

Sangone, A *Lakalaka* from Lapaha: Folklore as Expressed in the Dance in Tonga

A study of dance in Tonga must go back to the more basic art of poetry, for understanding the poetry is essential if one is to understand the meaning of the dance. On the other hand, if one is to study poetry or any other verbal art in Tonga it is essential to study dance, for today folklore is expressed mainly through the medium of dance. Folklore and dance, then, are interrelated arts and must be viewed in relation to the socio-political system which produced them.

There are two basic kinds of dance in Tonga—one which has movement as its main element, and one which accompanies poetry. It is with this latter type that we will be concerned, and it can further be divided into two types. One type sings the praise of the royal family, the high chiefs, and an ethnocentric love of Tonga, and is essentially an expression of allegiance to the established political and social order; the second kind comprises legends and folklore from Tonga's hallowed past, and also from more recent times. Indirectly, however, this second type of poetry functions in the same way as the first. The example discussed in this paper is of this latter type.

The usual kind of dance that accompanies poetry is called *lakalaka*, which literally means 'to walk' and, indeed, the leg movements are basically a walk that moves one step to the left, then one step to the right, and occasionally forward and back. The arm movements are graceful and intricate, deriving their distinctive character from the rotation of the lower arm. The dance is performed by all the men and women of a village ranged in two or

more rows facing the audience. The men stand on the right side (from the observer's point of view) and women stand on the left; the order in which they stand is determined by social status. The men do one set of virile movements while the women do another set of very graceful movements so that there are two dances going on simultaneously. Each group interprets the poem in a manner consistent with the Tongan view of movements suitable and appropriate for each sex. The movements allude to the poetry. They do not pantomime the words, nor do they symbolize in the sense that one movement symbolizes one phrase, or idea. Rather they are figurative: the movements create an abstract picture to which a number of meanings can be assigned, and conversely, one idea can be alluded to by several different sets of movements. This illustrates the Tongan value of 'not going straight,' for the proper way to refer to ideas or concepts is in a round-about way. This value is further exemplified in the poetry, for the words do not necessarily tell the meaning of the poem. Thus the dance creates a double abstraction—the movements allude to the words while the words allude to the hidden meaning (*heiliaki*).

The poetry is a series of concepts and references. Theoretically, these allusions should be readily recognizable in a homogeneous society such as Tonga, where the people have a common cultural tradition, and the poetry is written with the view that only allusions are necessary and the meaning is clear. In fact, however, only a few people, who are usually other poets, claim to understand the allusions with their mythological and genealogical references.

To illustrate these allusive qualities of *lakalaka* poetry I shall use as an example a *lakalaka* from Lapaha, Mu'a, Tongatapu. Lapaha was the former capital of Tonga and the traditional home of the most exalted line of Tongan rulers, the Tu'i Tonga. The people of Lapaha are known for their dancing and their knowledge of the sacred and legendary lore of Tonga. The poetry (*ta'anga*) of this *lakalaka* was composed about 1948 by the late Queen Salote Tupou III, who was a descendant on her mother's side of the Tu'i Tonga line. The melody (*fasi*) and dance movements (*laka*) were created by Vili Pusiaki of Lapaha. This *lakalaka* alludes to the legendary Tongan turtle named Sangone, but the story of Sangone is not told because it is assumed that everyone already knows the story. In fact, the tale of Sangone is only suggested in the poetry by eight lines which are



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a riddle that was used by a Tongan chief to find the shell of Sangone after it was buried in Samoa. The object of the poetry, however, hidden in allusions, symbols, and metaphors, is to trace the genealogy and praise the deeds and accomplishments of Tupou I, progenitor of the present line of kings—the throne now being held by Tupou IV.

The story of the turtle Sangone has been published by E. W. Gifford (1924: 49–52). To summarize the main points, Hina of the underworld and a Samoan lived together in Tonga for a long time. When the Samoan wanted to visit his relatives in his homeland, Hina gave him her mother, a turtle named Sangone, to carry him home. Hina told him that the first thing he must do on his arrival in Samoa was to get a coconut-leaf mat and a bunch of coconuts for Sangone to bring back to Tonga. The Samoan did not do as he was told but went off to visit his relatives. The townspeople cooked Sangone and buried her shell in a hole. A boy named Lafai who saw where they buried Sangone was told that he would remain small where they buried Sangone was found he would die.

