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978-1-108-05754-7 - *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific Ocean: Volume 1*

William Mariner Edited by John Martin

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An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific Ocean

In November 1806, the damaged *Port-au-Prince* arrived at what Captain Cook had called the Friendly Islands. William Charles Mariner (1791–1853) was among the few crew members spared by the native inhabitants. He lived there for four years. Published in 1818, this two-volume second edition offers an important early insight into Tongan customs and language. As editor John Martin (1789–1869) explains, the structure of a nation's language is vital to the consideration of its history. So successful was the first edition of 1817 – expanded upon here to include 'generally corroborative, and in a few instances somewhat corrective' information from another erstwhile inhabitant – that within months of its publication a French translation appeared; German and American editions soon followed. Volume 1 comprises Martin's extensive introduction, the story of the ship's voyage and destruction, and an account of Mariner's stay on the islands and the events leading to his departure.

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An Account of
the Natives of
the Tonga Islands
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VOLUME 1

WILLIAM MARINER
EDITED BY JOHN MARTIN



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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108057547

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This edition first published 1818

This digitally printed version 2012

ISBN 978-1-108-05754-7 Paperback

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T. DAVISON, LOMBARD-STREET, WHITEFRIARS, LONDON.

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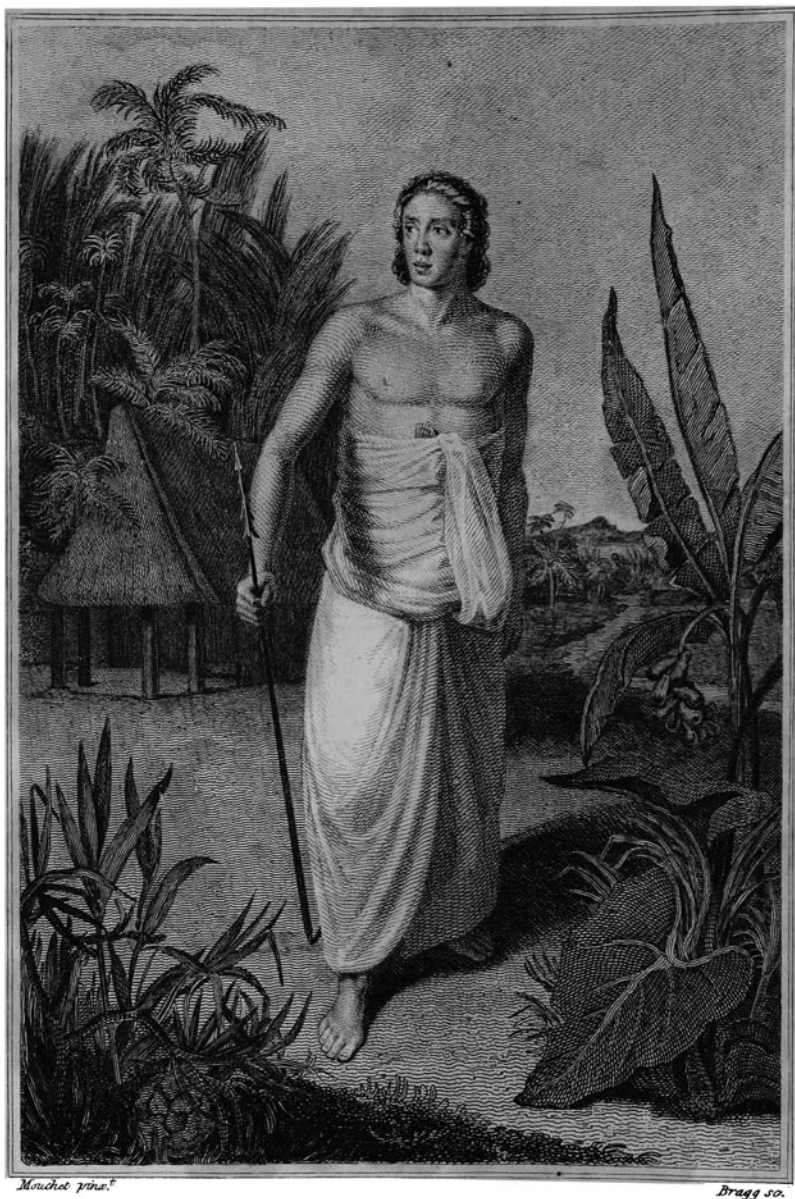
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M^r MARINER in the COSTUME of the TONGA ISLANDS.

