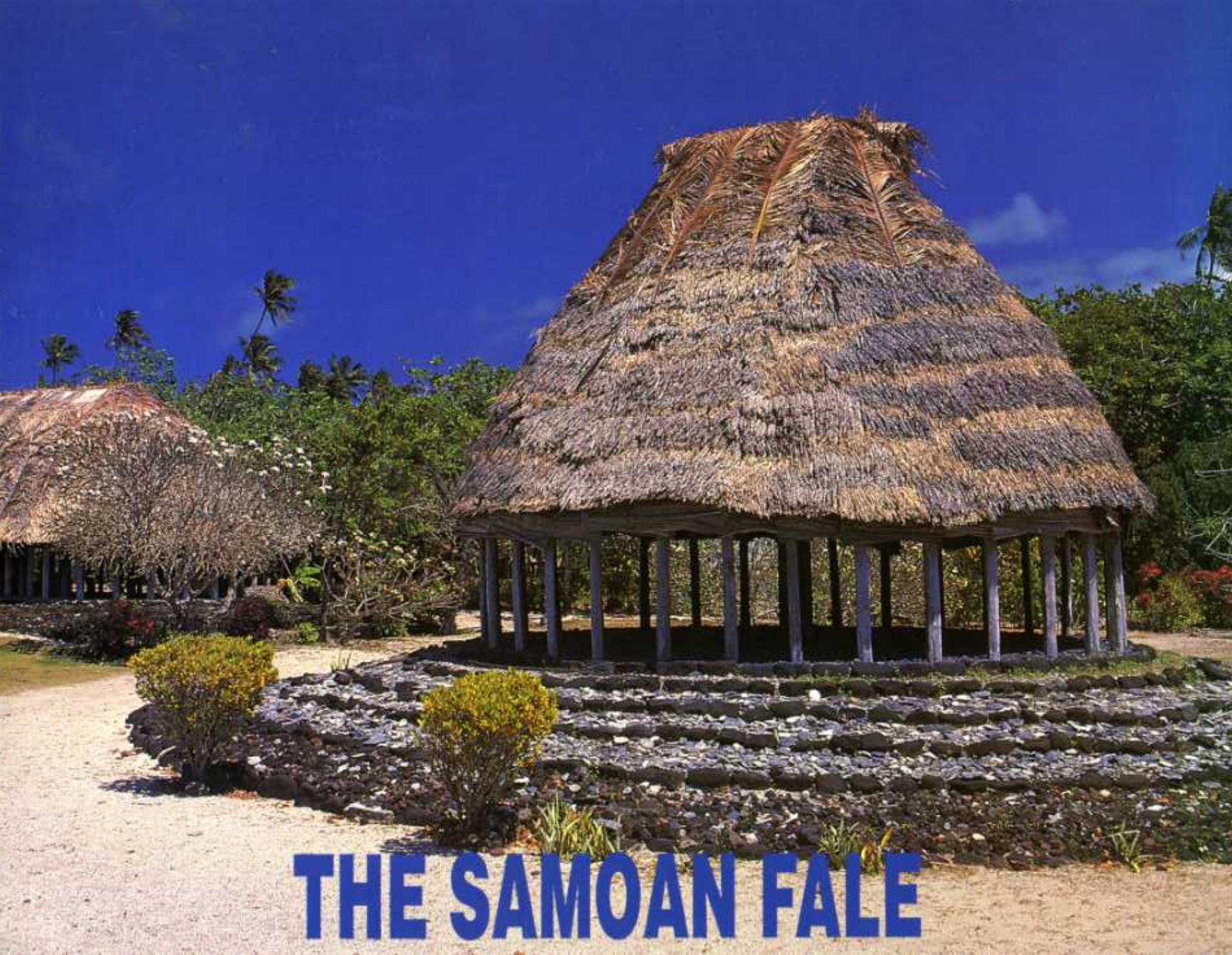
THE SAMOAN FALE

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UNESCO OFFICE FOR THE PACIFIC STATES

Report printed under UNESCO-AGFUND Regional Project, Development of Educational Facilities in Asia and the Pacific

Published in cooperation between UNESCO Office for the Pacific States and
UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

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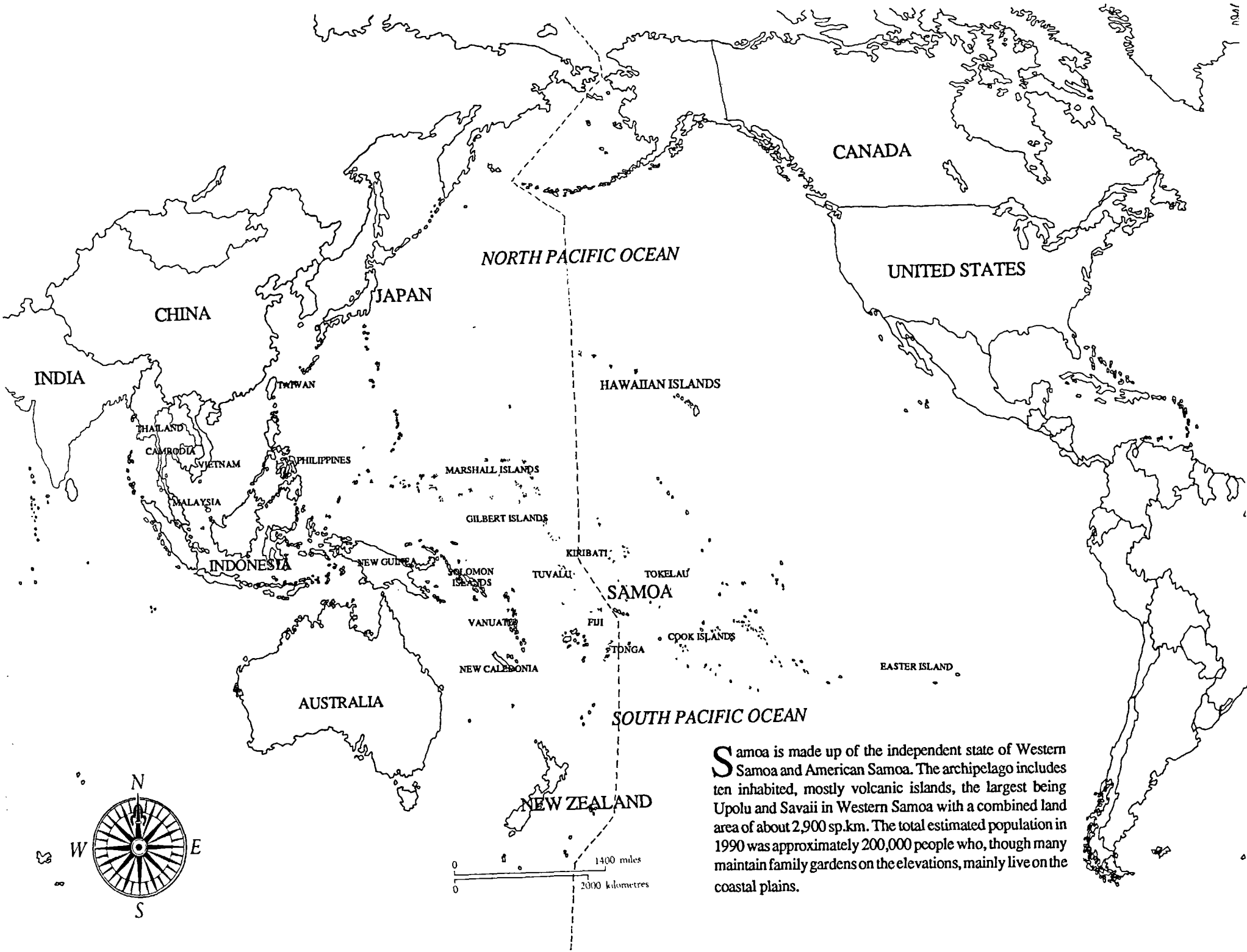
Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Printed in Thailand