When the story reached Tonga that Sangone's shell was buried in Samoa, the King of Tonga sent his brother, Fasi'apule, with a party to look for Sangone's shell. When they arrived in Samoa, they were served the customary *kava* (a ceremonial drink made of an infusion of the root of *Piper methysticum*). Fasi'apule, speaking in riddles that the Samoans did not understand, asked for several items. The people asked Lafai'apana, who by this time was quite old but still a boy in appearance, to interpret the riddles. He knew the references, and Fasi'apule's requests were granted. Fasi'apule then sent for Lafai'apana and asked him where Sangone was buried. After Lafai'apana had showed the Tongan party the place he asked for a "perch for his pigeon" before they dug up Sangone. Fasi'apule, not understanding that this was a riddle, sent his men to get a perch for a pigeon. Lafai'apana told him he was a fool, for he had meant a woman to sleep with. They then dug up Sangone, and as soon as the shell came into view Lafai'apana died; he was buried in Sangone's grave.

The poetry (*ta'anga*) of the *lakalaka* and its translation are as follows:

Ta'anga Sangone, Lakalaka of Lapaha

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|------|----|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| I. | 1 | <i>Ne'ine'i hako mei he Tonga,</i> | Little wonder that strong winds blew from the south |
| | 2 | <i>Tapu e 'u'ula mei Lulunga;</i> | And lightning flashed from Lulunga (Western islands of Ha'apai) |
| | 3 | <i>Na'e muna e Feingakorone,</i> | There was thunder at Feingakorone |
| | 4 | <i>Fakalake e 'uno 'o Sangone.</i> | At the raising of the shell of Sangone. |
| II. | 5 | <i>Lafai'apana e pe'i ke mohe a,</i> | Lafai'apana, go on with your sleep, |
| | 6 | <i>Ka e tuku mai a hofa fa'ava.</i> | Leave our performance to me. |
| | 7 | <i>Ke u lau folu haka he 'aho ni</i> | I will recite with movements this day |
| | 8 | <i>Ke me'te ai e mu'a Talo'i.</i> | That I please the Throne. |
| III. | 9 | <i>Holo pe 'a e nofo 'a mu'a ni,</i> | You in front be content to remain as you are. |
| | 10 | <i>Mō ha sola 'oku taka 'i Pangai,</i> | And any strangers mingling in Pangai, |
| | 11 | <i>Ka u folu si'i Hau-o-Momo</i> | Let me spread the dear Hau-o-Momo, |
| | 12 | <i>He ko e takafi 'etau nofo.</i> | This, the cover of our life. |
| IV. | 13 | <i>He mā'imoa fai 'i Heketa</i> | It was done at Heketa; |
| | 14 | <i>Na'e 'aokai mei Ha'amea;</i> | It was asked from Ha'amea; |
| | 15 | <i>'Isa 'Isa na'e fenua pe' ka ko Nua,</i> | Yes, though sprouted still Nua, |
| | 16 | <i>Peneperua ē ngatu vai fā kula.</i> | Even after mixing with the lime of fā kula. |
| V. | 17 | <i>'E Fasi'apule, ha'u ke ta'ō</i> | Fasi'apule, come let us go |
| | 18 | <i>Tala ho u'unga ki he 'Afio,</i> | Tell your genealogy to the King, |
| | 19 | <i>Ke hā e fua'ngalo na'e to'i</i> | Thus revealing the hidden desire |
| | 20 | <i>'O si'i e 'o'fa 'oku mo'oni</i> | Examine the compassion that is real, |
| | 21 | <i>Na'e 'aikona pe' o 'omui,</i> | It was carried in the <i>ta'ovula</i> and brought, |
| | 22 | <i>He na'e 'ikai fā'a huā'aki.</i> | For it was not mentionable by name. |

- VI. 23 'E Uamoleka, poto 'i he lau, Uamoleka, clever at speaking,
24 Hono 'ikai ke mālie kia au It is most enjoyable to me
25 Ho'o tala 'a e vaha māmā'o. How you talk about distant places.
26 Kuo vaoji hotau 'aho, Our lives have been brought close together—
27 Kakala tala, kakala mo'ori Famous kakala, true kakala (flowers)
28 'Oka faifo 'o toki manongi. Intermixed become fragrant.
VII. 29 Kisukava ē mei Hia'ama An enigmatic kara request from Samoa

