

A Re - Reading of London Missionary  
Society Mission in Southern Kiribati  
1870 1871

By  
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BD. August 2017



**A RE-READING OF LONDON MISSIONARY  
SOCIETY MISSION IN SOUTHERN KIRIBATI**

**1870-1871.**

A Thesis Presented to the  
Department of Church History

Malua Theological College  
Apia

In Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Toantemam Ueanteiti

August 2017

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the history of the early LMS Samoan missionaries in the southern islands of Kiribati. The LMS missionaries were sent to the five southernmost islands of the Kiribati Islands, Arorae, Beru, Tamana, Onotoa, and Nikunau. The thesis also attempts to highlight the key personalities, the challenges and success stories of the LMS mission to the Kiribati.

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hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Malua Theological College or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to honor the loss of my grandma Batie Baure Tebwa, the loss of my Dad Ueanteiti Erenete, the loss of my uncle Teororo Baure and the loss of my cousin Onikannara Arika who had gave me a very good support for my study during their lifetimes, may your souls rest peacefully

And also, to everyone who are willing and continuing to enlighten the world with the Good News.

Kam na bane ni kab'aia iroun te Atua.

God bless you all



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Faafetai, faafetai tele lava



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Once again,

Kam bati n rab'a ao Kam na bane ni Kab'aia iroun te Atua.

**Toantemam Ueanteiti**

**Malua Theological College**

## **List of Abbreviations**

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission
KUC	Kiribati Uniting Church
CCCS	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
EFKS	Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
LMS	London Missionary Society



## Introduction

The southern islands of the Kiribati Group of islands have been heavily influenced by the presence of Samoan missionaries who worked there from 1870-1871. I have chosen this period for it will provide enough time for reflection on what has taken place in Kiribati in the early days of the mission.

I am intrigued to find out the circumstances that led to the mission of the LMS to the Kiribati. I want to explore the key personalities and what influenced the choice of islands. What were the factors that led the mission to a particular island? What were the main issues faced by the missionaries.

## Methodology

The thesis will utilise primary sources of the time. These primary sources will be the reports and journals of the London Missionary Society missionaries to Kiribati. These missionaries include European and even Samoan missionary reports. In addition I will use interviews when available to gauge a sense of historical significance. A chronological sequence I believe explains how one event should give rise or explain succeeding events. Such a method would explain the current situation of the islands of Kiribati, Arorae, Tamana, Onotoa, Beru, and Nikunau.

The study will use primary materials from the LMS microfiche archives held in the Malua Theological Library archived.

## Outline of Chapters

Chapter one outlines the very first mission to the southern islands of Kiribati by the LMS that was led by Rev. Samuel J Whitmee. The chapter outlines how the LMS first contacted the islands of Arorae, Onotoa, Tamana and Beru.

Chapter two focuses on the second missionary journey of the LMS that was led by Rev. Thomas Powell to the islands of Arorae, Onotoa, Tamana, Beru and Nikunau. This period also includes the first missionary journey to Nikunau Island. This period covers period in which the LMS revisits these islands and see the progress or lack of progress. The chapter exams the personalities and issues faced by the church.

Chapter three focuses on the conclusion of the missionary journey. It will answer the questions posed in the introduction. Why was the LMS mission sent to the Gilbert Islands? What were the difficulties faced by the missionaries? What were the results of the mission in this short time? Did the LMS change lives in the five islands of Kiribati in this period?



## Chapter 1

### Kiribati and the London Missionary Society

#### Introduction:

This chapter aims to look at the beginning of the London Missionary Society (LMS) to the southern islands of Kiribati of which there were five islands, Arorae, Tamana, Onotoa, Beru and Nikunau. The chapter aims to identify the reasons and factors for the LMS mission to Kiribati. The chapter examines the early contacts of the LMS mission with four of the five islands of Kiribati.

#### 1.1 Why the LMS went to Kiribati.

Kiribati Islands formerly known as the Gilbert Islands had been described as atolls which are like 'tiny deserts'.<sup>1</sup> The islands are situated in regions of least rain where there is so little elevation above the sea that they do not catch the rainclouds that pass over them.<sup>2</sup>

The Samoan LMS missionaries went to five islands of Kiribati, Arorae, Tamana, Beru, Nikunau, and Onotoa.<sup>3</sup> There was a strong Samoan LMS mission in Tuvalu, which is the southern neighbour of the Kiribati islands.<sup>4</sup> The northern Tuvalu islands have close communication and interisland relations with the southern islands of the

<sup>1</sup>James McKinney Alexander, *The Islands of the Pacific from the Old to the New: A Compendious Sketch of Missions in the Pacific* (New York: American Tract Society, 1895), 309.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Nancy Newhouse, ed. *Kiribati: Aspects of History* (Suva: USP, 1979), 58-59.

<sup>4</sup>Raeburn Lange, *Island Ministers. Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth Century Pacific Islands Christianity* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2005), 210-11.

Kiribati Islands<sup>5</sup>. The extension of the LMS Samoan mission to the southern islands of Kiribati would be a natural progression of the LMS Samoan mission after Tuvalu.

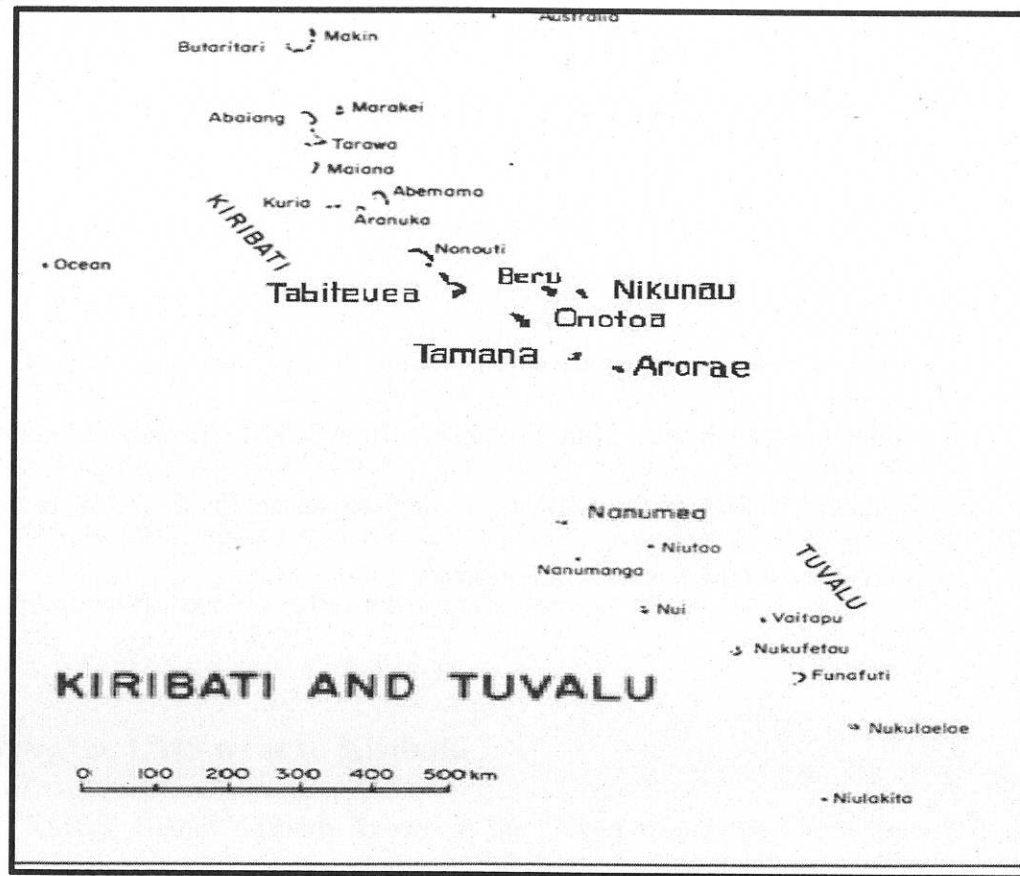
The American mission society the ABCFM were dominant in the northern islands and had a greater influence on the culture of Kiribati, even creating a native language in a written form for the first time and they were the first missionary society to translate the Bible into the language of these people.<sup>6</sup> The ABCFM influence had not reached yet the southern islands of the Kiribati, so they requested for the LMS to extend their mission to the southern islands of Kiribati.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 211. Lange writes that although trained in Samoa some of the missionaries to Kiribati were Ellice Islanders (Tuvaluans) from atolls just south of Kiribati. Ibid., 203. Also the island of Nui in Tuvalu uses a language closer to Kiribati than Tuvaluan.

