

Letter From Foua Tofinga.

Foua Tofinga is a retired employee of the former British Western Pacific High Commission in Fiji. In 1999, Mr. Tofinga helped TIGHAR's senior archaeologist, Dr. Tom King, translate some of the words reportedly seen written in the sand on Sydney Island during the Earhart search.



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October 5th, 1999.

Dr Thomas F. King, PhD
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Dear Dr King,

Thank you for your letter of September 10, 1999: for its news, the 'home work', and the copy of Sir Ian Thompson's letter. This brought back some vivid memories of those 1939-1945 days before the Empire shedded its far flung colonies, protectorates and dependencies.

The delay in responding to your letter was due to my having been in trouble (1) with a slight flu and then (2) with a fractured arm. It was only today last week that they removed the plaster of Paris. However, I am still restricted because of muscle tightness and, at times, pains in certain parts of the body. Also, having gone over the scriptural 70-year mark has to be acknowledged!

Now to Home Work One: "*kele fassau molei*".

In the Tuvaluan & Tokelauan languages these words collectively do not make sense. By themselves, "*kele*" means sand, soil, also it is a common name among the Tokelauan male folks; especially among Catholics. "*fassau*" – could it be "*faasau*?" In this part of Polynesia no consonant follows another but vowels do at times. Taking the word to be "*faasau*", it means, in the Samoan language, to let something to lie outside overnight to be dewed. At best, therefore, in my opinion, *fassau* (or, *faasau*) has to be a name – a female's name. The final word, "*molei*" is like the previous two, could be a name, a possible Polynesianised form of Murray. But I have yet to meet up with a Molei in person. Incidentally, if you take the excess "s" in "*fassau*" and insert it between 'e' & 'i', you would get "Molesi", Morris in English and a fairly common name in Polynesia. But do not allow me to muddle you too much. I conclude that three people were there, 2 males and 1 female.

May I ask whether the words were written in capital letters or in the lower case? Were they above or below the high water mark? What was the phase of the moon the day they sighted the words? And what of the tides?

I have asked a nephew of mine in Samoa to follow up the above three words from the Tokelauan angle.

Home Work Two:

You assumed correctly. Mrs Sikuri used the terms 'kula' (red), 'toto' (rust, literally blood) & 'fiti' (steel or iron)

Home Work Three:

Koata's son, Teunaia. I am sorry I do not recall having the privilege of meeting up with Koata and his wife Aana. But I will follow this up when someone from Kiribati, especially an Onotoan, comes this way.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Foua Tofinga', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Foua Tofinga.