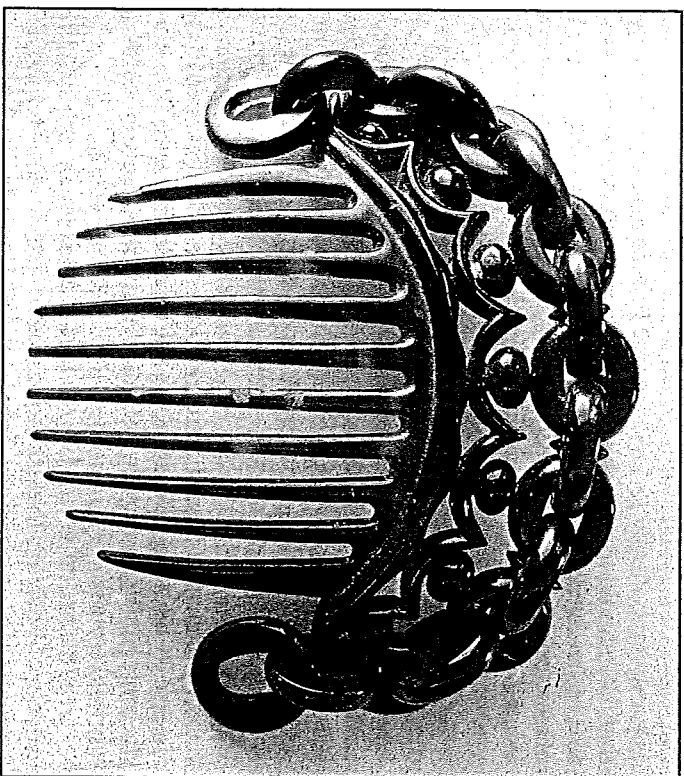


Figure 4.2. Turtle shell comb said to be made from Sangone's shell. The comb now belongs to Princess Pilelevu.

- 30 Na'e tali hupo e me'a katoa Was granted immediately and entirely:
31 Kisu e fika mo kokohu Wish for 'strike and fume'
32 'A e kau pongia 'i vao And 'fainted in the bush'
33 'A e lou tanga mo koki And the 'leaves' high-pitched cry
34 Pea mo e kapakau tatangi, And the 'winged whirling' (sound made by wings)
35 Kau ai ngulungulu mo tokoto And also 'grunt and lie down'
36 Mo e vaha laumafa 'o e fono. And the distribution of the fono (food served with kara).

- VIII. 37 Pea toki 'ilo ai e koloa, And then the treasure was known,
38 Ko e karokato e tala 'o Tonga, The essence of Tongan traditions;
39 Tala ai pē hono fakali, It has ever since been preserved
40 Ko e fakama'u 'o Hou'eiki. As the binding force of the chiefs.

- IX. 41 'Oka 'ilo 'e ha taha kuo anga It is known only by a person of experience,
42 'A e ola 'o tangoipomana. The result of Tangoipomana.
43 Pāhia 'oho he vaha mohe, Worn out by overnight sailing
44 He kalia na'e tau ki 'One. The vessel that landed at 'One,
45 Fakalele ki he Makahokovalu, Run to the Makahokovalu.
46 Paki mangamanga 'i he Break off the forked branch at Siangahu.

- X. 47 Ika moana si'ene fofu, The emerging of the deepsea fish
48 Fakahakehake 'i Fonuamotu, Started up from Fonuamotu,
49 Lolongo mā'au 'i Hakautapu, Silently floated at Hakautapu,
50 No'o 'i Havelu mo e koka tapu. Tied at Havelu to the sacred Koka tree.
51 Ko e ola ē 'oku ou lau, This is the outcome of which I speak
52 Fai'anga ia 'o e fetau. And the reason for my witty speech.
53 Tau tui fala'ahola 'ene hopo, Let us string the mature fala'ahola
54 He kuo kakai e vaha'akolo. There are many people at vaha'akolo.

The first stanza of the *lakalaka* announces the subject of the poetry—the exhuming of the shell of Sangone—and tells us that this accomplishment was so important that there were supernatural occurrences in the form of strong winds, lightning, and thunder.

Stanza 2 is a variation on the stylized opening called the *fakalapu*, which is used in any Tongan speech. This is used in a way similar to the Western custom of addressing the chairman and the ladies and gentlemen of the audience. The Tongan version, however, recognizes the sovereign and the chiefs and, in effect, asks their permission to speak. As this poetry was composed by the Queen and there is no one higher than she to defer to, no elaborate *fakalapu* is necessary. A *fakalapu* during a feast should start by telling the people to go on eating while the speech is given; in keeping with Sangone's story, this *fakalapu* begins by telling Lafaipana to go on with his sleep while the dance performance is given. The *fakalapu* ends by saying explicitly that this performance is to please the Throne. In addition Line 9 acknowledges 'you in front,' that is, the chiefs who are in the fore of the society and who would physically be sitting in the front row at the performance.