<sup>6</sup>S J Whitmee, *A Missionary Cruise in the South Pacific Being a Report of a Voyage Amongst the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands, in the Missionary Barque "John Williams" During 1870*. (Sydney: Joseph Cook and Co, 1871), 37-38.

<sup>7</sup>Samuel S Whitmee, Letter Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 11 May 1871.





**FIG 1: Distance and proximity between Tuvalu and Gilbert Islands**

The LMS missionary Samuel Whitmee was given authority by the LMS mission in Samoa for the islands to evangelise<sup>8</sup> Whitmee's original intention was to evangelise Nauru, which was known by the very inviting name of 'Pleasant Island'.

However during a stopover at *Quiros* Island in Tokelau Islands, Whitmee met a Gilbert Islander by the name of '*Sunday*'. *Sunday* was from the island of Beru, one of the islands of southern Kiribati. '*Sunday*' pleaded with Whitmee to take him to Beru and also to help evangelise his island home of Beru.<sup>9</sup> It was *Sunday*'s influence that changed Whitmee's original destination from Nauru to the Gilberts. Whitmee decided

<sup>8</sup>Whitmee, *A Missionary Cruise in the South Pacific Being a Report of a Voyage Amongst the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands, in the Missionary Barque "John Williams" During 1870.*, 38.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

that 'I changed my plans and determined to make an attempt to reach the Gilbert Islands.'<sup>10</sup>

When the *John Williams* made a stop over at the island of Nui in Tuvalu Whitmee was further convinced of the mission work to the Gilbert Islands. On this island he was met by two men from the island of Tamana, who had been converted to Christianity. As Whitmee wrote in his journal they ‘...were waiting for the ‘John Williams’ to go back to their home and tell their countrymen of Christ.’<sup>11</sup> Whitmee saw this chance meeting with these two Tamana Christians as divine providence that confirmed the mission to Gilbert Islands. On the 15 October 1870 Whitmee set sail towards the southern atolls of the Gilbert Islands.

There is also a third factor in Whitmee's decision to go to the Gilbert Islands. The island of Nui even though it is part of Tuvalu, spoke a language that is closer if not similar to Kiribati language.<sup>12</sup> It was there that Whitmee met Samoan missionary Kirisome. Kirisome was fluent in the language of Nui and thus became an interpreter for Whitmee on his journey to the Gilbert Islands<sup>13</sup> Kirisome's presence was to have an important impact in Whitmee's mission especially when the mission landed on the island of Tamana.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Lange, *Island Ministers. Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth Century Pacific Islands Christianity*, 203.

<sup>13</sup>Whitmee, *A Missionary Cruise in the South Pacific Being a Report of a Voyage Amongst the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands, in the Missionary Barque "John Williams" During 1870*.



## 1.2 The arrival of the first missionaries of the LMS on Arorae Island.

Arorae Island is about 6.5 km by 3.25 km and is the southernmost island of the Gilbert Islands group.<sup>14</sup> The main villages of Tamaroa and Roreti are divided by a Government station at Taribo. In 1809 a Captain Patterson of the brig *Elizbeth* named it Hope Island. This was later changed to Hurd Island by the hydrographer John Purdy.<sup>15</sup>



Fig 2. Site where the John Williams anchored in Arorae in 1870. 'Te Atimaata'.

<sup>14</sup>Norman Douglas and Ngaire Douglas, eds., *Pacific Islands Yearbook*, 16 ed. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1989), 308.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

According to local history the missionary vessel *John William* arrived at Arorae and anchored at the place or station known as "Te Atimaata" located in Roreti village.<sup>16</sup> When the *John Williams* arrived at Arorae Whitmee noted that some of the people were armed with knives and hatchets, while one man carried an old flintlock, and a revolver stuck in his belt.<sup>17</sup> Unknown to Whitmee the Arorae Islanders were fearful that the mission vessel was a "man stealing ship" and were prepared to defend their island.

Whitmee went out on a landing boat towards the shore and was immediately approached by a canoe. The canoe approached the boat and Whitmee, through his interpreter Kirisome informed the men on the canoe that their visit was a missionary visit. It was indeed fortunate that one of the men on the canoe had been on a

*'Christian Island, and knew there was no harm to fear from a missionary ship; so the canoe preceded our boat to the shore and carried the news of our peaceful and friendly intentions'.*<sup>18</sup>

Upon landing Whitmee's party was happily received by those on the shore. Kirisome and Whitmee were led to a large house where public assemblies are held in order to explain to the islanders of Arorae the reason of their visit. Whitmee explained to the assembly that the missionary ship the *John Williams* was not a 'man stealing' vessel. It had come to bring a missionary from Samoa to tell them about the one true God who made them, and teach them how to live here and hereafter.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Toantemam Ueanteiti, Interview with Elder Deacon Tiongo Aretana of village of Roreti in Arorae 22 December 2016; Samuel S Whitmee, Letter of Rev Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 18 July 1871.

<sup>17</sup>Whitmee, *A Missionary Cruise in the South Pacific Being a Report of a Voyage Amongst the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands, in the Missionary Barque "John Williams" During 1870.*, 39.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.



Kirisome and Whitmee's request was met with unanimous approval by the assembly. Led by three elders of the main villages the whole audience gave and assent to the utterances of the speakers by sundry gesticulations and by repeating the end of the sentences after the spokesmen'.<sup>20</sup> The people of Arorae happily agreed to Whitmee's request to receive a Samoan missionary, so the boat returned to the ship for Leleifotu and his wife who Whitmee had appointed him to remain there.

It was agreed in the assembly that the missionary should live in a central position on the island, and that all the people should commence next day build him a house. Whitmee stayed at "Te Atimaata" station and later the first Pastor's residence was built there.<sup>21</sup> They also arranged a plan for supplying him regularly with food. The latter arrangement gave me great satisfaction for the island was suffering from drought at the time of our visit, and consequent shortness of food.

When Rev Samuel Whitmee inspected the islands he observed that the number of people did not correspond to the number of houses. He was later told that the men of Arorae had been taken away by what the natives themselves described as, "the men stealing vessels".<sup>22</sup> The Kiribati islands were subjected to 'black birding' raids, of men taken either as volunteers or 'forcibly' as labourers. Whitmee had observed that many men had been "taken, and few remaining".<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ueanteiti. Interview with Elder Deacon Tiongo Aretana of village of Roreti in Arorae 22 December 2016.