Table of Contents

	Foreword	1
Chapter 1:	*A Samoan Village*	4
Chapter 2:	*Introduction to the Meeting and Guest Houses*	8
Chapter 3:	*Building a Fale: Preparations, Materials and Special Techniques*	14
Chapter 4:	*Building the Fale Tele (measured drawings)*	28
Chapter 5:	*Building the Fale Afolau (measured drawings)*	50
Chapter 6:	*Furnishings*	64
Chapter 7:	*Feasts and Ceremonies*	66
Chapter 8:	*Guild of Builders*	72
Chapter 9:	*Fale for Non-Traditional Purposes*	74
Appendix:	*Terminology*	77



Samoa is made up of the independent state of Western Samoa and American Samoa. The archipelago includes ten inhabited, mostly volcanic islands, the largest being Upolu and Savaii in Western Samoa with a combined land area of about 2,900 sp.km. The total estimated population in 1990 was approximately 200,000 people who, though many maintain family gardens on the elevations, mainly live on the coastal plains.

F O R E W O R D

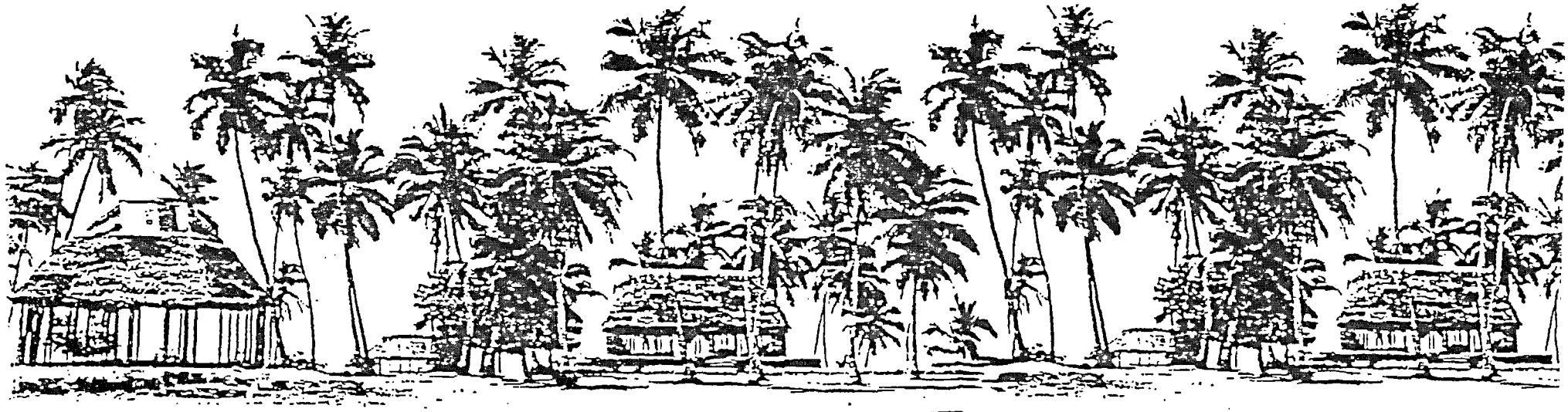
*"**Fale**" is the word for house in the language of Samoa, a small but culturally important island country situated in the south-eastern Pacific on the westward north south leg of the Polynesian Triangle, the extremities of which are Hawaii in the north, Easter Island in the east, and New Zealand in the south.*

*Samoa is the last of the Polynesian countries to make extensive use, even today, of its own traditional architecture in the construction of houses. Nowhere in the Pacific is a more felicitous traditional dwelling to be found. Pleasing to the eye, a standing tribute to its builders, open to the cooling sea breeze, highly resistant to cyclones, able to accommodate large numbers of people for formal meetings, to eat, relax, sleep... the **fale** does indeed seem to be without peer in combining so many positive features.*

*UNESCO has long encouraged the study of the world's traditional architecture as a means of promoting the cultural heritage. Moreover, Apia, Western Samoa, is home to the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States. For these two reasons, the Head of the Apia Office (co-author of this book) together with John Beynon, former Principal Architect of UNESCO's Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, decided to honour this significant cultural achievement by producing an illustrated study of how the **Fale** is constructed.*

*To that end, the services of French architect-photographer, Philippe Lair (D.P.L.G.), were retained. His assignment: capture on film the finest of the essentially ceremonial **fale** — those known as the **fale afolau** (long house) and **fale tele** (round house); document their place in the "faa-Samoa", that is the Samoan culture or "way of living"; analyze and describe the construction techniques; and render the construction in the form of a set of detailed drawings. Co-author, Peter Higginson, was given the task of turning Lair's work into prose.*

The undertaking proved far more complicated than initially imagined. Traditional builders with a knowledge not only of the techniques but the appropriate vocabulary proved to be in short supply. Obtaining complete agreement between experts on methods and terminology proved impossible with the result that any Samoan builder reading



