Lagaga:

A Short History of Western Samoa
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This History is the result of a Project funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the University of the South Pacific (Western Samoa Centre) and The Western Samoa Department of Education. It was Commenced in December 1979 and completed in January 1983.

The Samoa History Project has also produced:

A Checklist of Published and Unpublished Material Relating to Samoa.

Volume 1. General bibliography
Volume 2. Agriculture and Agricultural Research

The Samoa History Project Collection
(25 bound volumes of photocopied historical source materials)

The Collected Works of Gatoloai Peseta Sio
a collection of Samoan oral traditions, stories, poems, songs and historical essays.
The idea for this book was to have a history of Samoa from a Samoan point of view. After three years, during which it was written, we can now ask: what is a "Samoan point of view?" Does this book present it?

For Samoans, knowledge is power, and the most powerful knowledge is historical knowledge: treasured and guarded in people's heads, in notebooks locked in boxes and matai's briefcases or with their precious mats under mattresses. The valuable histories of families, lands, genealogies, villages and events long ago are family property as important as ie toga (fine mats) but ie toga can be distributed. Historical knowledge is only shared to trusted people within the family, or made public in the event of serious disputes over lands or titles.

Even "common" historical knowledge such as well-known legends, are controversial. Each has many versions, but the version of the teller is the truth as far as he or she is concerned. Of such categories of traditions, as Taisi O.F. Nelson observed in an article in 1925, the teller's version will usually, in some detail or other, enhance the dignity of the ancestors, family or village of the teller. So what is truth? What is history?

I am both a Samoan historian and an academically trained historian. As the latter, historical "facts" must be verified and examined so that they can be put in "truthful" context. For example, we can verify an event by looking at various written works, or by asking a variety of people concerned with that event. But we cannot say with absolute accuracy why the event occurred: that is interpretation. Interpretation is the difficult, controversial and interesting part of history. Nothing is more boring than lists of "facts" without interpretation. So the art of history writing is interpreting events in the most impartial way possible. But nobody is ever totally impartial: whether they know it or not, their own ideas and experiences get involved.

This book was written by Samoans, with the exception of Penelope's contributions (in which I contributed to her interpretations). So far as this book offers the interpretations of Samoans of the events described, it is a Samoan point of view. The weakness is that, with the exception of
the contributions of Gataloai Peseta Sio, liga Suafole and Tanuvase Tavale, we have little of the great, rich fund of historical information of our people locked in their heads and note books. We have relied extensively on facts from documentary sources.

Perhaps one day some generous agency will provide the resources for the long and difficult process of writing the history of the villages and families of Samoa. That will be a 'real' Samoan history in another sense. But this book is a beginning: we hope it will stimulate the interest of our students, teachers and the public of Samoa to promote historical consciousness. To those of our countrymen and women who find anything disagreeable in this book, we say humbly that we have tried and it was a first try. We hope that any argument over it will lead to better books by Samoans. We have entitled this book "Lagaga" because like a mat being woven, Samoan history continues to be made.

The book was written as a result of an idea of Professor Albert Wendt. It was generously funded by UNDP at the request of the Government of Western Samoa for publication by the University of the South Pacific. We are grateful for the support of the University of the South Pacific (Western Samoa Extension Centre) and the Western Samoa Education Department in the research and writing of the book.

We offer them our thanks. We also thank Janet Pereira, our resource coordinator, who put together a rare and valuable collection of readings from overseas libraries. This is to be held in the Pacific Collection of the Nelson Library, as the Samoa History Project Collection. Janet has also compiled a bibliography of over 9000 entries, the most complete listing of written sources of Samoa ever undertaken. We congratulate her for the difficult job she has done so well.

Professor Albert Wendt, the Project's coordinator, and USP Centre staff Makerita Vaai and Faavaeina Ioane administered the project with efficiency, patience and encouragement. Jennifer Wendt carefully read and corrected several earlier versions of the manuscript. Those writers who saw the project through and contributed are listed in the chapters to which they contributed. We are grateful for their perseverance. Penelope, my wife, not only contributed but provided some polishing of our expression in the final draft of the English edition.

We appreciate and offer thanks for the work done by Tate Simi in preparing the diagrams and maps for this book.

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Malama Meleisea