<sup>22</sup>Whitmee, *A Missionary Cruise in the South Pacific Being a Report of a Voyage Amongst the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands, in the Missionary Barque "John Williams" During 1870.*, 39.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Whitmee had noted that the coconut and pandanus trees looked very dry and unproductive, and these he found out later were the staple food of the islanders.<sup>24</sup> Whitmee's observation of Arorae highlights the challenges faced by the Samoan missionaries on the island, in particular the isolation and possibly the difficulty of growing 'traditional' Samoan crops. Unlike Samoa's rich volcanic soil, Arorae's soil is very sandy and much less capable of supporting taro, mangoes, etc... Whitmee's observation is supported by James Alexander's report written in 1895 which records those southern islands of the Gilbert Islands:

have little fertility of soil, and only twelve species of plants of which only the coconut and the pandanus yield food for the inhabitants.<sup>25</sup>

Whitmee had also noticed in his walk throughout the island evidence of idolatry. There were evidence of stones set up on one end and surrounded by a square or circle of large stones at least a metre in diameter. Whitmee found out that these were the gods of the people and every house had one in front of all the houses. Offerings of coconut and pandanus lay before the upright stone within the enclosure. Most of the people seemed unwilling to talk about their gods, but others said they did not care for them now, they were of no use.

The reports of Whitmee corresponded with local understanding of the arrival of the mission. According to Elder Deacon Tiongo Aretana the first missionaries who landed on Arorae were from the London Missionary Society (LMS).<sup>26</sup> According to Mr. Aretana

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Alexander, *The Islands of the Pacific from the Old to the New: A Compendious Sketch of Missions in the Pacific*, 309.

<sup>26</sup>Ueanteiti., Interview with Elder Deacon Tiongo Aretana of village of Roreti in Arorae 22 December 2016.



The LMS brought with them Christianity along with a Samoan missionary. The group was led by Rev. Samuel Whitmee from the LMS with a Samoan missionary and his wife who will stay in Arorae as their mission field.<sup>27</sup>

Mr. Aretana said that the Samoan missionary was known by the people of Arorae as Pastor Rereibotu which is the Aroraen translation of the Samoan name of the missionary.<sup>28</sup> However the journal of Whitmee of 1870 and a letter by Whitmee to Dr Mullens in 1871 identified Rereibotu as Leleifotu.<sup>29</sup>

Whitmee didn't stay for long but he left Leleifotu and his wife on the island and he took *Sunday* (known as *Tanre* in Kiribati the transliteration of Sunday) with him back to "the John William vessel" It is interesting that news from Arorae confirmed the difficulty for Leleifotu and his wife. According to Whitmee,

The Samoans are accustomed to a land of plenty and this 'land of coconut' and pandanus fruit is a great change to them. We feel it to be absolutely necessary to grant a supply of food (ship biscuit, arrowroot and perhaps a little flour) to them to the amount of five pounds each annually. This a new thing because these islands are altogether different from any one teachers have hitherto occupied<sup>30</sup>.

The missionary work at Arorae began in 1870 with one ordained pastor and one non-ordained missionary.<sup>31</sup> Seven years later there were 20 church members and 324 notional adherents.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Whitmee., Letter to Dr Mullins, 18 July 187; Whitmee, *A Missionary Cruise in the South Pacific Being a Report of a Voyage Amongst the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands, in the Missionary Barque "John Williams" During 1870.*

<sup>30</sup>Whitmee., Letter to Dr Mullins, 18 July 1871

<sup>31</sup>"Statistics of the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands 1877," (Apia London Missionary Society, 1877).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

### 1.3 Tamana Island.

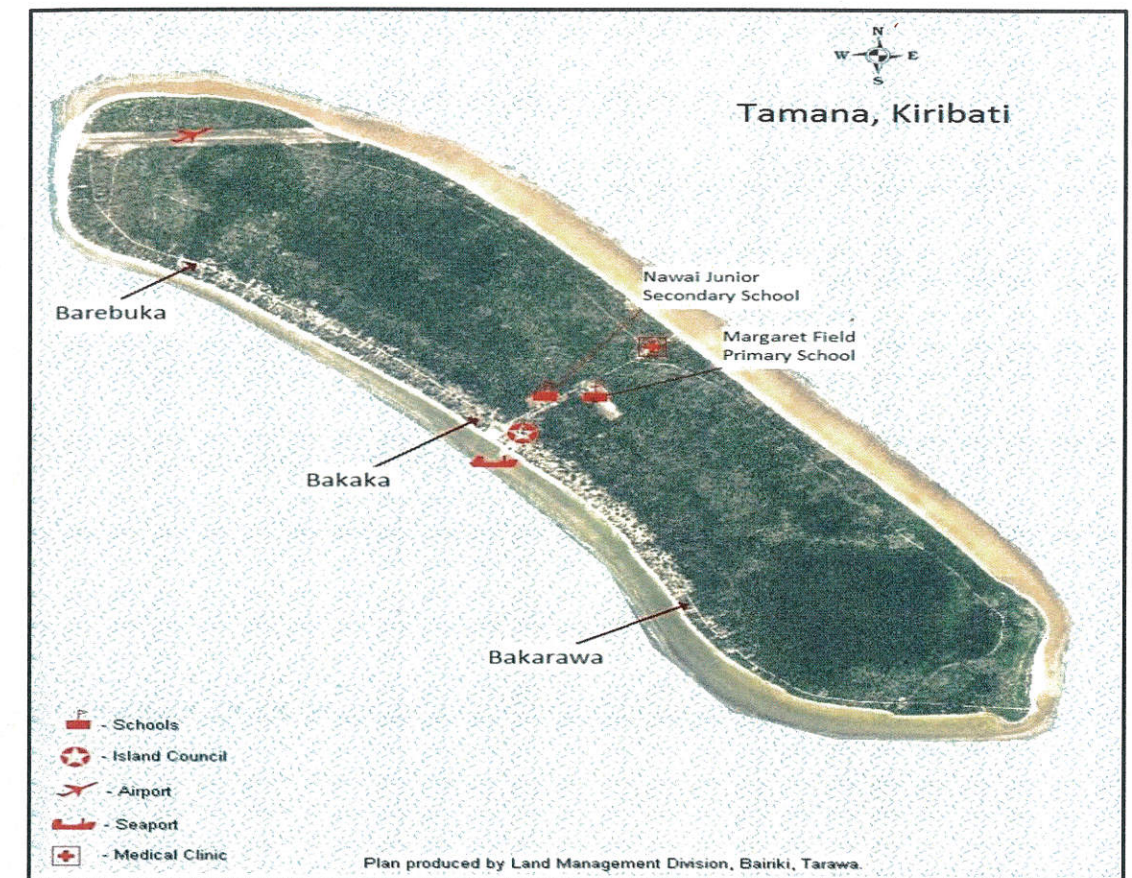


Fig 3: Map of Tamana (Source: Land Management Division, Tarawa, Kiribati)

The next island visited by Whitmee was Tamana.<sup>33</sup> It was around four to six kilometres long and two to four kilometres wide. Tamana has no lagoon however the island was according to Whitmee '*well supplied with coconut palms and pandanus; and although it was suffering from drought when we were there, there seemed to be no lack of food.*'<sup>34</sup> Whitmee also noted that there was plenty of underground water as indicated by the lush vegetation of Tamana. Whitmee estimated that there were approximately six hundred inhabitants on Tamana.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Whitmee, *A Missionary Cruise in the South Pacific Being a Report of a Voyage Amongst the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands, in the Missionary Barque "John Williams" During 1870.*, 41.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



There was commotion amongst the people of Tamana when they observed that *Sunday* was on board the *John Williams*. Whitmee was unaware the danger he was under with the presence of *Sunday* on the *John Williams*. The people of Tamana recognised *Sunday* as one who helped the 'people smuggling ships' from Tahiti. Whitmee noted that the people of Tamana thought that Whitmee was going to take the men of Tamana with *Sunday's* help.<sup>36</sup> However with the help of his interpreter Kirisome, Whitmee was able to explain the real reason to the people of Tamana of their visit. Whitmee acknowledged the good fortune to have Kirisome on board the *John Williams*.