Stanza 3 introduces the performers, and says in effect, "Here I am, the famous dance of Lapaha, and you should know who I am." It is addressed to any strangers who happen to be there, for anyone else would know who the performers are. One interpretation of Lines 11 and 12 says that dancing is the cover which Lapaha shows to the world—it is worth displaying and hides any other defects. It is phrased in terms of Sangone's story, as Hau-o-Momo is the proper name of the fine mat (*kie*) which was used to wrap Sangone's shell and is the cover that hides any defects that may have resulted from the shell's long burial. A deeper interpretation of these lines says that the dance will unfold the Hau-o-Momo, that is, Sangone's story and how it embodies the sacred Tongan traditions.

Stanzas 4 and 5 then tell the genealogy of the main character, Fasi'apule, and how he was related to the King of Tonga, the Tu'i Tonga Tu'itātui (see diagram). Two stories are mentioned and a proverb is incorporated which has its origin in one of the stories. People are referred to by the proper name of their residences. The Tu'i Tonga Momo of Heketa, speaking in riddles, sent a message to Lo'au of Ha'amea to send his *fenua* (a sprouted seed yam), meaning his daughter Nua, who had already given birth to Fasi'apule by

Ngongo Kilito. In spite of the fact that she was already a mother, she was still a very beautiful woman. This gave rise to the proverb, '*fenua pe ka ko Nua*,' although she has sprouted yet Nua, which is used to refer to anything that is used or second-hand but still desirable (Collocott and Havea 1922:48). Line 16 in metaphorical language tells of her deed. *Penepenua* is a lime mixture used by chiefs to make their hair beautiful and here means that she has already mixed with a chief who is symbolized as *fā kula*. *Fā kula* are keys of a type of pandanus used as a necklace for chiefs and refers to a renowned person with lovely skin—lovely skin being a meaning of Kilito, the second half of her lover's name.

Nua later had a child by the Tu'i Tonga Momo who eventually became the Tu'i Tonga Tu'itātui, but the child was never told that he had a half brother, Fasi'apule. Stanza 5 refers to the time when Fasi'apule, who was bringing food to the Tu'i Tonga, used objects to show symbolically to Tu'itātui that he was his half brother, and that they should treat each other with compassion. Fasi'apule says that he has carried the secret '*zikona*,' which means in the top part of his *ta'ovua* (a mat worn around the waist without which a Tongan is not 'dressed'). This means he carried the secret close to him, for it was not proper that he should mention it.

So far, then, we have been introduced to the subject (Stanza 1), the *fakalapu* or stylized speech prelude has been given (Stanza 2), the dancers have introduced themselves and the story they are going to tell (Stanza 3), and the main character has been introduced and his genealogy and background told (Stanzas 4 and 5).

Stanza 6 serves a number of purposes. Ulanoleka was a well-known poet who spoke eloquently on a number of subjects. Ula and Leka are also titles of a class of ceremonial attendants, known as *toutai*, whose duties are connected with navigation and the sea. By alluding to Ulanoleka, the story is advanced by getting the protagonist, Fasi'apule, to Samoa, where the main events of the story take place.

In addition, however, Ula mo leka is an example, celebrated in poetry, of bridging the gap between the Tu'i Tonga and the Tu'i Kanokupolu lines of kings. Leka was a *toutai* of the Tu'i Tonga and Ula was a *toutai* of the Tu'i Kanokupolu. Ula who was adopted by Leka, became known as Ulanoleka and is reported to have told how he brought the two lines together by virtue of his being born into one

line and adopted into the other; however, the two lines of *foulati* go on (Gifford 1929: 142, 233–234). This sets the stage for the references to the intermixture of the two lines of kings culminating with the present titleholder referred to in Stanza 10. The importance of mixing two lines of kings in order to get the best possible descendants is here phrased metaphorically, as it is the *mixture* of sweet-smelling flowers that makes them fragrant. Ulanoleka further serves the continuity of the composition in that a *foulati* ceremonial attendant presides at the King's *kaua* ceremony for three days after a voyage and it is at one of these *kaua* ceremonies that the next stanza takes place.