F O R E W O R D

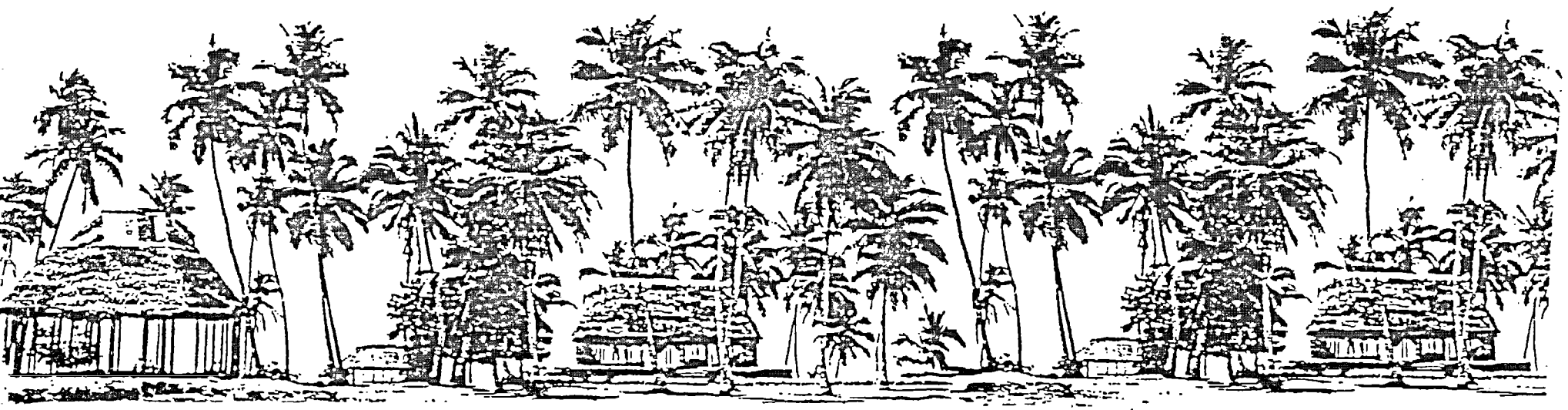
this text might take issue with one or another description. Notwithstanding, both Lair and Higginson went to great ends to check and recheck all the technical details (and the spelling) and feel confident that they reflect the views of the majority.

The book has four specific purposes. The first is quite obviously to produce an elegant tribute to this particular cultural genius. The second is to provide those with a superficial knowledge of Samoa with the means of increasing their appreciation of the country and of its people through a better understanding of one of its most striking achievements. Third, the book is intended to promote national pride and interest in Samoa's cultural heritage.

The fourth and final purpose, perhaps the most open to question, was nevertheless what prompted the authors to think of the project in the first instance. The book is an attempt to record an organized body of knowledge about an important subject not in the belief that the resulting work would pass the test of rigorous research but simply because there are fewer and fewer traditional builders. No known beginning-to-end detailed study of fale construction exists, at least in English, not even one with the modest pretensions of what is contained in the following pages.

Is it possible for anyone to build a fale using this book alone as a guide? Unlikely. But a group of partially informed Samoans will probably find that this book will provide some useful information which has either been forgotten or was never properly learned in the first place. And in any case, the fale, being Samoan, would only be built by Samoans for Samoans. Whatever the outcome, the authors' fondest hope is that they will never forget the greatness of the noble ***fale afolau and fale tele****. The day they do, they will have lost a major part of their identity.*

A final word on the use of Samoan words: wherever possible all Samoan words and especially those of a technical nature are translated into the closest possible English language equivalent. A note of caution must, however, be sounded since Samoan building methods and materials differ so greatly from their European counterparts. Because the Samoan language is unusually rich in qualifying words, an effort was made to retain their special flavour by



F O R E W O R D

using the Samoan followed by its approximate English equivalent in order to convey both meaning and sentiment. The reader alone must, finally, be the judge of the wisdom of this decision.

The information set forth in the following pages is the gift to the authors from others, too numerous to mention. It is hoped that their trust has not been misplaced. Finding the technical respondents, the language specialist, and those with a knowledge of the intricacies of the ***faa-Samoa*** *took almost as much time as preparing the text.*

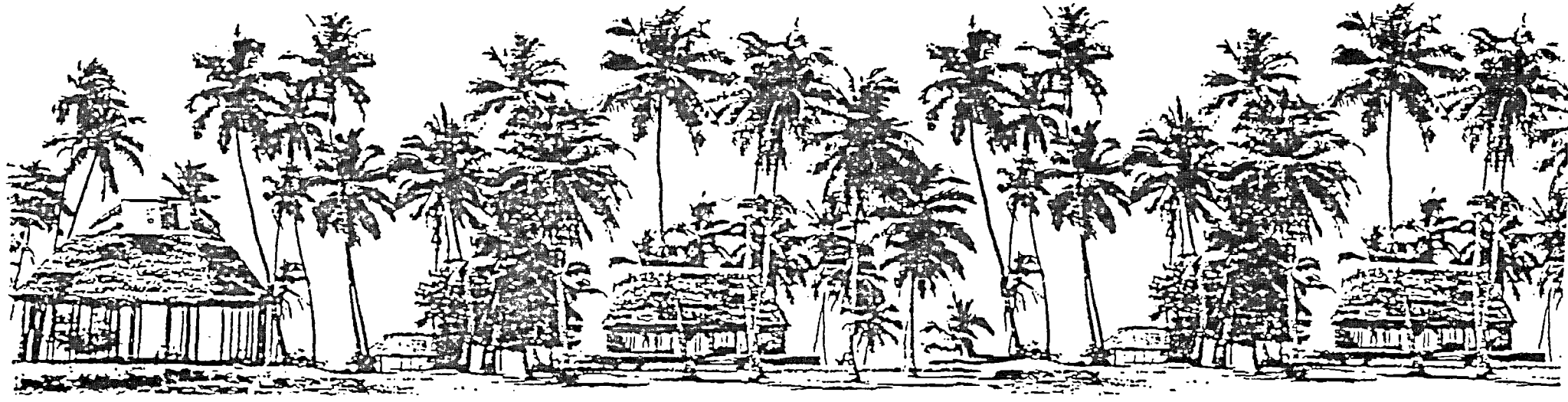
Special thanks are recorded for the help of Afioga Tuuu Ieti Taule'alo, Architect and former Deputy Director of the Ministry of Works, whose assistance to Mr Lair in making contacts with traditional builders and in guiding the study were indispensable; to Galo Tuiletufuga Apelu whose chiefly connections opened many doors; and to Afioga Ma'ilata Taigaga Palepoi who, in addition to explaining the protocol of matai council meetings, provided the drawing showing how people are seated in a welcoming ceremony.

Pernille Askerud is responsible for the transformation of a cardboard box of photos, drawings, and text into the present book. But the real heroes are the Samoan people whose culture provided the subject and whose pride in their accomplishments furnished more than enough encouragement to the authors to see the task through to completion despite the many problems to be resolved.