I could not help thinking that without Kirisome and the Christian natives who had come with him, I should have been placed in very great peril. The people on the island have made up their minds to fight the next time the Tahiti vessel goes to their island. And who could wonder if they were to commit some outrage upon the crews of other vessels which were innocent of all ill intentions?<sup>37</sup>

The people of Tamana had reported to Whitmee that less than a year ago a party from a vessel landed on the island, firing and killing four natives and later forcing over a hundred into their boats.<sup>38</sup> It was reasonable to see why the missionary John Williams was killed in Erromanga, because of the cruelties of sandal wood traders, which forced the Erromangas to

take vengeance on the first white man they came in contact with. Had I not been accompanied by Christian natives of Tamana who told the people why I had come to visit them, I might have paid with my life for the cruelty of these modern slavers.<sup>39</sup>

As in Arorae Whitmee went ashore and met with elders in the large house where all public decisions were made. All those that were present were very happy to know

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

that a teacher would remain on Tamana. Whitmee had noted that one reason for the great joy amongst the people of Tamana was their belief that the presence of a teacher on their island meant that 'they would be protected against "men stealing ships"'.<sup>40</sup>



Fig 4 Tamana Island (Source; Google maps)

Whitmee tells of an incident in which he was in conversation with one man who had been a worker on board a whaling vessel. This man had broken English but spoke of his contempt for *Sunday*. He wanted Whitmee to leave *Sunday* in Tamana so that when they left the people of Tamana would kill him.<sup>41</sup> Despite Whitmee's insistence that *Sunday* was a reformed man the man "...was very sceptical on that point, saying emphatically, "Sunday bad man". "He nobe good. He very bad. No can be good".<sup>42</sup> There was no use in arguing with him, so I merely told him I would keep Sunday on board and take him home to Peru. He replied "all right", but soon added, "You no go

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.



Peru with Sunday. Peru man kill Sunday. He kill you too. No, no, you no go Peru. Sunday, he kill great many men, and gathering his hands full of small stones, he continued "he kill so many Peru men.

Whitmee decided to leave Kirisome for the first year as well as two Christian Tamana islanders that accompanied him from Nui. However after the Tamana experience Whitmee decided that Kirisome was needed for the other islands of southern Kiribati, Onotoa and Beru.

#### 1.4 Onotoa Island.

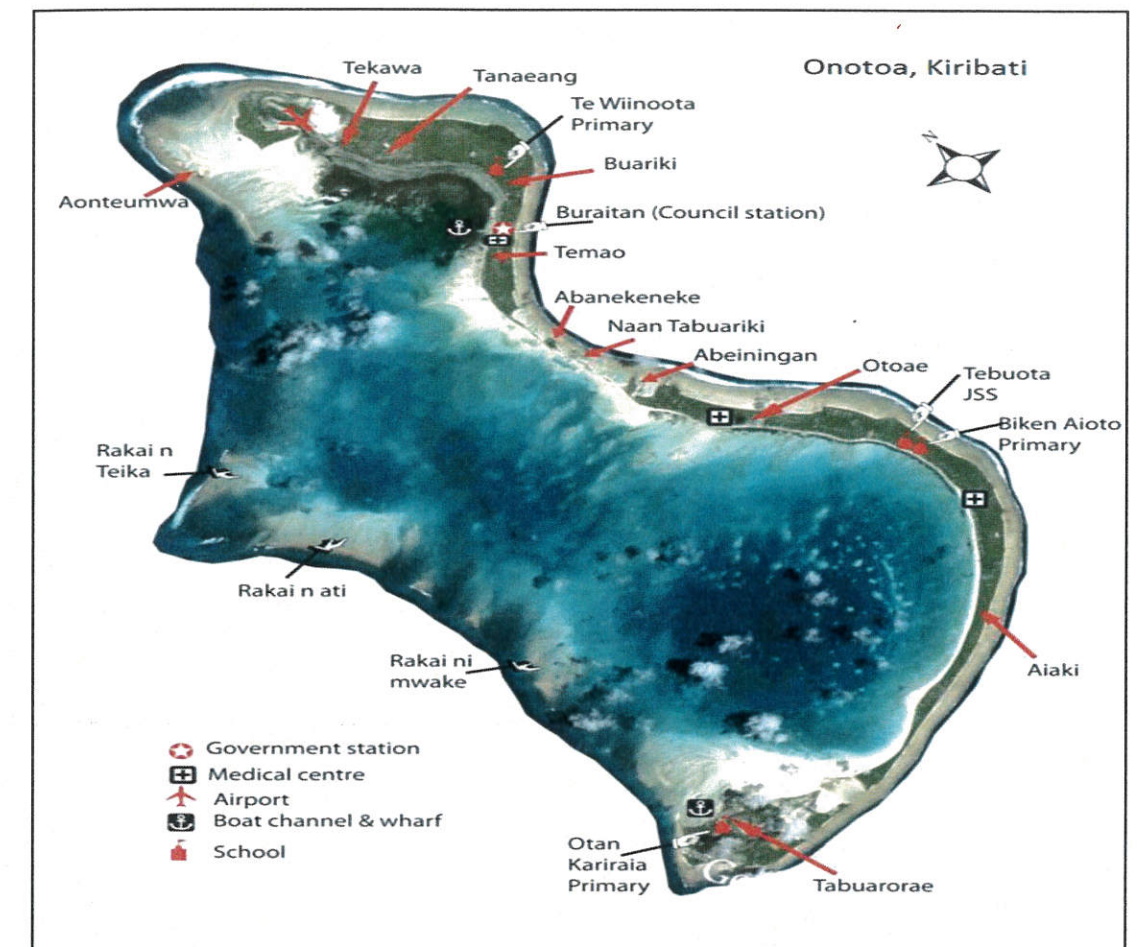


Fig 5: Map of Onotoa (Source: Google maps)

Whitmee arrived off Onotoa on the 19 October 1870.<sup>43</sup> Onotoa is an atoll with a large lagoon in the centre. *Sunday* was able to tell Whitmee of what had happened in Onotoa, in which *Sunday* was an accomplice to the people smuggling activities of the vessels. This would place the mission in danger after the scenario in Tamana. This was evident in Whitmee's account when the *John Williams* came close to the Onotoa.

When we approached the island, we saw a number of people watching us from the beach, but for some time no canoe came off, and we were afraid we should have some difficulty in communicating with them. The Samoan teachers were alarmed by the report we had heard at Tamana, and were anxious that I would not venture to land till we knew with. Two of them came to me with a request that I would allow them to go ashore first without any white people in the boat. The reason

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 44.



they gave for this wish, was very humiliating to those possessing a white skin. It was, that the natives of Onotoa had reason to fear the whites who had stolen away their fellow islanders, and that if they saw only Polynesians in the boat, they would most likely allow them to land and explain to them the object of our visit without molestation, whereas they might attack us if they saw a white face.<sup>44</sup>

It was evident that Kirisome, the Samoan teachers and maybe even *Sunday* did not want Whitmee to go on a landing boat to the shore. Those on the *John Williams* also discouraged Whitmee from boarding a landing craft to go on shore. During these deliberations a canoe came from the island. As the canoe neared the *John Williams* Kirisome began to call out those on the canoe in their language, and in the course of their conversations told them the *John Williams* was neither a trader nor a man stealer, but a missionary ship.<sup>45</sup>

The people on the canoe were happy and ventured alongside the *John Williams*. Whitmee was told by those in the canoe that there were already missionaries on the island. Whitmee assumed that the missionaries were the ABCFM from the Hawaiian Islands. However Whitmee was to later find out that there were no missionaries on the island. The people of Onotoa believed that the mentioning of the presence of missionaries would protect them from the 'a man stealing ships'.<sup>46</sup> This particular village where Whitmee had landed was devastated by the loss of so many of the men of the village, from the 'man stealing ships'. The other two villages were reported to be much larger, and they had both abandoned the worship of their idols and were waiting for missionaries<sup>47</sup>. With the arrival of Whitmee the villagers saw the acceptance of Christianity as a time of change and possible fortune for the village.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

Whitmee had noticed that 'man stealing ships' were in an ironic way helped the mission of the LMS to southern Kiribati.