Stanza 7 gives the riddles used by Fasi'apule to find Sangone's shell. At the *kaua* ceremony he asks metaphorically for a number of things which he knows that only a wise old man can provide correctly. These are: (1) 'strike and fume,' referring to broken-off roots of *kaua* which were left in the ground and are very powdery when beaten; (2) 'fainted in the bush,' referring to the wild plantains found in the forest; (3) 'leaves high-pitched cry,' referring to the sound made when the immature leaves are plucked from the taro plant; (4) 'winged whirring,' referring to wild chicken that flies; and (5) 'grunt and lie down,' referring to a pig so large it just lies down and grunts. Thus only Stanza 7 actually tells any part of Sangone's story and it is a riddle, emphasizing again the Tongan way of indirect or roundabout explanation.

Line 36 is probably the key to the poem. It is part of Sangone's story, while at the same time it is the transition to the purpose of the poetry which the beginning of the poem introduces. In the legend there is a specific point of Fasi'apule taking a large share of the *kaua* food for distribution to his people, and of his doing the apportioning himself. When applied to Tupou I, this refers to his division of the land of Tonga, which was his rightful property, won by force of arms. He apportioned the land into a number of hereditary estates, each under a noble, who in turn distributes eight and a quarter acres to each male over sixteen years of age.

Although Lines 37 to 40 outwardly refer to Sangone's shell, the hidden meaning is that this land division is a cherished tradition still followed today, and is one of the things that bind the chiefs together. Metaphorically this says that what the King has, the people get a portion of, in contrast to the time previous to Tupou I when the

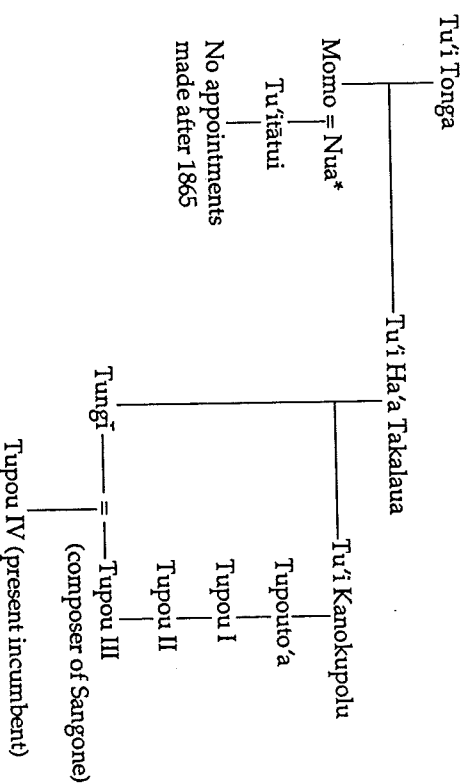
people worked only for the king and no share was given to them.

The next two lines refer to Tangoipomana, the proper name of the bonito hook made from Sangone's shell. When the last Tu'i Tonga sold the shell in Fiji after he became a Christian, Tupou I heard about it and bought the shell. This symbolizes the end of the power of the Tu'i Tonga line and also the end of the old religion. Tupou I became the new ruler, keeper of traditions, and head of the church. The remainder of Stanza 9 refers to the father of Tupou I, Tupou'o'a. He died on the small island of 'One and was taken by boat to be buried in Makahokovalu, a terraced tomb in 'Uliha in the central group of Tongan Islands. Makahokovalu, a common symbol for the Tu'i Kanokupolu, emphasizes the shift in reference from the Tu'i Tongas concerned in Sangone's story to the Tu'i Kanokupolu. Line 46 possibly refers to a branch to satisfy Lafaipana's request for a perch for his pigeon.

In the Tongan view of the world the biggest fish inhabit the deepest part of the ocean. Deep-sea fish (*ika moana*) are thus the biggest fish, and in Stanza 10 signify the Tu'i Kanokupolu chiefs and their rise in power and rank even though they were only the third line of kings, the Tu'i Tonga and Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua lines being of higher rank (see diagram). The poetry tells us that their rise started from Fonumotu, the residence of, and thus the symbol of, the first Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua, who was the son of a Tu'i Tonga. The Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua line of temporal rulers gave rise to the Tu'i Kanokupolu line, which eventually overshadowed the other two lines by force of arms. This made them more powerful but did not give them higher rank. They did gain higher rank, however, in the only way possible, which is by marrying women of exalted rank. Specifically, chiefs of the Tu'i Kanokupolu line married women of the Tu'i Tonga line. Thus, by the intermarriage of the two lines, the Tu'i Kanokupolu and Tu'i Tonga blood lines became equally exalted as they are today.

