

THE 'OTUHAKA AMONG THE OTHER TONGAN DANCES

It is customary to divide the Tongan dances in 3 groups:

- The dances of the old tradition, that is to say those which were performed before the coming of the Europeans. They include: the *me'etu'upaki*, the *me'elaufola*, the *ula* and the *'otuhaka*.

- The dances of the new tradition, which originated after the coming of the missionaries. They include in order of their arrival: the *'tau'olunga*, the *lakalaka* and finally the *mā'ulu'ulu*.

- The dances from abroad, mainly from other Polynesian countries, like Fiji, 'Uvea (Wallis), Futuna and Sāmoa. Some of those dances, however, came to Tonga such a long time ago, that they have shifted out of this group into one of the others. They include: the *kailao* (from 'Uvea), the *sōkē* (originally called *eke*, also from 'Uvea), the *meke* (from Fiji), the *mako* (from 'Uvea) and the *tau'alunga* (taualuga, from Sāmoa).

The dances from abroad

First, let us have a quick look at the differences between the 'foreign' dances.

The *kailao* is a war dance for men. They mock fight which each other, using stylized wooden javelins. The rougher and the more exciting the movements they make, the better. There is no song associated with it, only a quick drum beating.

The *meke* is also a men war dance, not too different from the *kailao*. But where the *kailao* is quite popular nowadays and almost seen as a real Tongan dance, the *meke* is seldom performed, and if, then only by the people of Koulo in Ha'apai. The text they sing while dancing is in an old non-understandable language, related to Fijian.

The *sōkē* was originally a war dance for men too, but has now further evolved than the *kailao* and the *meke*. Where in the former two nowadays women perhaps may participate, in the *sōkē* this is taken for granted. The javelins are replaced by sticks, long ones for the men, and short ones for the women. The dancers perform in small groups of four: two men and two women. They all hit their sticks against each other on the rhythm of the beating of the drum. There is a simple accompanying song, but that is usually drowned out in the noise of stick clashes.

The *mako* is a standing dance for men, it is very rare.

The *tau'alunga* is a standing dance for women. Or yet better: for one and only one nice looking girl, preferably a Sāmoan *taupou*, a daughter of the local chief, and preferably at the end of a dance evening as the final climax of the show. Then she steps around in the centre of the stage with tranquil and dignified movements of her arms and legs. Lesser chiefs, *ulāfale*, may accompany her, but they have to stay in the corners of the stage, keeping their movements as rough and wild as possible. The greater the contrast between their ugly performance and the beauty of the girl, the more they honour her and the better it is. The *tau'alunga* came about two centuries ago to Tonga, mixed there with the Tongan *ula* and evolved in the *tau'olunga* of today.

Me'elaufola & Lakalaka

When we look at the dances of the old tradition, then we see that some are still performed nowadays, while at least one of them is lost. That one is the *me'elaufola* (meaning: dance with outstretched arms). According to the journals of captain Cook and other European explorers, as well as the diaries of the first missionaries, it was a standing group dance for men and women. They sang while moving legs and arms sometimes in rude and vigorous gestures, other times in softer and gentler ways, but always with grace and dexterity. The men and women danced in their own gender groups, but the groups moved along and through each other from time to time.

And that was something the missionaries did not like. Their vocabularies were narrowed down to the words 'sin' and 'vice' only, and when they saw men and women so close together, making all kind of suspected movements, they feared the worst. So to avoid taking any risk, they forbade the *me'elaufola* completely. The Tongans obeyed, but unwillingly.

The trick they used to fool the missionaries was quite simple. It was a chief called Tuku'aho who around 1870 created a new dance style building from the nursery rhymes which were approved by the missionaries. Probably they had done so with the thought that if it was fit for children, then there could be no sin in it. Anyway, the new dance was extended with hand and feet movements, which were 'accidentally' just quite the same as those used in the *me'elaufola*. But the missionaries noted nothing and gave their consent.