London Published Feb^y 2, 1818, by J. Murray, Albemarle Street.

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AN ACCOUNT
OF
THE NATIVES
OF THE
TONGA ISLANDS,
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN.

WITH
AN ORIGINAL GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY
OF
THEIR LANGUAGE.

COMPILED AND ARRANGED FROM THE EXTENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS OF

MR. WILLIAM MARINER,

SEVERAL YEARS RESIDENT IN THOSE ISLANDS.

BY JOHN MARTIN, M. D.

“ The savages of America inspire less interest . . . since celebrated navigators
“ have made known to us the inhabitants of the islands of the South Sea . . . The
“ state of half-civilization in which those islanders are found gives a peculiar
“ charm to the description of their manners . . . Such pictures, no doubt, have
“ more attraction than those which pourtray the solemn gravity of the inhabitant
“ of the banks of the Missouri or the Maranon.”

Preface to Humboldt's Personal Narrative.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION, WITH ADDITIONS.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

1818.

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TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
SIR JOSEPH BANKS, BART. G. C. B.
PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY,
&c. &c. &c.
THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT
OF THE
NATIVES OF THE TONGA ISLANDS,
IN WHICH IT IS ATTEMPTED PARTICULARLY TO SET FORTH
THEIR MANNERS, CUSTOMS, RELIGION,
AND LANGUAGE,
FROM THE ORAL DESCRIPTIONS OF AN ENGLISHMAN
LONG RESIDENT THERE,
IS MOST WILLINGLY INSCRIBED
AS A SMALL, YET APPROPRIATE TRIBUTE
OF RESPECT,
BY
HIS VERY OBEDIENT AND
DEVOTED HUMBLE SERVANT,
JOHN MARTIN.

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PREFACE

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

THE flattering reception with which the present work has already been honoured by a liberal public, and the appearance of a French translation of it at Paris, in November last, are convincing proofs of the interest, at least, which the subject has excited. Whilst preparing this second edition, it has been my good fortune to meet with an additional weight of testimony in favour of the facts related; and not to detain the reader with unnecessary matter, I shall at once lay open the source of this new proof of the strict fidelity of Mr. Mariner's representations. Jeremiah Higgins,

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a young man belonging to the crew of the *Port au Prince* *, made his escape from the Tonga Islands about thirteen months before Mr. Mariner, that is to say, after a residence there of two years and eleven months. Being very young, he was one of the first who acquired a tolerable knowledge of the language ; he practised their dances, and learned their songs ;--and although he had not the advantage of those better opportunities which fell in Mr. Mariner's way, and consequently is not so intimately acquainted, in certain points of view, with the political sentiments, and moral notions and habits especially of the higher classes of the natives, which the superior education of the latter, as well as his relative condition among the Tonga chiefs, rendered him more apt to acquire ;—still, the information obtained from Higgins must undoubtedly be considered valuable, if only regarded as generally corroborative, and in a few instances

* He served on board this vessel in the capacity of what is technically termed a landsman, and was then about fifteen or sixteen years of age.

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somewhat corrective of Mr. Mariner's statements.