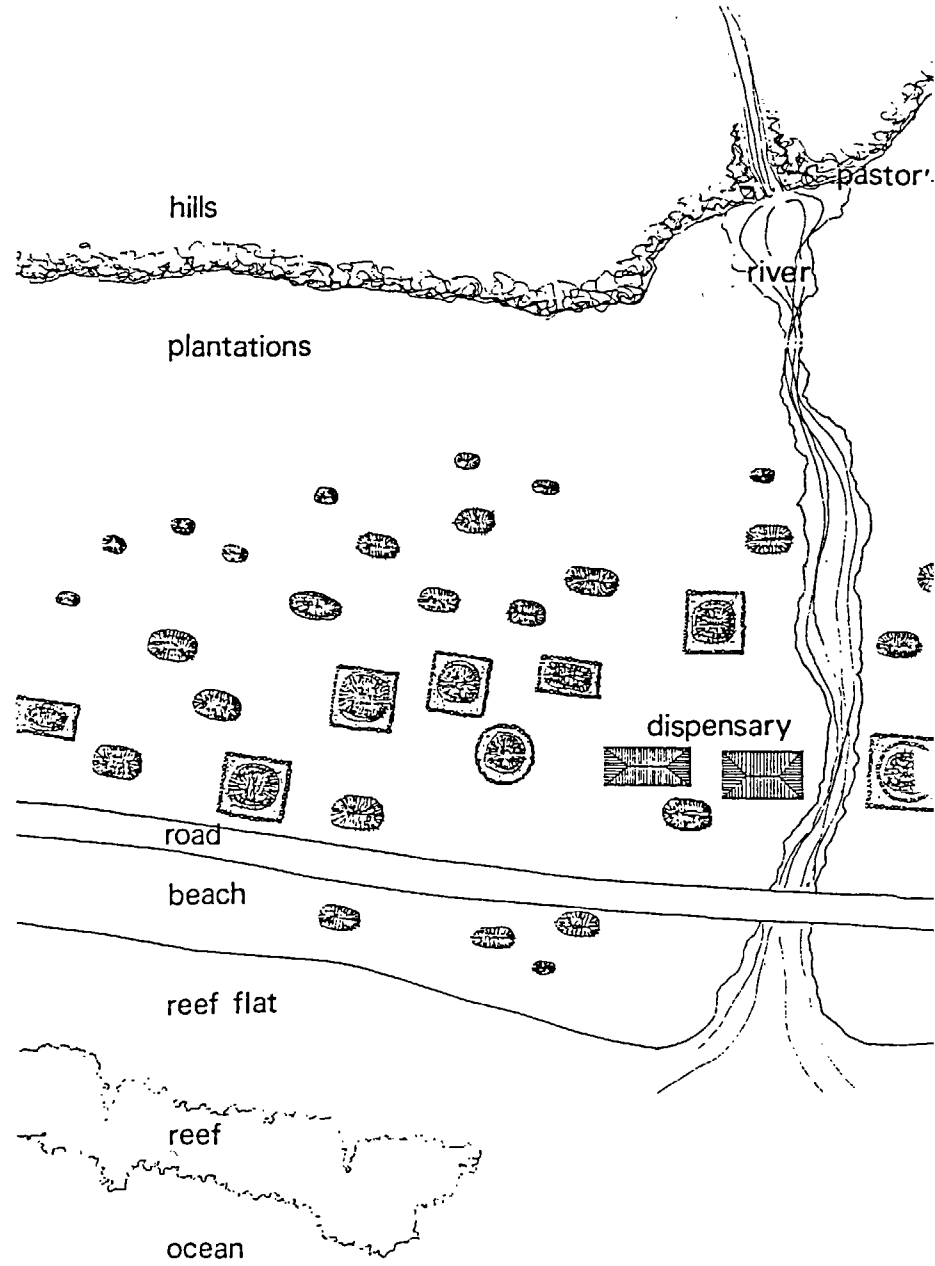
Only the reader and time can say whether the four objectives stated above have been achieved but the authors would not wish to ascribe to anyone but themselves any shortcomings of fact or taste for which they alone assume full responsibility. The contents of this book reflect their views and are not necessarily those of UNESCO.

F.L. Higginson

Chief of Mission
UNESCO Office for the Pacific States
Apia, Western Samoa
March 1992



