulifanua i A'ana; alu i Savai'i*, is from line 60, *Na tuuta i Savai'i ma le Mulifanua o A'ana*, with the order changed to leave Fitiuaumua in Savai'i, the location of Pu'apu'a. The prose, *tau le taua i Pu'apu'a*, is from line 67, *Na tau le taua i Pu'apu'a*; the prose, *tau fai le taua i Matautu*, from line 74, *Fa'aa'e taua i Matautu*. The author has based his prose very closely on the chant and has created summaries simply by selecting a few lines from the whole for transposition into prose.

The prose materials unsupported by the chant consist for the most part of standard motifs and stock episodes so that one can suspect that they have been borrowed to fill out the narrative. However, although the name Sinasinā-le-Fe'e cannot be found in Fraser's version of the chant, a Fe'esinasina is found in Krämer's (1902:435, line 19), indicating some traditional connection of the name to the story. More versions of the story would need to be collected before a judgment could be made.

I have concentrated in this article on texts that are demonstrably related, but the interpreter must naturally be attentive to the possible influence on a prose text of an unknown chant or chants.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>For example, Krämer (1902:347). This is standard Polynesian practice; in Hawaiian literature, for example, chant is used often in the large complexes about the gods Pele and Kamapua'a (Emerson 1915:passim; Charlot 1987:76–82).

Similarly, chants can allude briefly to pertinent stories (Krämer 1902:415, 460), or narrate a long (pp. 400–403) or short (p. 351) story with poetic obliqueness. A chant can express the views and feelings of an individual character at a certain point in a well-known story (p. 352).

I will usually quote Samoan texts as they appear in their sources.

<sup>2</sup>Moyle 1981:43, 273, 312. Compare Charlot (1987:66–67, 76, 79–80). Chants are introduced by stereotyped phrases or reference to a character singing a *tagi*, for example, Pratt (1889:457), Sierich (1901:17, 21; 1902:176, 195; 1905:183–184, 187), and frequently in Moyle (1981).

<sup>3</sup>The word does not appear in Milner (1966), but is provided by Krämer (1902:482), "*Vorbemerkung*, eine kurze Erzählung, die einem Gesang (solo) zu dessen Verständnis vorausgeschickt wird"; for examples of use of the word, see pp. 412, 416, 419, 428, 430. Pratt (1960:350) glosses the word as "brief, as life," suggesting the sense "summary" or "synopsis." It might also be analyzed as a compound of *tū* and *lagi*<sup>2</sup> (Milner 1966:95, 279–280, etc.). Krämer (1902:421, note 1) apparently found *tūlagi* in the Samoan family manuscript records he studied. On p. 434, he notes the lack of *tūlagi* for a chant. Clear presentations of plots are rare in chant, for example, Sierich (1902:178).

<sup>4</sup>Krämer 1902:413, *Ei ai fo'i lenei solo*; 416, *E i ai la le solo lenei*; 431, *E 'ua la le solo lenei*.

<sup>5</sup>Titles vary. Both were first published apparently in Powell (1887), subsequently in Powell and Pratt (1890:206–216), Fraser (1892:164; a reprint of an article I have not yet located), and Krämer (1902:395–400) (who collected an independent version). Powell received the text from Tauanu'u and Fofō, Powell and Pratt (1890:206–207; and Fraser (1892:165) (Fofō is sometimes misspelled Tofo, for example, Fraser [1900:125]). Interestingly, a short *tūlagi* introduces the chant, Powell (1887:156), which resembles in type that of Krämer (1902:421). I will discuss these texts in more detail in a later article.

<sup>6</sup>Pratt 1889:456–457. Also, Sierich (1904): the prose on p. 108, paragraphs 4–5, is based on the first chant on p. 109, lines 4–8; see also Sierich (1901:17; 1902:181, 185; 1905:187). Moyle 1981:168, 170, 176, 200. For Hawaiian literature, see Charlot (1987:79).

Other genres can exercise the same influence. In a text from Stuebel (1973 [1896]: 76 [236]), the proverbial saying, 'O le māvaega nai le one 'The parting words from the sand', is first given in its original form and later used for the wording of the narrative: *ona taunuu ai lea o le māvaega a le pusi ma Ulufanuasese'e na faia i le onē* 'Thus were fulfilled the last words of the eel to Ulufanuasese'e that were said in the sand' (see also Schultz [1965:430]; compare the variant 'o mavaega na i le tai, Krämer [1902:106]; and Pratt [1889:461], *o le mavaega nai Fiti*, and p. 463, *mavaega nai Tāpaga*). The two sections of the proverbial saying have simply been separated by explanatory material.