For three or four years (until December last) Jeremiah resided with his father, an old inhabitant of the town of Aylesbury, a man well known, and much respected; and in the employ of many farmers in the county as a hay-binder. Some time after the publication of the first edition of the present work, a copy was sent to Jeremiah, with a request, that he would particularly remark and make a memorandum of whatever he conceived not to be correctly stated. In the month of November last, Mr. Higgins, the father, happening to be in town upon some business, called to inform me, that his son had been exceedingly pleased with the perusal of the work, particularly as it served to corroborate many things which he had previously related to his friends and neighbours, and to which he had reason to think they did not always give the credit that was due; inasmuch that he began to be heartily tired of answering their numerous inquiries. Among those to whom he had given the

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most information prior to the publication of the work was Mr. T. Woodman, a very respectable and intelligent farmer, residing at Stone, near Aylesbury. As this gentleman had also read the book, I wrote to him to request the favour of his sentiments, with regard to the two unconnected sources of information, which had fallen in his way. From the answer which he obligingly sent me, dated Stone, 4th December, 1817, I beg leave to extract the following paragraph, as bearing immediately upon the subject.

“ I most certainly have many times, before your publication appeared in the world, asked Jeremiah Higgins many questions respecting the inhabitants of the Tonga islands; but as he is a young man of a reserved disposition, the communications he made were always desultory, unconnected, and confined. Yet I cannot have the least doubt, or the least hesitation in saying, that in the accounts he gave, he spoke of the very same people, and of the very same incidents, which are related by Mr. Mariner, in the work you have recently publish-

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“ ed. He spoke to me of the capture of
“ the vessel he sailed in : of the siege and
“ reduction of the Tonga great fortress : of
“ the effects of the great guns : of the pa-
“ nic and consternation thence produced :
“ of their religious and political convoca-
“ tions, &c. &c., which are events so
“ exactly detailed and portrayed in the
“ work you have given, that I find not the
“ least difference between the one and the
“ other, save that the accounts given by
“ Mr. Mariner are more amplified, and
“ better arranged in bearing reference to
“ the religious and political proceedings
“ relating to their society.”

That no source of information or of satisfactory proof might be left untried, I engaged Jeremiah Higgins to come up to town, and now it was, for the first time, that he and Mr. Mariner met, since their separation at the Tonga islands. He remained with me till the latter end of December, and I had abundant reason to be satisfied with the accordance between his several statements, extracted from him by various questions, and those which I had

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formerly received from Mr. Mariner. When they spoke the Tonga language together, I noticed the similarity of their pronunciation and accent: when Higgins sang and exhibited some Tonga dances in presence of several of my friends, whilst Mr. Mariner also sang and beat time according to the native method *, we were struck with the accuracy of the description of these amusements in the “voyages of Captain Cook.” But to be brief, however satisfied I have hitherto been with Mr. Mariner’s details, I issue this second

* To give greater effect to the scene, Mr. Mariner was dressed as represented in the frontispiece, and Higgins’s only apparel was a sort of circular apron, made of loose strips of matting very thickly set, and at the top plaited so as to form a band round the lower waist, (the pelvis) from which the strips hung down nearly to the knees: this was to represent the apron of the leaves of the *chi* tree, used by the natives on such occasions. He had also a wreath of artificial flowers round the head, and another round the neck. He is beautifully tattowed from the hips nearly to the knees, agreeably to the custom of the Tonga people. Upon them it appears of a black colour, but upon a white man it causes the skin to resemble soft blue satin. The neatness, and I might almost say, the mathematical precision with which the pattern is executed, far surpasses the expectation of all who see it for the first time.

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edition with a twofold confidence, for now I can assure the candid reader that, endeavouring to divest my mind of all prejudices, I have carefully and assiduously questioned Jeremiah Higgins, at various times, with regard to the events at the Tonga islands while he was there, and the manners and customs of the people, and have always found his answers (though for obvious reasons somewhat more confined) yet so consonant and agreeable, as far as they went, with Mr. Mariner's accounts, that I feel quite certain of the truth of the great outlines of the matter contained in the following sheets, and the highest degree of confidence in all the details. Such is the additional testimony which the present work has obtained, and I flatter myself that I have used all the means within my reach to render it, if possible, worthy of the honour which public approbation has already bestowed upon it.