Chapter 1: A Samoan village

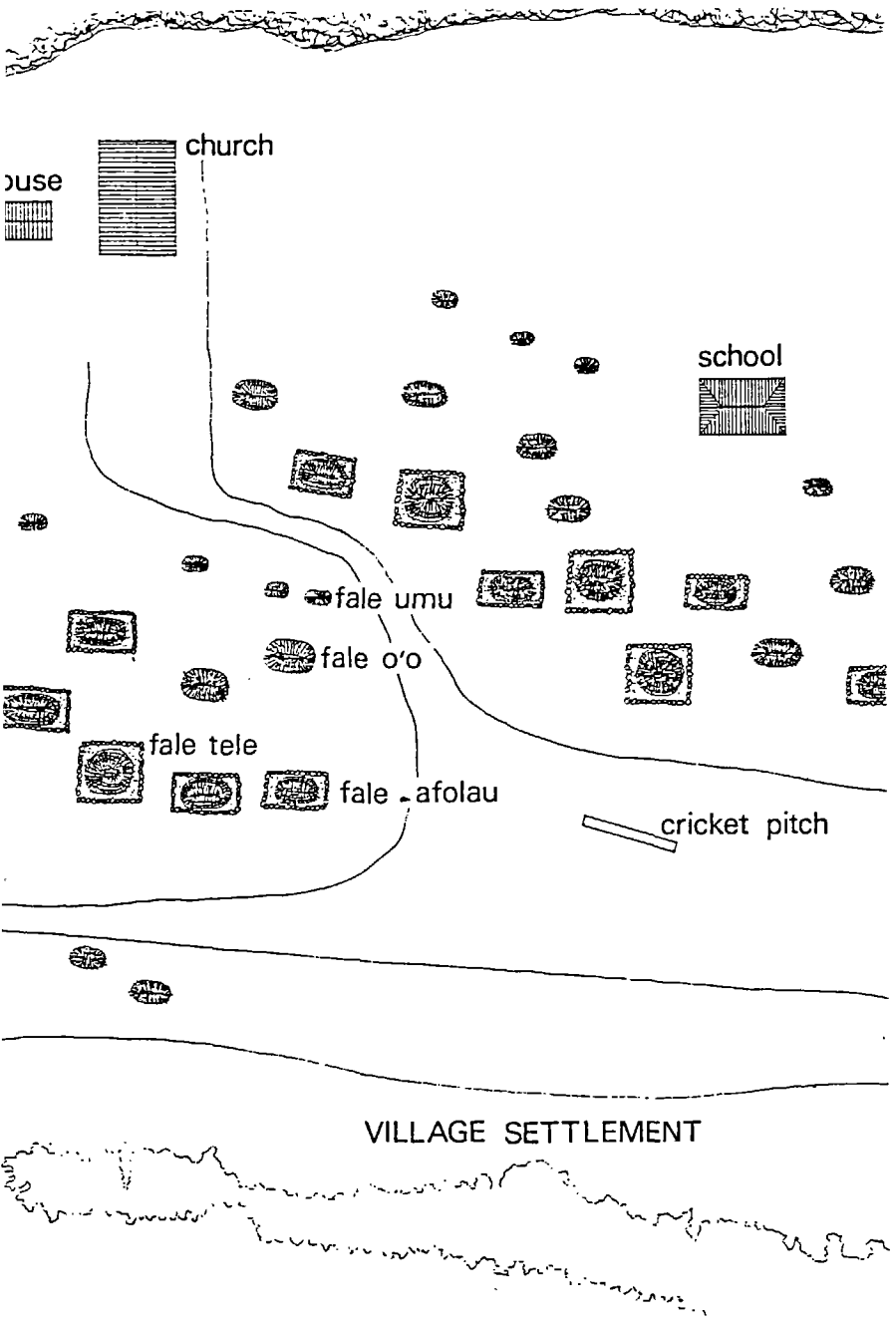


The visual harmony of Samoan villages owes its existence to two main sources. The first is the accident of an unusually kind pre-history of volcanic eruptions which left mountains and a coastline of undisputed beauty; the second is an ostensibly unconscious genius on the part of the Samoans who, to the visitor, seem not only to have chosen the most visually felicitous sites for villages but seemingly laid them out so that peace to the eye of the beholder was ensured.

Many villages, particularly the small ones lying along the coast, are transected by a single road, the part lying next to the lagoon being referred to as *ituala i gatai* and the one on the inland side as *ituala i guata*. For the villages lying entirely inland, the houses are often laid out in a circle. In both cases, flowers and shrubs are everywhere, often planted as borders, arbors, or to line paths and the grass, cut with bush knives, is kept cut short and well swept.

The social organization

The family leaders in a village are part of a dual hierarchy of *matai* (titled persons). One category of *matai* is the *ali'i* or chiefs. High chiefs are referred to as *ali'i sili* or *sa'oali'i*, less powerful ones as *usoali'i*.



The other type of *matai* is the *tulafale* or talking chief (orator). High talking chiefs are called *tulafale taua* and the lower ranking ones *faleupolu*. Since a given title is part of the heritage and birthright of an individual *aiga* (family) - and an *aiga* may contain 100 or more recognized members - it follows that when a title falls vacant (normally through death) and must be filled, it is necessarily in one category or the other (*ali'i* or *tulafale*) and at a set rank. Families are thus no more at liberty to change the nature of the title (for example from orator to chief) than they are - as will be seen subsequently - to live and build wherever and however they choose.

The difference between the two types of titles may appear arbitrary to non-Samoans (*palagi*) but is nevertheless of tremendous importance. The *matai* who holds an *ali'i* (chief's) title is, in the absolute, more powerful than a *tulafale* (orator) of corresponding rank. Of the two, however, only the *tulafale* is normally empowered to speak in village councils where official decisions affecting village and *aiga* matters are taken. The orators then are the institutionalized "power-behind-the-throne" and it is not an exaggeration to say that in this symbiotic relation the power of the *ali'i* is a direct function of the *tulafale's* oratorical skills.

Parliamentary-style debating skills, while important, are not by themselves sufficient to influence council decisions. Power is established in the first instance by determining the order of speakers, length of talking time, right of reply and the like, all of which depend upon the hierarchy of all the *matai* present. This hierarchy is not something absolute but varies partly in accordance with the particular people who are actually participating in a council meeting but more especially with the capacity of the *tulafale* for the 'creative' use of genealogy. A good *tulafale* will thus not only have an encyclopedic knowledge of that of his own *aiga* but an extensive knowledge of the genealogies of all the *matai* present. Memory, then, is king - that and the ability to use history selectively to establish position power in the decision-making process.

Being a *matai* of a family, whether *alii* or *tulafale*, carries heavy responsibilities and most take their duties seriously, particularly those with high-ranking titles. When a title becomes vacant, discussions are held throughout the length and breadth of the *aiga potopoto* (extended family) to determine who is the most deserving and the one most likely not only to look after the internal interests of the *aiga* but advance its power and prestige both within the village and beyond. Where very high, much sought after titles are concerned, the process can take months and even years before a decision is reached. Both men and women are in theory eligible but of the over 20,000 titles in Western Samoa alone, only a small fraction are held by women.

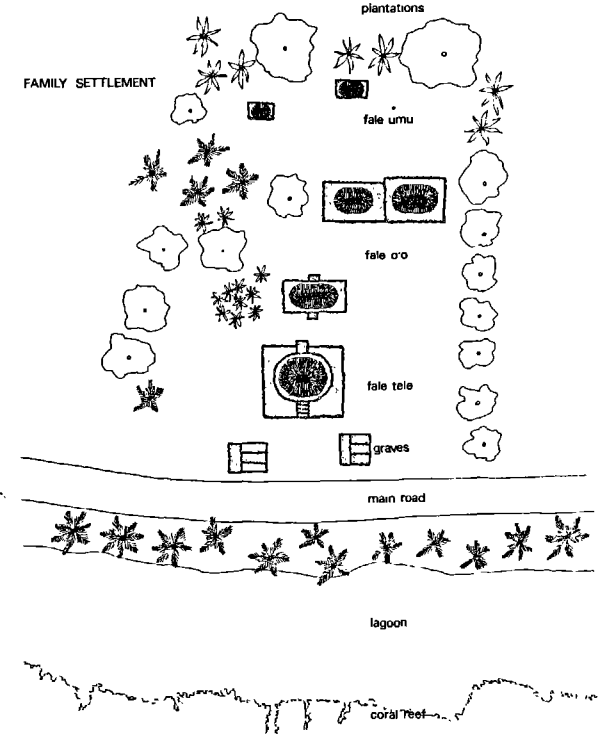
Once the title is conferred and the *matai* named (n.b. it is entirely possible for an individual to hold more than one title if, by blood ties, he or she is linked to more than one *aiga*) the *aiga* and especially the immediate family of the new *matai* donates as much as they can afford (and sometimes considerably more - being deeply in debt is the common lament of new title holders!) to the village council: pigs, taro, tinned corned beef and fish, money, tapa, and 'fine mats' which, as the name implies, are made of finely woven pandanus leaves and have an exclusively ceremonial exchange function. The council in turns shares all these things out among its members. From that day on, the newly-elected matai will look after the affairs of his/her *aiga* including allocation of land, money sent from overseas relatives and of course certain basic matters relating to the construction of a *fale*.

Layout of a settlement

Typically, and particularly outside the capital (Apia in Western Samoa, Pago Pago in American Samoa), each family's land stretches in strips from the sea inland if on the coast, or from the bush towards the road if there is no sea frontage. All families in a village build their houses following the same basic pattern, according to established tradition.