I noticed this feeling on other islands, and I am convinced that a desire for protection from the kidnappers is one reason why our teachers were so gladly received on these heathen islands... Thus, although the doings of the kidnappers made it somewhat difficult for us to gain the confidence of the islanders, they facilitated our work as soon as we had gained their confidence.<sup>48</sup>

As in Onotoa and Tamana, Whitmee and his colleagues were led to a large *house* in the presence of villagers around the island. Here the request to leave a teacher was warmly welcomed, but instead of one they wanted three teachers as there were three villages on Onotoa. Whitmee had only two teachers left so he could only afford just one teacher to commence the mission on Onotoa.

Whitmee left a Samoan teacher Sumeo with his wife and children. Whitmee had informed Sumeo to work in Onotoa for a year and wait till the return of the *John Williams* for helpers in the work.<sup>49</sup> In that afternoon Whitmee progressed to the second last island of the group which was the home island of *Sunday* Beru Island.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



### 1.5 Beru Island.



Fig 6: Map of Beru Island (Source: Google maps).

The *John Williams* sighted Beru Island, early the next morning. This island is several kilometres long and one to two kilometres in width. It is not an atoll like most of the islands Whitmee visited. There were several shallow lagoons in it, some very small, surrounded by the land, and dry at low tide, others larger and open on one side to the reef which runs round the island.

The vegetation of Beru is similar to those of other islands in the group. Pandanus and coconut are everywhere abundant. Whitmee was told by the people of Beru that the pandanus fruit in Beru is of a superior quality than found in Ellice Islands and Samoa.<sup>50</sup> The women even created a cake out of the pandanus fruit which is then dried in the sun, and made into a roll like an ancient manuscript. Whitmee described it as tasting like 'old dates' but it lasts for a while.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

Upon arrival in the early morning Whitmee and the crew of the *John Williams* took precautions to conceal *Sunday* from the view of the islanders of Berú. Although *Sunday* did not agree at first, Whitmee tried to explain that his appearance would threaten the safety of the mission, as Whitmee feared the islanders would attack the ship. As usual they waited for a canoe to approach the *John Williams*, when two men in a canoe came out to meet the mission boat, Kirisome immediately commenced a conversation with the two men as soon as the canoe was within hearing distance. Kirisome reassured them that they were a missionary boat and not a 'man stealing boat'. According to Whitmee this calmed the two men in the canoe. The men were invited onto the missionary boat and when they boarded the *John Williams* Kirisome asked them if they knew anything about *Sunday*.

The replied, that a ship from Tahiti had been there a few days before & the people on board told them he was dead. He then told them that *Sunday* was not dead, but that he had been left by the Tahitian vessel at another island where are had found him, and that we had taken compassion on him and brought him back to his home.<sup>51</sup>

Kirisome took time to explain the change in *Sunday* that he was reformed and had asked for a missionary for the island of Beru. Nevertheless the islanders were concerned about the information Kirisome gave them. When Kirisome revealed *Sunday* to his countrymen, he was welcomed and embraced.<sup>52</sup> It was his family that had come out to see the mission boat.

When the mission went ashore Whitmee found out it was *Sunday's* village. When the villagers recognised *Sunday* they all greeted *Sunday* and rushed to embrace him, giving him quite an ovation.<sup>53</sup> As with the other islands the missionary party were led to

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 51.



a large house amongst two hundred villagers. *Sunday* gave an account to those in the meeting house of the kindness of Whitmee and the missionary party towards him and how the Tahitian boat abandoned him. *Sunday* also informed the villagers of the missionary teacher from the LMS in Samoa. The whole village listened to *Sunday's* account and he asked if they would accept the teacher – and there was unanimous applause and agreement. Kirisome interpreted *Sunday's* speech and Whitmee was happy of *Sunday's* explanation of the Gospel.

He urged his countrymen to cast off the worship of their gods, who could neither do them good nor harm, and to worship the one true God whom made them and who preserves them, and bestows upon them all they possess and who loves them and wishes to do them good.<sup>54</sup>

*Sunday* made the villagers laugh when he explained how the missionaries feared that if they land they would be attacked because the village thought they were going to take people away. The villagers joked that would have happened if they did not know it was a mission boat.<sup>55</sup>

Whitmee was invited to another village about four to six kilometre distance. The mission was accompanied by the people of *Sunday's* village. *Sunday's* older brother a renowned warrior and respected person on the island accompanied the missionaries. His brother was concerned that *Sunday's* arrival was to take people from Beru away. However *Sunday* reassured his older brother that he had given up those evil ways.

*Sunday* replied that he intended to remain with them and learn the new religion; that he had seen enough of the foreigners with whom he went away; and he only assisted them to procure people because he was afraid of them, for they threatened to tie him up if he did not help to procure a cargo.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 53.

When the missionaries reached the other village they were again confronted with a large number of people. After a little conversation these villagers were unanimous in their wish to have Elisaia, the Samoan teacher whom Whitmee appointed to mission in Beru. Again the leaders of Beru wanted three teachers to distribute between the three villages. Whitmee promised them two more teachers come the following year.<sup>57</sup> When it was time to say farewell to the people of Beru, Whitmee asked *Sunday* to

“...take care of his teacher Elisaia, and help him all he could in his work”. To this he replied in English, “Yes, I be missionary too”.<sup>58</sup>

Beru was the last island of the Gilberts that Whitmee visited. The nearest island to Beru was Tabiteuea (Drummond Island) lying Northwest of this island. However it was found out that the Hawaiian mission was already there. Whitmee was later informed that the Hawaiian mission had reached another island to the north of Tabiteuea Island. Tabiteuea was now under the ABCFM control and seems to be the most southern extent of the Hawaiian mission.

Had the mission had another missionary on board they would have gone to the island lying southeast of Beru the island of Nikunau. Unfortunately Nikunau proved to be a difficult island for the mission. Even if there was another missionary available, the problem lay in that Nikunau was in the windward direction, in other words it would require sailing against the wind. Although it was possible to sail against the wind it would inevitably take longer to reach the destination. The *John Williams* sailed back to Samoa with the idea that Nikunau Island will be visited in the next visit of the mission vessel.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 53.



### Conclusion:

The mission to Kiribati began with Whitmee's decision to go to the Gilbert Islands. The LMS mission had given Whitmee authority to go either to Nauru. However it seems like a chance meeting with a Gilbert Islander from the island of Beru by the name of *Sunday* convinced Whitmee to go to the Gilbert Islands.

The first Samoan missionary to the Gilbert Islands is Leleifotu and his wife on the island of Arorae. The second missionary should have been Kirisome on the island of Tamana. However Whitmee needed Kirisome as a translator for the islands of Onotoa and Beru. The third missionary was Sumeo and his wife on the island of Onotoa. The fourth Samoan missionary was Elisaia and his wife on the island of Beru. After Elisaia was left on Beru, Kirisome returned to commence the mission on Tamana. Whitmee had promised two more teachers for Onotoa and another two more teachers for Beru.

Already there are problems noted on these islands compared to the Samoa. Firstly the lack of rain and the poor soils compared to rich volcanic soils of Samoa. Hence in addition to fish, pandanus fruit and coconuts are the staple diet on these four islands. The staple diet of the Samoans such as bananas, taro, yams, etc...are not available in the Gilbert Islands. The lack of rain is one reason for the situation in the Gilbert Islands.