<sup>7</sup>Stuebel 1973 [1896]: 7–8 [167–168]; German translation, 1896: 67–68; English translation, Nelson 1925:142–143 (Nelson's revision of the Samoan text, 144–145). The story is famous and exists in several versions, for example, Turner (1884: 242–245), Reinecke (1899:228–229), Sierich (1904:98–100), Herman (1955:33–34) (a retelling from several sources, Moyle [1981:7]). Nelson (1925:132–134) is a combination of the story under discussion with elements from the similar story of Pili and his sister (reference below). For the wider context, see Kirtley (1967; 1971:137–139). The Pili story in Krämer (1902:438–443) displays many similarities; also, Bülow (1898:7–8) and Herman (1955:25–26). Alternative stories exist of course for the origin of the coconut, for example, Herman (1955:91–93).

<sup>8</sup>All these points are described in Charlot (1988).

<sup>9</sup>The typographical error, *apeoai* for *apevai* ('apevai) is not found in the printing of the word in the German translation, Stuebel (1896:68). *Tuga* for *tuna*. The connection between bathing and sex is a motif, for example, Turner (1884:99), Stuebel (1973 [1896]: 13 [173], 64 [224]), and Krämer (1902:441–442).

<sup>10</sup>Besides the materials in note 7 above, see Sierich (1904:105–109) and Herman (1955:6, 96–97). Drinking a coconut is perceived as kissing it, Sierich (1904:100) (see also the description of the mating as a *fa'amasei'au* 'defloration ceremony', p. 99); the kiss is emphasized also by Reinecke.

<sup>11</sup>Fraser 1900:125–126, introduction; 126–128, Samoan text of chant; 128–129, Samoan text of story; 129–131, English translation of chant; 131–133, English translation of story; 133–134, notes. Another version of the chant was published by Krämer (1902:434–436). Compare Turner (1884:224) and Herman (1955:72) (apparently a composite).

<sup>12</sup>I have argued elsewhere that a prose narration of the Hawaiian chief Kūali'i was reconstructed from a chant in his honor, Charlot (1985:32–34).

This method may be the ultimate explanation of the large number of couples with the same name in Samoan literature, for example, Stuebel (1973 [1896]: 70 [230], 77 [237]) (Matuna and Matuna); Krämer (1902:434–436) (Veu and Veu and Fitiaumua), p. 441 (Pili story); Sierich (1902:174; 1904:88, 94, 98) (Sina and the eel); Sierich (1905:183), Fraser (1900:128), Moyle (1981: 21–23, 220): that is, the double use of the name might not have been an original part of the tradition, but an expedient reconstruction from an earlier chant text. Such couples are found in the two texts I examine in detail, the story of Sina and the eel and of Fitiaumua (Fraser 1900).

In the former, the first line of the chant, *Soufina Sina le tama a Pāi* 'Oh young woman Sina, child of Pāi', states only that one parent, who could be the father (who would normally be mentioned) or the mother (Milner 1966: *tama* 1.), was named Pāi. The prose states in a stereotyped line (Charlot 1988) *O le ulugali o Pāi ma Pāi* 'The couple Pāi and Pāi' (so Sierich 1904:98). In Turner (1884:243), the name is given only to the father (no parent names are provided by Reinecke, Nelson, or Herman).

Of course, parents of the same name can be mentioned in chants, as Veu and Veu in the chant of Fitiaumua, Fraser (1900:127, line 14); Krämer (1902:441, line 60), *Pega ma Pega*. Naturally, such a double use, even if a reconstruction, can itself in time become a tradition and even a literary device.

<sup>13</sup>Compare Schultz (1965:149). Fraser (1900:133, note to line 8) translates "When you are building the canoe, you build it standing up" and interprets the line as giving the location of the tale-bearer mentioned in the next. The Samoan storyteller omits the name, Sefai-feaū, of the person who informs Tufu-le-Mata-afa, referring only to *le tagata* 'the person' or 'some person' (Fraser 1900:131) because he has probably—and, I believe, correctly—interpreted the *Sefai-feaū* not as a name, but as 'some messenger'; an interpretation supported by Krämer (1902:435, line 11).



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