At the front of each family holding is built the family's *fale tele* or guest house. The *fale tele* is always round. Just behind the guest house is the *fale afolau* (long house) in which the matai and his immediate family live. Some families have built their *fale afolau* at the front and use them as guest houses. In both cases, however, only highly-specialized carpenters are normally used in the construction of these *fales*. They are built from a variety of selected timbers, decorated and elevated on stone platforms.

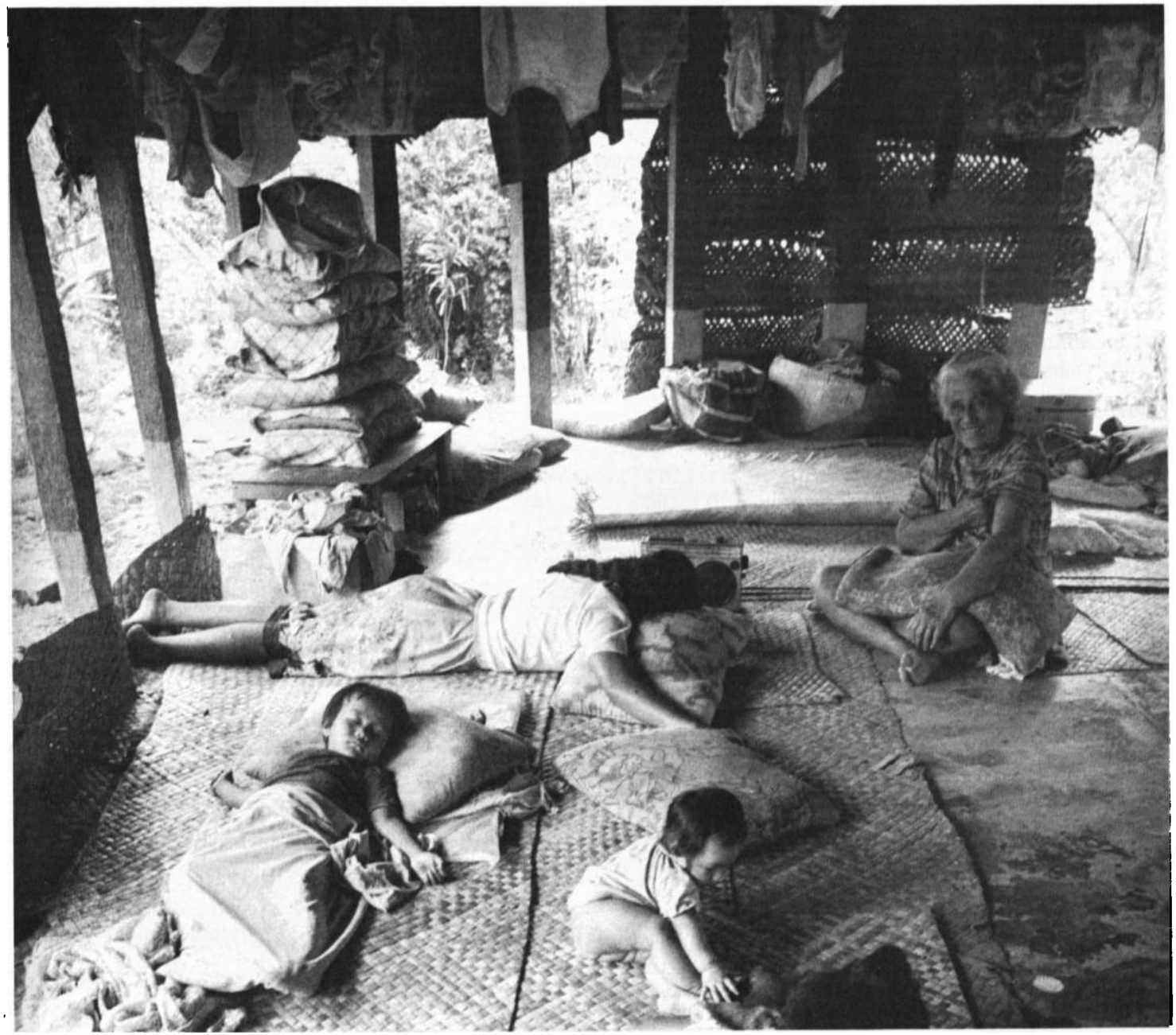
Of the many versions of the fale, the *fale tele* and *fale afolau* are the most complex and it is these two which are the subject of the following chapters. All other traditional constructions are derivations of them and while simpler, use essentially the same techniques and materials.



Lined up behind the *fale tele* and *fale afolau* are several smaller houses, some intended for family members to live in, others for various manual activities and the backmost one (discounting the toilet) for cooking. Here the free running pigs and chickens congregate and are fed (until their own ultimate contribution to the *aiga's* welfare); here too, are planted the bananas, the breadfruit, the papaya (taro is usually planted in a separate patch).

Known as the *fale umu*, the cook house has a stone floor and a smoke-blackened roof and timbers. Fires are built on the stone floor to heat it up and when the stones are judged to be hot enough, the untitled men will place the taro, breadfruit and various packages of food - fish, chicken, coconut cream in young taro leaves - wrapped up in banana and breadfruit leaves. The pile of packages is in turn covered in more banana leaves, old mats or whatever is handy to keep the heat in.

Apart from the buildings belonging to the individual families, there is a host of other common facilities in the village: the school, copra sheds, long boat and outrigger canoe sheds, a cricket pitch, a village water pipe where people come to bath and collect water for the family, perhaps a thatch-covered bus stop, and, most prominent of all, one or more churches, often of cathedral proportions and built of coral cement. Even the smallest, most remote villages boast of a church and sometimes a very grand one with twin bell towers, a full-facade set of steps, and even a variation on the 'rose' window, a trademark of French Renaissance cathedral architecture.



Chapter 2: Introduction to the Meeting and Guest Houses

Even a superficial analysis of the unusual design of the fale reveals how successfully it satisfies several requirements. The high vaulted roof and open sides (save for the supporting posts) assure maximum coolness. The steep pitch of the roof is remarkably resistant to high winds. Indeed the much-publicized 'Cyclone Ofa' which battered the Samoas for three days in February 1990 with over 100 knot winds left the islands littered with the wreckage of destroyed European style houses which had low profile roofs. In contrast most fales, provided they were sufficiently inland to escape the fury of the sea, remained intact save for a 'frowsy' thatch here and there.

As noted in the previous chapter, there are two types of meeting or guest houses, the *fale tele* or round house and the *fale afolau* or long house. The *fale tele* has between one and three centre posts at the top of which is fixed the vaulted roof. The roof's height is dictated by the number of *so'a* - vertical collar beams. The highest one believed to have been built had 11 but more commonly a fale will have 7 *so'a*.