A complete account of all the different tribes inhabiting the islands of the Pacific Ocean would no doubt form a most interesting portion of human history, and

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supply, in a great measure, the history of the earlier ages of mankind, so much obscured as they are by romance and fabulous traditions. The infancy of human society in our times probably differs not much, except in local circumstances, from that which existed four thousand years ago:—by a scrupulous and attentive examination of the *present*, therefore, we may be able to form some tolerable judgment of the *past*. And this is not, I apprehend, a matter of idle curiosity or of useless knowledge, as some have the presumption to cry out;—for all that regards man, whether it be good or evil, is highly interesting to man;—the good, that we may either adopt or improve;—the evil, that we may either avoid or remedy:—and as the history of the human individual cannot be perfectly understood, without examining him in his infancy,—so a true knowledge of the species in a state of society is not to be thoroughly and easily acquired, without a suitable investigation into the incipient stages of the social compact; for there it is that the passions of man are

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more openly and strongly developed,—his imaginations and prejudices less concealed by artificial coverings,—and his actions, generally speaking, under much less restraint. Moreover, as the education of children ought, in one point of view, to be chiefly founded upon a knowledge of their notions and habits, so ought all attempts at civilization (which is only another kind of education) to be built upon our acquaintance with the customs and modes of thinking of the people on whom we wish to superinduce new trains of habits and sentiments,—so that we may educate or lead them out of bad into better,—out of imperfection towards perfection. It is in morals much the same as in physics; if we wish to alter the qualities of a substance, we must first examine what those qualities are, that we may see in what way they are best capable of being changed. It is true, by hard labour with the hammer, we may bend a piece of cold iron; but observation and experience teach us, that at a high temperature this metal becomes so soft, that we can fashion it as we please.

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With regard to the Society islands, where missionaries have so long established themselves, we have not yet an intimate, and what may be called a domestic history of the people: this, I think, is much to be regretted: if it be not already too late, it will perhaps be so in a few years, when their native customs and notions will become so mingled with what is European, that little profitable knowledge will be derivable from them. In New Zealand, a novel and interesting scene lies open; the church missionary society have there set on foot their benevolent purposes. They begin by educating the children, and teaching their parents the mechanic arts; —but it is to be hoped that the civilized New Zealander, hereafter to be born, will have within his reach the authentic records of what his ancestors once were, that he may know the extent of his obligations to those of his fellow men who were the means of leading his forefathers out of the darkness of superstition, and out of the house of bondage.

In referring to the “ Narrative of a Voy-

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age to New Zealand, by John Liddiard Nicholas, Esq." it must be acknowledged, that much credit is certainly due to the author, who, in a short visit of a few weeks, has been able to collect such a mass of interesting matter. Mr. Nicholas informs us, that "as Mr. Kendall" (one of the missionaries) "is applying himself strictly to the study of the New Zealand language, it is probable he will furnish us in some time with a copious and enlarged account of it." While this is doing, it is to be hoped that the other parts of the history of the New Zealand intellect, as it is developed in their customs, laws, and superstitions, will not be forgotten.

*27, Basinghall Street,
4th March, 1818.*

J. MARTIN.

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THE cluster of islands in the South Pacific Ocean, whose inhabitants constitute the subject of the present work, is that to which Captain Cook gave the epithet “Friendly:” his chart of the Friendly * Islands however does not include Vavaoo, which he did not visit; and as this island is the largest, and now comparatively the most important of all those belonging to the same archipelago, which, in his time, were under the same government, and still speak precisely the same language, and follow the same customs, we have thought it expedient to denote them all by one common name, which the natives them-

* He gave them this name on account of the apparent amicable disposition of the natives towards him; but in reality their intention was to massacre him and his friends, and take the two ships, as they did afterwards the Port au Prince. See Vol. II. p. 60.

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selves give them, viz. “Tonga,” or, the Tonga Islands*.