That was the *lakalaka*, the dance now considered as the national dance of Tonga. Although it would be too simple to state that the *lakalaka* is the same as the *me'elaufola*, that the latter was only renamed, it is quite clear that the *lakalaka* is a worthy descendant of the now forgotten *me'elaufola*. It is still a standing dance for men and women. They are nicely separated, the men to the left, the women to the right (as seen from the group itself) and, noteworthy, in this way they are closer together than what was considered to be good for the *me'elaufola*. The *lakalaka* is always performed by a large group of people, on some special occasions more than a hundred. And it still has its gentle movements and its vigorous movements, just as its name, *lakalaka* (meaning: to step briskly or carefully), indicates.

There are many different *lakalaka*, and new forms are continuously created by the *punake* (the artists who make the text of the song, compose the music for it and design the accompanying dance movements). For that reason the *lakalaka* is really a dance of the new tradition, a living dance, as one says, a dance which still evolves.

Me'etu'upaki

The *me'etu'upaki* (meaning: standing paddle dance) is a dance done by men, although nowadays women may be included too. They handle a small symbolic rowing paddle (the *paki*) using it in all kinds of movements, elegant, yet vigorous enough to be wild. In the meanwhile they step to and fro, rearranging themselves, forming and unforming lines. Everything is done on the rhythm of the beat of the slit drum.

The *me'etu'upaki* is a dance of the old tradition, that is to say: no new forms for it are created anymore nowadays, there is only one version. The way in which it was already performed for captain James Cook, is still the way in which it can be seen today. Although in Cook's time probably more versions existed than the single one left over today.

Nevertheless there are some slight variations in the movements as performed by one dance group compared to another. Even shows of groups instructed by one and the same dance master may differ. In addition to that there are also slightly different versions of the accompanying text. The reason for this all is that the text and choreography have been handed down from almost immemorial times by people who may have lapses in their memory from time to time. Especially the text is now so archaic that nobody can understand it. Then of course, errors can easily go along unnoticed.

Why has the *me'etu'upaki* survived up to today, but not so the *me'elaufola*? One reason is that the *me'etu'upaki* was a royal dance, performed by and for the nobles at the court of the sacred spiritual king, the *tu'i* Tonga. And of course also for the king himself. Now it happened that in the middle of the 19th century the *tu'i* Tonga was still heathen. Other chiefs, however, were already converted to christianity, that was to Wesleyan protestantism. Those chiefs rivalled the power of the king, which was already on the decline for many generations anyway. Thus to become a methodist too would imply a complete submission of the *tu'i* Tonga to those chiefs. That was out of the question. Therefore it was only a political move for the king to have himself converted by the catholic missionaries. The catholics were not so narrow minded as the protestants. Instead of forbidding the old dances, they included them in their catholic tradition, especially after 1865 when Laufileitonga, the last *tu'i* Tonga, died.

There are still nowadays the people from Mu'a, the capital city of the eastern district on Tongatapu, once the residence of the *tu'i* Tonga, who are the authorities not only concerning the *me'etu'upaki*, but also the other two ancient royal dances, the *ula* and the *'otuhaka*. As whether they want to show that, though loyal now to the current royal dynasty, their heart is

still in the reminiscence of the tu'i Tonga.

Ula & Tau'olunga

The *ula* (meaning: dance) was a standing dance for women in which they made graceful gestures with hand and arms. It is only since quite recently that, occasionally, men may perform too. Indeed, the dance is still performed today, but not too often. Even less than the already rare me'etu'upaki.

Traditionally an *ula* was performed after a 'otuhaka, to which it is quite related (see below). Some (2 to 6) of the seated performers rose and started dancing, while the others remained seated and became the chorus. But nowadays the dance can be done in itself, the performers enter on the stage in two groups, one from the left and one from the right. For those reasons the *ula* is also named *fa'ahi ula* (meaning: split dance), which is, however, usually mispronounced as *faha'ula*.