How would the four Samoan missionaries fare after one year in their respective islands?

## Chapter 2

### The Second Missionary Journey 1871

The following year after the first mission to Kiribati in 1870 was followed by the second LMS mission of 1871. Rev Thomas Powell was the leader of the second missionary journey to Gilbert Islands. It was a good time to see any changes in the mission after a year. The following reports of the mission show that it was a difficult situation especially for the Samoan missionaries

#### 2.1 Arorae Island.

The *John Williams* sailed from Apia on Tuesday September 19, 1871. On board were the missionaries Rev James C Vivian, Mrs Vivian and child, Rev George Pratt and Mr Davies. After calling at Savaii to land Mr Pratt at Maututu and Mr Davies goods at Falealupo, the *John Williams* left on the 21 September for Olosega the first island of the Tokelau Group.

The *John Williams* reached Arorae Island on the 21 October, 1871. Leleifotu gave Thomas Powell his findings of the population of Arorae as nine hundred and thirty nine.(939).<sup>1</sup> According to Leleifotu

Two hundred and seven have been taken away from the man stealing ships. The number remaining is 939. Of these there are 246 men 323 women 216 boys and 154 girls. There are more women than men because most of those people who were taken away are men.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871," (Malua Samoa Church (LMS), 1871).

<sup>2</sup>Whitmee., Letter of Rev Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 18 July 1871



Leleifotu also reported that 'people stealing vessels' had arrived just three days before the arrival of the *John Williams*.<sup>3</sup> The vessel was from Fiji and it took fifteen persons to work as labourers in Fiji. It was too late for the teacher to protect these people from kidnapping.<sup>4</sup>

When Thomas Powell arrived in September 1871 a new chapel had been built and the house of the teacher from August to September 1871 (see appendix).<sup>5</sup> The people of Arorae were committed to provide their teacher and his family with food and other needs but that was only for seven months.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless Leleifotu's first day was disastrous one for his wife. She was ill for more than a month and there was concern that she might die.<sup>7</sup> When the people of Arorae asked what spirit had caused her sickness Leleifotu replied "it was from God and all things are from Him".<sup>8</sup>

Leleifotu and his family struggled with hunger after the first seven months and he even tried to purchase food from passing ships but could obtain very little.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately vessels refused to sell food and Leleifotu had to wait until the visit of Thomas Powell.<sup>10</sup> Growing conditions for typical Samoan plants were unfavourable to grow, so many plants brought over from Samoa died. According to Leleifotu's account of the food shortage,

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871," (Malua 1871).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup>Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871."

<sup>7</sup>Whitmee., Letter of Rev Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 18 July 1871

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Letter of Rev Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 18 July 1871

<sup>9</sup>Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871."

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

All the plants we brought from Samoa are dead. We are not accustomed to the food which grows here and we miss very much the abundance of Samoa. When the John Williams comes again try to send me some bananas and other plants. Also want more books and slates to teach the people to read and write.<sup>11</sup>

Leleifotu noted that the 'island was thickly populated for its capacity to produce food hence the people often suffer from shortness of food'.<sup>12</sup> A kindly captain of a shipping vessel who was passing through Arorae learning of Leleifotu's predicament gave him a present of a bag of flour (50lbs), a large bag of biscuit 100lbs, more than 500 sticks of tobacco for barter and three large beef pieces<sup>13</sup>.

Powell gathered the people for an afternoon service at about 4 o'clock at the locally made chapel. More than 500 people with woman and girls on one side and the men on the other side attended the service.<sup>14</sup> Kirisome interpreted the message of Thomas Powell which pleased some of the old men who frequently gave a nod with agreement of the sermon.

At the close of the service Thomas Powell requested for the men to remain for a short discussion. Thomas asked the men if they wanted another teacher to work with Leleifotu<sup>15</sup>. The men all agreed and they approved to have another teacher, "yes, yes, let him come" Thomas reminded the Aroraens that the village was responsible to feed him, to build his house and to look after his family; to which everyone in the meeting agreed. As a result Thomas allocated Navalika to work together with Leleifotu in the mission on

<sup>11</sup>Whitmee., Letter of Rev Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 18 July 1871

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., Letter of Rev Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 18 July 1871

<sup>13</sup>Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871."

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.



Arorae.<sup>16</sup> Realising the scarcity of food each teacher were given an extra 200lbs of ship biscuit and 200lbs of arrowroot from the supply of biscuit and arrowroot which the Samoan committee had procured to distribute to teachers in the Gilbert Islands.<sup>17</sup>

According to Mr. Tiongo Aretana Arorae traditional history support Powell's report that two missionaries worked in the only villages of Arorae. Leleifotu and his family remained to serve at Roreti village and Navalika and his family were moved to Tamaroa village.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2 Leleifotu's Report 3 February 1871.

Leleifotu held religious services regularly in the large meeting houses in which people used to hold their gatherings. A chapel had not been built yet in his first year and according to Leleifotu "The people are not fond of work and it is difficult to get them to do much."<sup>19</sup>

Leleifotu was concerned that most of the males that attended the services came without clothes while women wear just coconut leaf girdles.<sup>20</sup> Leleifotu noted that the men thought it was not proper of them to wear clothes. What greatly hindered them from buying clothes was their desire for tobacco. They would sell anything to a passing ship so they could obtain tobacco.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ueanteiti., Interview with Elder Deacon Tiongo Aretana of village of Roreti in Arorae, 20 December 2016

<sup>19</sup>Whitmee., Letter of Rev Samuel Whitmee to Dr Mullens, 18 July 1871

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Leleifotu had counted two hundred and fifteen stone gods. He was encouraged by the people of Arorae to remove their gods away because if they remain they would continue to give offerings to them. They were all keen to have only the God of heaven for their God. It is possible that the sickness of Leleifotu's wife created fear among the islanders of the power of the Christian God in the sense that the cause of her sickness might be related to the work of Leleifotu in destroying the stone gods. Nevertheless within two days, Leleifotu was able to destroy these idols from one end of the island to the other end.<sup>22</sup>

Some were large stones others were small. Some were set up in the houses, others beside the house of those who worship them. The people were accustomed to give a great many offerings of food to these stones. If a person had a dream he would take an offering to ease God in the morning thinking that he had been talking to him during the night because he wanted food. He took a great deal of food for ... of the god – lest he should be angry and bring disease upon him. When a person is sick a very large quantity is given as long as the sickness lasts to appease the anger of the gods.<sup>23</sup>

Leleifotu tells of three large stones that were much larger than the other stones. Leleifotu was told by the people of Arorae that these were superior gods and this caused Leleifotu to break one of the large stones. Leleifotu also took this opportunity to take the large food offerings which were placed before it.

The people cried out, expecting I should fall down dead. Some of the coconuts which had been given to the god I took to my house. The people wished me to destroy all inferior gods before the great ones because they were most afraid of them. But I took hold of one big stone and dashed it to pieces. Then I went to another to destroy that. As I went a man came to me with some fire and asked me to burn the house in which the god stood. I said wait till I have broken the stone, but he asked me to let him break it. I then went to him to burn the house but some of the people were so frightened, they held me and would not let me burn it.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



Such events highlight the fear of the people of Arorae to dispose of their ancient religion. When asked by one man about the gods that he was destroying, Leleifotu replied:

They are no gods. There is only one God, the God of heaven. He then said 'It is good, throw away these false gods'. Another man asked me if I had 'commanded ... the rain to cause it to descend!' I replied that God alone had power to cause it to rain. Then he said 'Pray to God that it may rain least we all die on account of the drought.'<sup>25</sup>

Punishment for crimes was very severe especially of theft. Theft was a severe crime on Arorae and the punishment was very harsh. Theft was punishable by strangulation and the body thrown into the sea without burial. Any family member or friends that are caught retrieving the body were "also strangled in the same way and his or her body is thrown into the sea". Such events highlight the scarcity of resources on the island of Arorae. Theft deprives others of their ability to survive especially in the drought season, such was the need for harsh punishment.