As I presume it would be unnecessary to offer any apologies for presenting to the public the following account of a people, of whose government, religion, customs, and language, so little has hitherto been published †, I shall proceed at once to give a simple statement of the circumstances which first gave rise to it, and the authority under which it has been conducted.

In the year 1811 I accidentally heard that Mr. William Mariner, the bearer of a letter from the East Indies to one of my connections in London, had been a re-

* These islands, therefore, consist of the island of Tonga, which gives name to the whole, the cluster called the Hapai islands, and the island of Vavaoo. See the Map.

† The accounts of circumnavigators are imperfect by reason of the shortness of their stay; of these, however, Captain Cook's is the most accurate. The missionaries might have furnished us with more intimate details, but their accounts relate rather to the history of their mission than that of the natives. One of them, an anonymous writer, in a small volume entitled, “A Four Years Residence at Tongataboo,” gives a very imperfect account of the people, himself being the chief subject of his narrative.

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sident at the Friendly Islands during the space of four years; and, my curiosity being strongly excited, I solicited his acquaintance. In the course of three or four interviews I discovered, with much satisfaction, that the information he was able to communicate respecting the people with whom he had been so long and so intimately associated was very far superior to any thing that had yet appeared before the public. His answers to several inquiries, regarding their religion, government, and habits of life, were given with that kind of unassuming confidence which bespeaks a thorough intimacy with the subject, and carries with it the conviction of truth:—in fact, having been thrown upon those islands at an early age, his young and flexible mind had so accorded itself with the habits and circumstances of the natives, that he could not feel any disposition to overrate or embellish what to him was neither strange nor new. To my inquiries respecting his intentions of publishing, he replied, that having necessarily been, for several years, out of the habit

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either of writing or reading, or of that turn of thinking requisite for composition and arrangement, he was apprehensive his endeavours would fail in doing that justice to the work which I seemed to think its importance demanded: he modestly proposed, however, to submit the subject to my consideration for a future opportunity. In the mean while circumstances called him away to the West Indies: on his return he brought me memoranda of the principal events at the Tonga islands, in the order in which they had happened during his residence there, together with a description of the most important religious ceremonies, and a vocabulary of about four or five hundred words. The inspection of these materials served greatly to increase the interest which I had already taken in the matter, and I urged the necessity of committing the whole to paper while every thing remained fresh in his memory. To facilitate this object, I proposed to undertake the composition and arrangement of the intended work, whilst Mr. Mariner should direct his view solely to noting

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down all that he had seen and heard as his memory might spontaneously furnish it, in order that these materials might afterwards be made, from time to time, subjects of conversation, strict scrutiny, amplification, arrangement and composition. Not one of the ensuing pages has therefore been written without Mr. Mariner's presence, that he might be consulted in regard to every little circumstance or observation that could in the smallest degree affect the truth of the subject under consideration: and, in this way, it is presumed that a great deal more useful and interesting matter has been elicited than would probably have occurred to him through the medium of his own unassisted reflections; for conversation calls to mind many things that would otherwise have escaped the memory, it constantly demands elucidations; one idea gives birth to another, until the whole subject lies completely unfolded to the mind.

With regard to arrangement: in the first place is related an account of the voyage of the Port au Prince, it being

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esteemed sufficiently interesting, as it involves a combination of untoward circumstances that led ultimately to the destruction of the ship: the whole of this has been faithfully composed from a journal kept by Mr. Mariner on board. Next follows a narrative, or rather, as it may be termed, a historical account, of all the important and interesting events that occurred during his stay at the Tonga Islands; not merely as they regarded himself, but with an aspect to the different changes, religious and political, since they affected, in a most important manner, the situation of public affairs: and that this portion of the work may be better understood, a comparison is drawn between the state of these islands upon Mr. Mariner's arrival, and that in which Captain Cook had previously found them; in doing which the revolution of Tonga*, and other important and highly interesting events which had taken place in the mean while, are given according to the account of the

* From the "Transactions of the Missionary Society," it appears that this event took place in May, 1799.