The poet is saying, then, that the Tu'i Kanokupolu line began its rise with the division of power into spiritual (Tu'i Tonga) and temporal (Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua) lines. Hakaupapu in Line 49 is the sacred reef for bonito fishing for the Tu'i—originally for the Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua, but later for the Tu'i Kanokupolu—and refers to the fact that the privileges of the Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua were transferred to the Tu'i Kanokupolu. Finally the Tu'i Kanokupolu became the

Three Lines of Tongan Kings



*Nua was also the mother of Fasi'apule by Ngongo Kilioto, thus Tu'itātui and Fasi'apule are half brothers.

supreme ruler, symbolized in the poetry as being tied to the sacred *koka* tree, a tree traditionally used as a back rest during the coronation of the Tu'i Kanokupolu at a place called Havelu in the village of Kanokupolu.

The second part of Stanza 10 ends the poem by telling us that the reason for the poetry is the commemoration of the great deeds of the chiefly ancestors of the present King, such as the retrieval of Sangone's shell and the distribution of land. It is such deeds that elevated the chiefs of old, and it is their descendants who are today's chiefs, responsible for leading the people and making possible celebrations such as the one during which this *lakalaka* is performed. The celebration (*kitianga*) is referred to in the words "there are many people at *vaha'akolo*" (the area that divides two villages at the place where the palace stands). Line 53, a stylized statement borrowed from an ancient dance type *fa'atutu*, refers to the stringing of pandanus keys for a necklace worn by high chiefs at celebrations.

The second part of this stanza, then, brings us back to the present and acknowledges the high position of the chiefs to whom the people owe their allegiance. This is the closing counterpart of the *fakalapu* in Stanza 2.

The preoccupation with genealogy, apparent in the poetry, reflects the importance of ancestry in the Tongan social system. On the social level all titles and property are validated by appealing to genealogy, and on an everyday level all interpersonal relationships are determined by the genealogies of the persons involved. The structure of the poetry also pays strict attention to the rules of Tongan etiquette, which also is based on a hierarchical ranking of persons. The *fakalapu* (Stanza 2) must acknowledge the presence of chiefs and people of high rank; and the ending must again refer to the chiefs by bringing attention back to them. It is a stylized way for the *lakalaka* to ask for permission to speak, and after having spoken, again defer to the chiefs.

The story, then—that of Sangone in this case—is really secondary and is used as a vehicle for presenting the real object of the poetry and its accompanying dance: to pay allegiance to the established order of Tongan society.

The poetry can be interpreted in many different ways and on many different levels. This paper suggests only a few of the many possible meanings. Many of the references are quite obscure and hidden in rhetoric and metaphorical language. Even the performers seldom know the meaning of what they are performing. They know that the references are to chiefs, but the actual stories and circumstances are known only to other poets who deal in similar Tongan lore, and sometimes to the choreographer, who may be given an explanation by the poet who composed it. The interpretation given here is a composite of information given to me by several individuals, including dancers who knew only a few of the references, a ceremonial attendant (*falefi*) who helps to teach the dance and explained the obscure references in Stanza 7, and a woman employed in the Palace Office who knew the meaning of Stanza 8. Only the Honourable Ve'ehala, keeper of the Palace records, knew the meanings of Hau-o-Momo, Tangoipomana, the reference to *ika moana*, and the meaning of Stanza 9. Ve'ehala, however, is a prolific poet who has written *lakalaka* poetry for his own village as well as official *lakalaka* for the Tongan government.

The performance of the poetry with dance accompaniment is usually on state occasions, as a 'gift' to the Palace, along with first fruits or on other food giving occasions, as a farewell or welcome for one of the royal family, for local celebrations such as the dedication of a new church, or as a welcome to visiting dignitaries. As in any living dance tradition, the forms of dance in Tonga have changed. The poetry which dance accompanies, however, still makes reference to the same or similar themes: cosmology; legendary origin of monuments, tombs, and fabulous ships; heroes and beautiful women; sacred animals; and stories associated with outstanding local events. The performances serve the chiefs today just as they have always done—to honour and entertain them, and to demonstrate the allegiance of their subjects. As long as the present social system of Tonga remains, dances of this type will no doubt continue to be created and performed.