The *fale afolau* on the other hand is essentially an elongated *fale tele* having straight sides and rounded half domes at either end. The length of the *fale afolau* is obviously dictated in large measure by the number of crossbeams (*utu poto*) which lie on top of the posts on the two sides and which form the platform on which the central part of the roof is constructed.

In both types of fale, protection from the elements is provided by wall screens or blinds (*pola sisi*). Resembling wide Venetian blinds, the *pola* are made of loosely plaited coconut leaf mats which are raised or lowered at need on the outer side of the posts. When wind and rain blow into the *fale*, the *pola* are lowered on the windward side only. Contrary to what Europeans and Asians might imagine, they are never lowered for privacy and indeed once the rain has stopped, the *pola* are raised.

The most is made of the building materials at hand and, judging by the vast quantity of 'sennit' (braided coconut fibre) used in tying the whole structure together, especially of the ubiquitous coconut palm. The raised stone platform on which the fale is erected is traditionally covered with sea-rounded pebbles which are cool to the touch and, with a sleeping mat thrown on them, make a remarkably forgiving mattress.

Mats are put down on the pebble (or in a more recently built *fale*, the cement) floor when people enter a *fale* to rest or meet. Most mats are 3 x 8 feet and however many are required to cover the floor are put out. Made occasionally of coconut but usually of pandanus leaves, they are rolled up and stacked on shelves or beams when not in use.

Participants gathering for a meeting in a *fale tele* or *fale afolau* immediately proceed to take their seats in front of preassigned posts. One's place in the circle is determined by the relative rank of each village *matai* attending or, in the case of outsiders, by the role each visitor is expected to play in the meeting (see diagramme this and next page).

On the host *matai's* right are the seats reserved for other village chiefs; on the left, those for the visitors. Obviously the host *matai* may not have the highest title in the gathering which is why the middle of either side is reserved for the highest ranking *alii* and *tulafale* - host village and visitors thus facing each other.

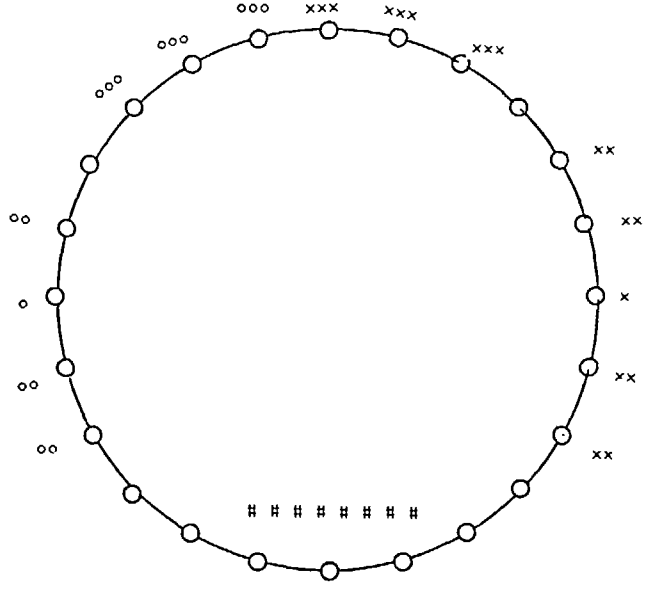
Those without titles are normally welcome to listen to the discussions but always sit on the edge of the raised stone platform outside the posts.

The women are also free to use the guest house for Women's Committee meetings, the importance of which to the general running of the village should not be underestimated. The host *matai's* wife sits in her husband's place; kava is served the same as for the men, and issues discussed and decided. Just as important, they range from the simple to the complex - assigning menial tasks to one family or another; discussing the bad behaviour and punishment to be given to some young *tama leaga ona tele* who "went too far"; debating boundary questions and the like. In one village in Upolu, the Women's Committee became disgusted with the combined ineffectiveness or constant absence of the village chiefs and in effect threw the remaining ones out. While writing this that village is run exclusively by the women.

One's physical place in a meeting is not the only important consideration in judging the relative significance of the occasion or the people present. The fale itself - its floor size, height, the number of *so'a* (beams), the decorations, the length (if it is a *fale afolau*) - all these and more reflect the status and position of the family in the village.

Under no circumstances would a prospective builder seek to construct something grander than the village chief. An *ali'i* would expect (and be expected) to have at least one more set of beams than his corresponding *tulafale* (orator). If a high chief's house has seven so'a, his orator would thus normally have no more than six.

WELCOMING A "MALAGA". (VISITORS)

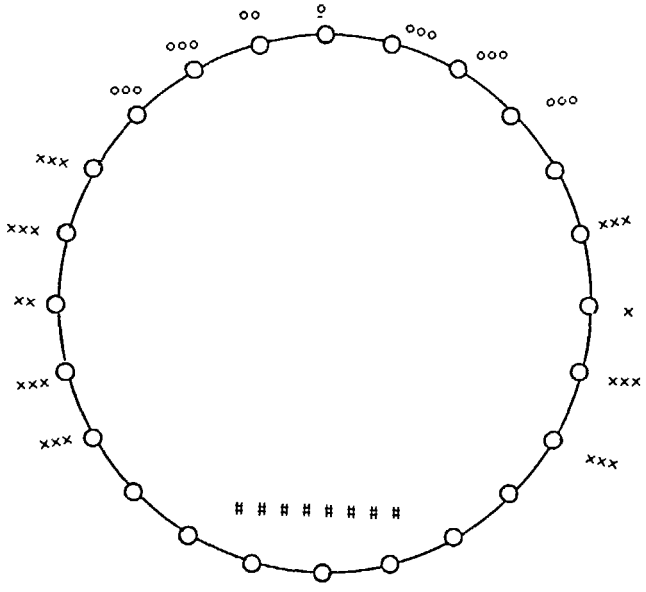


x HIGH CHIEF. "ALI'I" (HOSTING VILLAGE)
xx OTHER ALI'IS.
xxx TALKING CHIEF. "TULAFALE" (HOST VILLAGE)

o HIGH CHIEF. "ALI'I" (VISITORS)
oo OTHER ALI'IS. (VISITORS)
ooo TALKING CHIEVES. (VISITORS)