The text of the *ula* is quite simple, every song consists of two lines which are repeated and repeated and repeated again. There are the graceful motions of the arms, the hands and also the head which must give the dance its beauty. The movements of the legs and the body have in the *ula* only secondary meaning. Like in the Sāmoan *taualuga*, the motions do not reflect the meaning of the text in anyway. The more since most of the text is in archaic Tongan and/or Sāmoan. Therefore most people do not understand the meaning of it. Maybe that is better after all, since the translation sometimes turns out to be a silly child song.

The *ula* is really a dance to look at. Those dancers who look prettiest and perform the traditional movements best are selected and placed in front. This contrasts with the 'otuhaka where the best positions are allotted to rank. Originally both *ula* and 'otuhaka could only be done by chiefly women anyway: the *ula* for the young ladies, the 'otuhaka for the old ones. The *ula* is the only Tongan dance where the explicit display of female beauty is coming on the first place. The reason is, it is said, that in former times the *ula* was preferably done at night in the presence of the tu'i Tonga, who then would the select one, or even more girls he liked best to spend the rest of the night with him in bed.

The *tau'olunga* (meaning: reaching high) came originally from Sāmoa, perhaps already as early as in the beginning of the 19th century, so that by now it may well be considered as a real Tongan dance. In fact the current *tau'olunga* is a blend of the Sāmoan *taualuga* and the Tongan *ula*. However, for a long time the *tau'olunga* was danced in the Sāmoan way. It was only the involvement of queen Sālote in the beginning of this century, which revolutionised the dance into its current style.

It is a standing dance, principally for young nice girls, but nowadays boys sometimes will perform it too, though they should dance wilder. Like in the *tau'alunga*, the movements of the girl, initially dancing solo on the centre stage, are supple and elegant. But very often she is soon joined by others, especially in fundraisings. These performers, men and elderly women hopping around her, are supposed to dance roughly and primitively, as to contrast against the beautiful movements of the girl, making her dance even more splendid.

But unlike both the *tau'alunga* and the *ula*, where the beauty of the movements is a goal in itself, unrelated to the text sung, in the *tau'olunga* the dancers perform as to interpret the text. However, especially when solo, the dancer is quite free to do what she (he) wants, within certain rules of course. For example: when the text talks about the heavens, arms should go up as to outline the sky dome. But that still can be done in many ways. As a group dance, however, the *tau'olunga* is best when all dancers synchronize to make the same movements at the same moment.

The *tau'olunga* is danced very often, it is much more popular than the *ula*. The reason is that the *ula* is a dance of the old tradition. Therefore there is only one *ula*, the dance is unique and can only be performed in the traditional way. (There exist some modern dances, also called *ula*, but that is only to fool tourists.) The *tau'olunga* on the other hand is a dance of the new tradition. There are many different *tau'olunga* songs, the Tongans can understand the meaning of their texts, they can dance it as they want and they can use the music they want, guitars and pop. With the *ula* this would not be possible, there every movement is rigidly

dictated. So in daily life the old *ula* has given offspring to the new *tau'olunga*, and only a few people, interested in the old-fashioned parent, are left over.

'Otuhaka & Mā'ulu'ulu

The '*otuhaka* (meaning: row of arms movements) was also a dance for women in which they performed the same kind of movements as in the *ula*. But this time they were seated side by side in a long curved row. Nowadays the 'otuhaka can be done by men and women alike, and if it is done so, the two genders are seated alternately. We are tempted to think that this was not forbidden by the missionaries with the thought that even if a man and a woman are seated so close to each other, that if they remain fixed on their places, there is no opportunity for sin.

Originally, however, the 'otuhaka was a royal dance, only to be performed by chiefly ladies before the tu'i Tonga. Those ladies were seated in order of their rank. Those who believed that they were important persons occupied the best positions in the middle of the row. The 'otuhaka was therefore always a dance of dignity, quite opposed to the *ula*. Yet when the 'otuhaka was over, and the performers might continue with the *ula*, then the focus of the attention shifted from nobility to beauty.