As a result of the scarcity of fresh water many Aroraens drink fermented coconut 'sap' from the coconut tree. This created problems for Leleifotu's mission:

There is one very bad custom in the island. The people get strong drink from the cocoanut tree which they use freely until they are drunk. When they are drunk they are very quarrelsome.<sup>26</sup>

After seven years a survey of the Arorae revealed that since 1870 there was one ordained pastor and one non-ordained missionary.<sup>27</sup> There were 20 church members or communicants and 324 notional adherents.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>"Statistics of the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands 1877."

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

## 2.3 Origins from Samoa.

During Powells stay in Arorae he was able to gather information on the origins of the people of Arorae. According to their oral tradition the people of Arorae claim their origins from Samoa. Their tradition account is as follows;<sup>29</sup>



Fig7: Site of the first pastor's house. The stone is one of the original pillars of the first pastor's house where Leleifotu lived. (Source: Author's photo)

The god Tapuariki swam from Samoa to Beru with logs of wood, the one was the Uli, the Puapua of Samoa (*GuettaidaSpeciosa*) and the other is the Kanawa, the Tauamave of Samoa and the Tou of Tahiti (*CordiaSubsoidata*). Tapuariki planted these two trees on Beru. In wet weather the Uli and the Kanawa tree approached each other and in dry weather they receded. The Uli eventually bore a child by Kanawa a girl who was named Eiarepoto. This girl became the wife of Tapuariki by whom he had first a girl whom he named her N.Tiriuea and next a son whom he named Kantoa; These

<sup>29</sup>Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871."



offsprings was how Beru was populated and eventually migration would occur to other islands, such as Arorae, Tamana, Onotoa, etc...<sup>30</sup>

The significance of this account is that the Gilbert islands that the LMS missionaries were sent to were already familiar with the Samoans. Samoa appear in the legends and myths as the origin of these people, at least in the southern islands of the Gilbert Islands. It should be noted that this myth is from one island that is Arorae. It may be the other islands have a different version of the origins of the people of 'southern Kiribati. Nevertheless the myth from Arorae does highlight that at least in Arorae the Samoans were not unknown to the people of the Gilbert Islands.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

## 2.4 Nikunau Island.

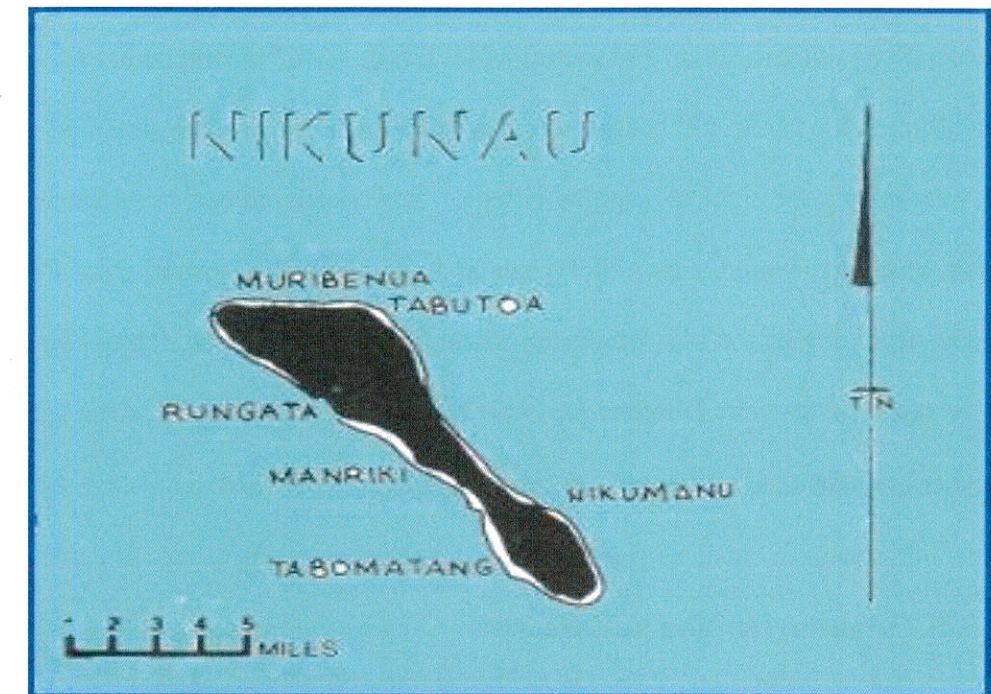


Fig 8: Map of Nikunau (source: Google maps)

The *John Williams* arrived at Nikunau on 24 October 1871 at 12:31pm.<sup>31</sup> It was a much larger island than Arorae, Onotoa, Tamana and Beru.<sup>32</sup> Powell estimated the population to be between 2500 to 3000 people. There were also six villages instead of the two or three on the other islands. The names and order of the villages from North to South with their respective chiefs were:<sup>33</sup>

- i. Tabomatang, chief Tetamuni,
- ii. Nukumanu, chief Peia,
- iii. Manriki, chief Peiara,
- iv. Rungata, chief Taonateapa,
- v. Taputoa, chief Teingia and
- vi. Muribenua, chief Teruatu

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>James Vivian, "Journal of James Vivian Gilbert Islands 23 Oct - 9 Nov 1871," (Malua Samoa Church (LMS), 1871).

<sup>33</sup>Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871."



About 4 o'clock in the afternoon a canoe followed by a boat of 18-20 passengers towards the *John Williams*. Powell with a few phrases that he learnt from Leleifotu together with two other interpreters, Old Tamarua of Tamana, and Sakaie of Vaitupu informed the canoe and boat of their intentions. One of the crew members on the canoe was Teingia the chief of Taputoa village.<sup>34</sup> Powell offered two missionaries or teachers in which one would stay with Teingia and another with a second chief Peia. This was the beginning of the mission on the island of Nikunau. The names of Samoan teachers or missionaries were Lilo and Lemuelu. The teachers stayed with their wives with two children each.

## 2.5 Tamana, Onotoa and Beru.

The *John Williams* sighted Tamana Island on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 1871 Powell met Kirisome the Samoan missionary with a very pleasing and successful report. Kirisome reported that the majority of the people had abandoned idolatry and about 20 families regularly attended worship. He also reported the help of Mr. Bingham from the Sandwich Islands mission whom he supplied books in the native language. This was a great chance for the people of nearly 50 of both old and young to learn how to read. Powell found out that Kirisome and his wife were determined to leave. Powell took Kirisome and his wife and left Samuelu to continue on with the mission. Kirisome had left Tamana and return to Nui in Tuvalu. No reason is given for Kirisome return but he and his family would have experienced the same difficulties as Leleifotu in Arorae.<sup>35</sup> The loss of Kirisome to the Gilbert mission was a setback because of Kirisome's fluency of the Kiribati language which is very similar to the Nui dialect.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Whitmee., Letter to Dr Mullens, 11 May 1871

The loss of Kirisome can be seen at a census taken six years later. In 1877 there was one ordained pastor, 252 notional adherents and 52 church members. There was a decline by 67 church members from the last census taken.<sup>36</sup>

On both islands of Onotoa and Beru only one teacher was working on these islands in 1870.<sup>37</sup> Whitmee's promise of at least two more teachers for each of Onotoa and Beru to be added in the next visit of the *John Williams*, Powell managed to leave Esia and Isaia and their wives to help Elisaia on Beru but because of the lack of missionaries the promise to the people of Onotoa and the Samoan teacher Sumeo did not eventuate.<sup>38</sup> Six years later in 1877 Onotoa had two ordained pastors, 730 notional Adherents and 110 church members.<sup>39</sup> In 1877 Beru was also showing promising numbers of two ordained pastors, 2000 notional adherents and 144 church members.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion:

By 1871 the challenges in the Gilbert Islands became apparent with Leleifotu's struggle not only with a sick wife but also with food. The village where Leleifotu worked could only provide seven months worth of food. The lack of rain further made the situation very difficult especially the failure to grow traditional Samoan plants such as taro or bananas.