The *ula* and 'otuhaka are closely linked since they use the same music. Therefore there is some overlap in their songs. Some texts are really belonging to the 'otuhaka, others to the *ula*, but about yet others the opinions differ. Anyway, the texts of the 'otuhaka are also in the same old archaic Tongan/Sāmoan language and as obscure for the modern Tongan as those for the *ula* and me'etu'upaki. Therefore it cannot be said whether the traditional movements interpret the text or not. But it is likely that originally it was the case, though nowadays only here and there a few recognizable relicts of it are left over.

The *mā'ulu'ulu* also came from Sāmoa, probably around the end of the 19th century, after the arrival of the *lakalaka*. Tradition claims that the Tongans were impressed by the shows of the Sāmoan troupes and this stimulated them in creating a new dance type. The *mā'ulu'ulu* has borrowed a lot from the 'otuhaka. The dancers, originally only young girls, but nowadays men and women alike, are seated in one or more rows on the ground and perform arm movements not too remote from the 'otuhaka. In fact, since everybody ought to move his/her arms in the same way on the same moment, it is really a "row of arm movements". Sometimes the group can be very large, more than a 1000 people.

The meaning of the word *mā'ulu'ulu* is either "row of heads" or, more likely "to make a thundering sound". This probably refers to the skin covered drum which was introduced in Tonga around the same time. The drum is able to produce much louder sounds than the *tafua* (see below) used until that time, and therefore became very popular.

The function of the legs is in the *mā'ulu'ulu* somewhat more important than in the 'otuhaka. In both dances one sits crosslegged on the ground. In the 'otuhaka the left leg is in front, the right one behind it, and both feet are folded under the thighs. In the *mā'ulu'ulu* the left leg is in the back and the right leg in front while shifted forwards so that the right foot is free to wobble somewhat on the rhythm of the music.

The arms on the other hand are treated equally. In both the 'otuhaka and the *mā'ulu'ulu* they remain much closer to the body (called *haka nonou*) than is the case in the *lakalaka* or the me'elaufola (as the name of the latter already suggests).

In exactly the same way and for exactly the same reasons that the *tau'olunga* has eclipsed its parent the *ula*, so has the *mā'ulu'ulu* completely replaced the 'otuhaka. The *mā'ulu'ulu* is generally often danced, the 'otuhaka only rarely. And also where in former times on a special occasion one would have chosen for a 'otuhaka followed by an *ula*, nowadays the combination *mā'ulu'ulu* — *tau'olunga* is often encountered.

Another reason for the higher popularity of *tau'olunga* and *mā'ulu'ulu* is their bigger range in movements. Whereas in *ula* and 'otuhaka all arm and leg movements have about the same magnitude of speed, much larger extremes are encountered in the more modern dances. From dignifiedly slow to excitingly fast; from using only hands to the whole body as well. Much more difficult to perform, and thus more admiration for a dancer who does it well.

The performance of the 'otuhaka

The 'otuhaka is a dance done with the performers seated. They sit side by side in a single row curved in a half circle. In the centre of this semicircle sit the one or two drummers. If space does not permit, a same layout for the dancers as with the mā'ulu'ulu can be taken: seated in several straight horizontal rows.

The legs are crossed in the usual manner, left leg in front, while both feet are folded away under the thighs or knees. The legs remain in this position for the whole dance, save for an occasional temporary forward shift of the left leg.

The costume of the dancers is not standardized, but is usual as follows: a *tupenu* (skirt) of any colour with a white *sote* (shirt); a small single white *tekiteki* (feather in the hair) on the head; a *papai* (necklace) and/or a *kahoa* (shoulder garland) made of orange pandanus fruits over the upper body; and *vesa* (bracelets pleated out of small leaves) around wrists and ankles.

The drummers keep the beat of the dance by hitting with their sticks a *tafua*: bamboos wrapped up in a rolled mat. Nowadays a real tafua is rare, but any other drum will do, as long as all dancers can hear it. The drummer is usually the dance master, especially in small groups. He or she will sing the first part of every new song, then all the dancers will follow up with the rest. Every song is repeated a few times, either with the same or with different movements.

The main beats of the drum are about one second apart, but a few lesser beats are given in between. As usual with Tongan dances, when the songs progress the beat increases, and with it the speed of the song and the dance movements, so that when the final repetition of any song is reached the tempo is breathtakingly quick. After this climax there is a small pause, in which dancers and drummers can rest, while the public applauds. And when it goes on with the next song the tempo restarts again in the slow pace.

A peculiarity is that the 'otuhaka (as well as the mā'ulu'ulu) starts (and ends) with a part in which no song is sung. There is only the beating of the mat and the gestures of the dancers. If you do not know what is going on, it can be quite boring. In fact there is a text for this introduction, called *tafua* after the mat itself, but this text is supposed to be silently understood. However if you do know the text, the movements of the dancers immediately become more interesting since it turns out that they interpret it. The tafua itself is written in modern Tongan and clearly and recent addition to the old dance. By consequence the movements therefore are not fixed by tradition and will be different from dance to dance and from dance group to dance group. In the tafua the dancers ask permission from the high chief or from god to do the dance, not because they want to attract attention to themselves but because they want to honour their chief in the traditional Tongan way. Or so it is supposed to be. It is only after the completion of the tafua, the sung parts follow.

In fact one should remember that the formal traditional Tongan dances, like the 'otuhaka, were *never* done to please the public, but only to show off for the guests of honour: the king, the local chief or whatever nibs available. Because that were the persons you could beg for something, not the ordinary people who possessed nothing.

In case of the 'otuhaka the best place for the audience is directly behind the drummers, well inside the circle, where one has the full view on all the dancers. Therefore those places are reserved for the guests of honour, even when they usually are so busy with eating that they have no time to look on anyway. All other places are inferior, but the normal people have to find a place to watch there, and therefore will miss most of spectacle.

'OTUHAKA — THE SONG

Those sections of the 'otuhaka, which will be analysed in detail in this chapter are given below. The numbers in straight brackets [] behind the lines indicate either the number of repetitions, or when the verse is to be done. The term 'dance' will be used for each section, while the 'verses' are the separate lines of it. A dance is usually identified by its first few words. For example the dance *Moengangongo* consists of 12 verses (all with the same text, but with different movements).

Vowels printed in **boldface** indicate the main beats and should have the stress. Sometimes they are lengthened into the following half beat, which is indicated by "--". Once this is not the case, and then there is only a silence after the syllable, as shown by "...". Usually the first part of every song is sung by the dance master only, so that the dancers will not make a mistake. Those parts are printed *italic*. After this solo, the rest of the participants follow in chorus. Remember that the tafua is not sung, but is to be recited in your mind only.

TAFUA: Ko au eni kuo u lele mai, ke fai ha'o fekau, pea teu nima mo va'e kae tau ai ho langi. 'Ou poto ai he matelie. 'Ou ikuna 'a 'itāniti. Lau ai e tangata mo e finemotu'a ko kita. Ko e ua ni, 'oku taha pē. Leveleva e malanga, kae tau tu'a'ofa 'eiki atu. [2x]

'O*i*, inu le 'a--va ē; tau fa'a sulu'ia... 'i le alofa--. [3x]

'O*i*, *soi lenā*--, soi lenā mala; tu'i Tonga toki sala;

lau manu lā ē--. [2x] [then repeat "'oi inu" once again]

Muli tu--pe 'ai lue; tau la--fo 'ene lue. [7x]

'A--nilai 'ā ē; afe Siulafata, fai le tai, fanā ē. [8x]

'Amui le pue--; pue Tonga, ē Tonga. [2x]

'Amui le pue, pue, pue, Tonga. [3rd time]

Moengangongo tau fea?;

ke fanguna tua mo e opea. [12x]

'O*iau lenei*; 'ua ta toe fa'alongo; 'ua liu lea fono; }

tama 'o le seila, lata, tā'oto'oto. } [2x]

'Alu 'e--se, vave 'ese, ma le fa'afelefele. [fū] }

Nau fa'alongo 'i le tala 'o Meleke; }

'ua sisi lona fua 'i lenei ele ele. } [2x]

'Alu 'e--se, vave 'ese, ma le fa'afelefele. [fū] }