<sup>36</sup>"Statistics of the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands 1877."

<sup>37</sup>., Letter to Dr Mullens, 11 May 1871

<sup>38</sup>Powell, "Report of Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Groups Outstations September-November 1871."

<sup>39</sup>"Statistics of the Tokelau, Ellice and Gilbert Islands 1877."

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.



Such a scenario may have contributed to Kirisome leaving Tamana. Could such harsh conditions also contribute to the lack of missionary volunteers to Kiribati. There were no additional missionaries to Onotoa as promised by Whitmee. However the result of this journey added 6 more missionaries or teachers into the mission but the need of more missionaries to add on to the mission field was still requested by the people of these islands.

### Chapter 3

#### Conclusion

From the results of the thesis we are able to discover four reasons for the LMS mission towards Kiribati or Gilbert Islands. Firstly, it was the chance meeting between the LMS mission and *Sunday* at *Quiros* Island. Whitmee's original plan was to start the LMS mission in Nauru with a population of at least three thousand on one island. However there is no doubt he was influenced by the request of *Sunday* to take the mission to the Gilbert Islands, especially to *Sunday's* island of Beru.

*Sunday* must have felt betrayed by the people kidnappers to be abandon in on *Quiros* Island. This must have led to a repentant heart. However *Sunday* was stigmatised by his assistance to the people kidnappers and to go back to Beru was not going to be easy. However as 'part' of a missionary party to promote peace would be an ideal way to return home. So for *Sunday* to assist the mission as best as he could in evangelising the islands would be his 'ticket' back home.

A second reason for Whitmee's decision to go to Kiribati was the stop over at Nui after picking up *Sunday* at *Quiros* Island. Whitmee not only acquired the services of an experienced Samoan missionary, Kirisome but also two recent converts to Christianity from the island of Tamana. However it was the acquisition of Kirisome who was fluent in the Nui language that further convinced Whitmee to go to Kiribati. The language of Nui Island is very similar to Kiribati, even though Nui is part of Polynesian Tuvalu. It is therefore not surprising to find two recently converted

Christians from the island of Tamana on Niu, as the island of Niu and Kiribati can readily converse with each other.

Kirisome was vital to the mission because not only he could converse in Kiribati but it would give the LMS mission an advantage in convincing the Kiribati islanders of the authenticity of the mission. The ability of Kirisome to pick up the mood of the Kiribati islanders was vital to the first missionary mission. He was able to ease tensions and warn the mission of impending danger – from the threat of revenge due to the people smuggling activities at the time. Kirisome was also trained in Malua Seminary (known today as Malua Theological College) so he understood the aims and goals of the LMS mission. In addition to Kirisome the presence and testimony of two Tamana islanders would further assist Whitmee's quest to introduce Christianity in Kiribati. Therefore Whitmee was to have amongst his mission party a 'repentent' Kiribati people smuggler, a Samoan Malua trained missionary able to converse in Kiribati and two recent Kiribati converts from the island of Tamana.

A third factor that contributed to the 'success' of the mission is the legends of Kiribati which involved Samoa. Now our sources are only from the island of Arorae but it does paint a picture that the Kiribati people were aware of Samoa in their oral tradition. If as the myths and legends of Arorae suggests Samoa is the origin of the Kiribati people at least the southern islands then missionaries especially from Samoa have special significance in the mind set of the people of Kiribati. They are not only seen as the people where their ancestors were from but also people who have a spiritual connection through myths and legends of their origins. Again the presence of Kirisome is significant because not only could he speak and understand Kiribati but he was also a

Samoan. Samoa was where the ancestors of Kiribati were from and this particular Samoan could speak Kiribati. Kirisome must have had a special impact on the minds and hearts of the Kiribati people. What a great impact the Samoan missionaries would have if they first went to Nui and became conversant in the Nui dialect before they went to mission to Kiribati

Fourthly the people smuggling activities had a positive impact on the mission. Whitmee clearly sees that the acceptance of Christianity and the missionaries was one way for the Kiribati to prevent further attacks from 'people stealing boats'. In a positive way the prevalence of people smuggling was indicative of the powerlessness of the gods and idols of Kiribati. The islanders of Kiribati were looking for an alternative source of protection and Christianity became that hope symbolised by the missionary. The presence of a missionary would also mean that mission boats would bring supplies to the islanders. The presence of the missionary would be a stronger voice against the people smugglers.

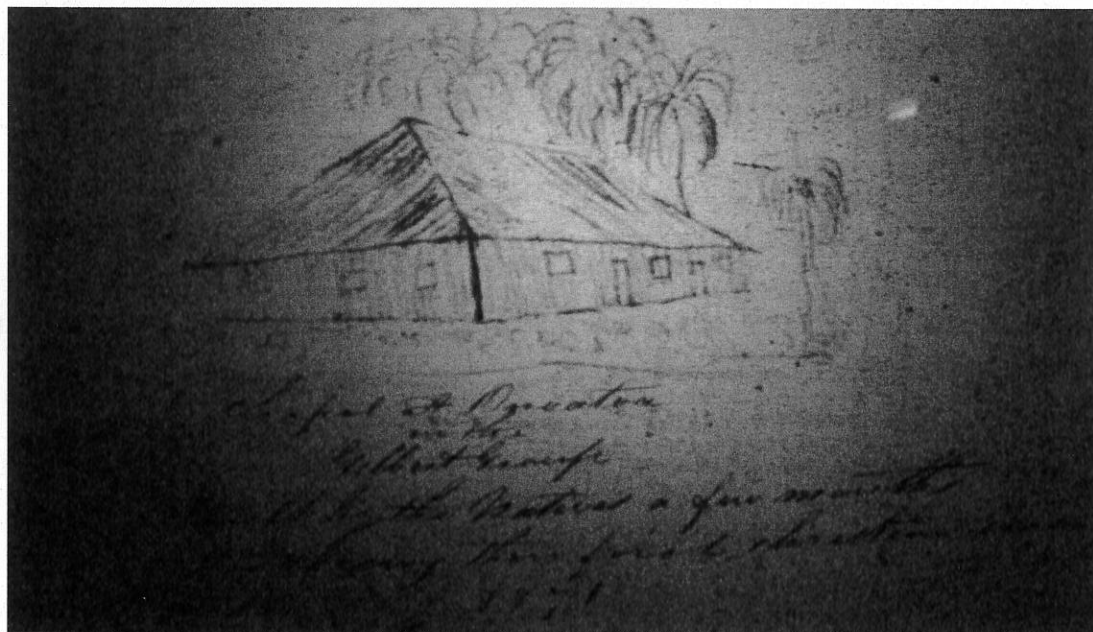
Ultimately it was the climate and drought conditions that were the greatest challenge for the Samoan missionaries. Certainly they miss the food and fauna of Polynesia and were not accustomed to the staple diet and the harsher; environment of southern Kiribati. Even Kirisome would not last a year in Tamana despite his proficiency in the language. However it does say much for those missionaries who remained in Kiribati not for their own sake but the sake of the Gospel and the people of Kiribati.



## Appendix



Sketch of Chapel at Arorae in September 1871 (Source: Journal of Thomas Powell)



Sketch of Chapel at Onotoa in September 1871 (Source: Journal of Thomas Powell)

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