UN-TITLED MEN. "TAULELE'A"
PREPAIRING KAVA

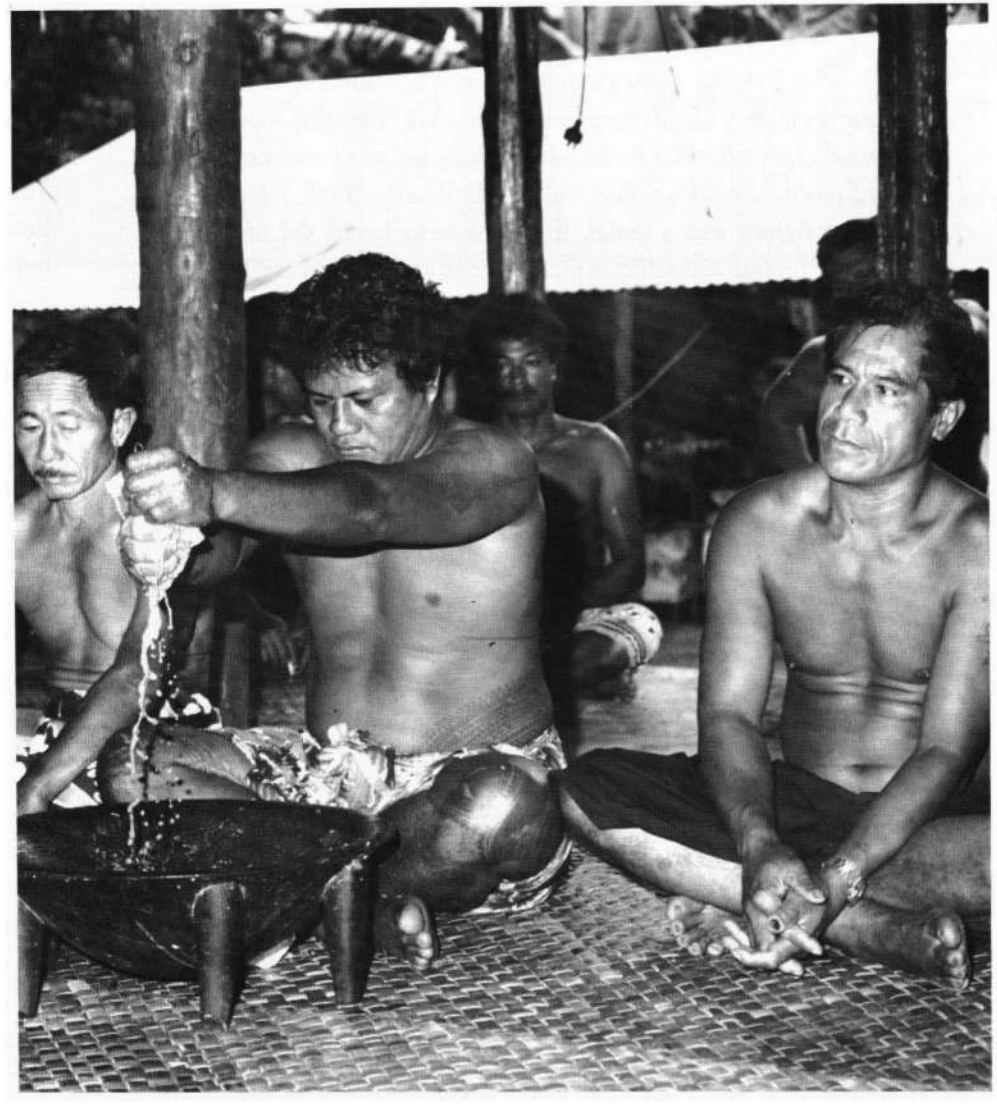
VILLAGE COUNCIL MEETING.



x FIRST RANKING HIGH CHIEF. (ALI'I)
xx SECOND RANKING HIGH CHIEF
xxx OTHER ALI'IS

o FIRST RANKING TALKING CHIEF (TULAFALE)
oo SECOND RANKING TALKING CHIEF
ooo OTHER TALKING CHIEVES

UNTITLED MEN. "TAULELE'A"
(PREPAIRING KAVA)



Chapter 3: Building a Fale: Preparations, Materials and Special Techniques

The decision to build a new guest house is of considerable importance to a family not only for all the reasons mentioned in the previous chapter but because considerable financial expenses and an enormous amount of hard physical work are involved for the family. Such decisions are not taken lightly and a matai, if he wants to avoid the unpleasant surprise of finding himself completely alone and very probably unable to finish what he has started, will, in his interest and that of his immediate family, first consult all the members of the aiga. He will need their agreement to share in the many material and financial expenses, feeding the builders, fetching the timber, braiding the sennit, cutting and setting the posts, erecting the scaffolding, making the thatch and providing the countless other necessary support services throughout the construction.

The contract

Once everything has been discussed and agreed to the satisfaction of all members of the aiga, a decision is made about who is to be selected to be head carpenter. A renowned so-called *matai tufuga* is as highly esteemed in Samoa as a famous architect is in Europe or elsewhere.

The matai will unofficially approach the master carpenter - often through a third party - and let it be known that his services are desired. He is invited to come to the matai's house, or that of his orator or other intermediary where a *sua* or offering is presented. If the matai and master carpenter are both renowned, the *sua* would include the presentation of at least one particularly prized ceremonial fine mat (*ietoga*), along of course with some tapa, tinned beef, a roast pig or two, taro, and the like. The *sua* has a special designation known as the *tauga*. The *tauga* ceremony lays the groundwork for formal discussions to commence.

This contract ceremony is emphasized to the non-Samoan reader because the entire construction process including acquiring the building materials was traditionally outside the monetized economy. Today, cash may and indeed usually does change hands. The food consumed and some materials do in fact have a market value. So the terms of the contract are inevitably changing with the times. Everything is measured by a yardstick which, while not immediately comprehensible to the non-Samoans, indisputably works. Language suitable to the importance of the occasion definitely plays its part in the total process.

Once these matters are settled to the satisfaction of both sides, the matai returns to his family to inform them of the *feagaiga* (the conclusion of the discussions) and acquaint them with the master carpenter's requirements, and obtain their agreement on the proposed day to begin work.

Only one kind of contract was traditionally passed between the matai and the master carpenter. In it, the family agrees to feed and lodge him, his wife and all the other builders for the duration of the construction. Since the honour and status of the matai are at stake, he will ensure that the builders are well fed. A contract like this is called *apisa*, named after the type of fale provided to the master carpenter and his wife. In the *apisa*, the matai is called the *taufalealii* and the master carpenter the *agaiotupu*. The *taufalealii* and his family will go out of their way to meet all the *agaiotupu's* needs and ensure that they are in no way offended. On completion of the fale, an elaborate presentation of fine mats and other traditional offerings is made to the master carpenter and his assistants.

Preparing for the construction

When a date is fixed for the work to begin, the entire family plunges into a beehive of activity.

Several months are needed to prepare the materials needed for building the fale. They include the basics: timber of various types, sennit (*asi*), thatching material and various specialized tools. Before the arrival of the *agaiotupu*, the *taufalealii*'s family have already erected a building shed (*fale-ta*) where all the materials and the tools will be stored when not in use.

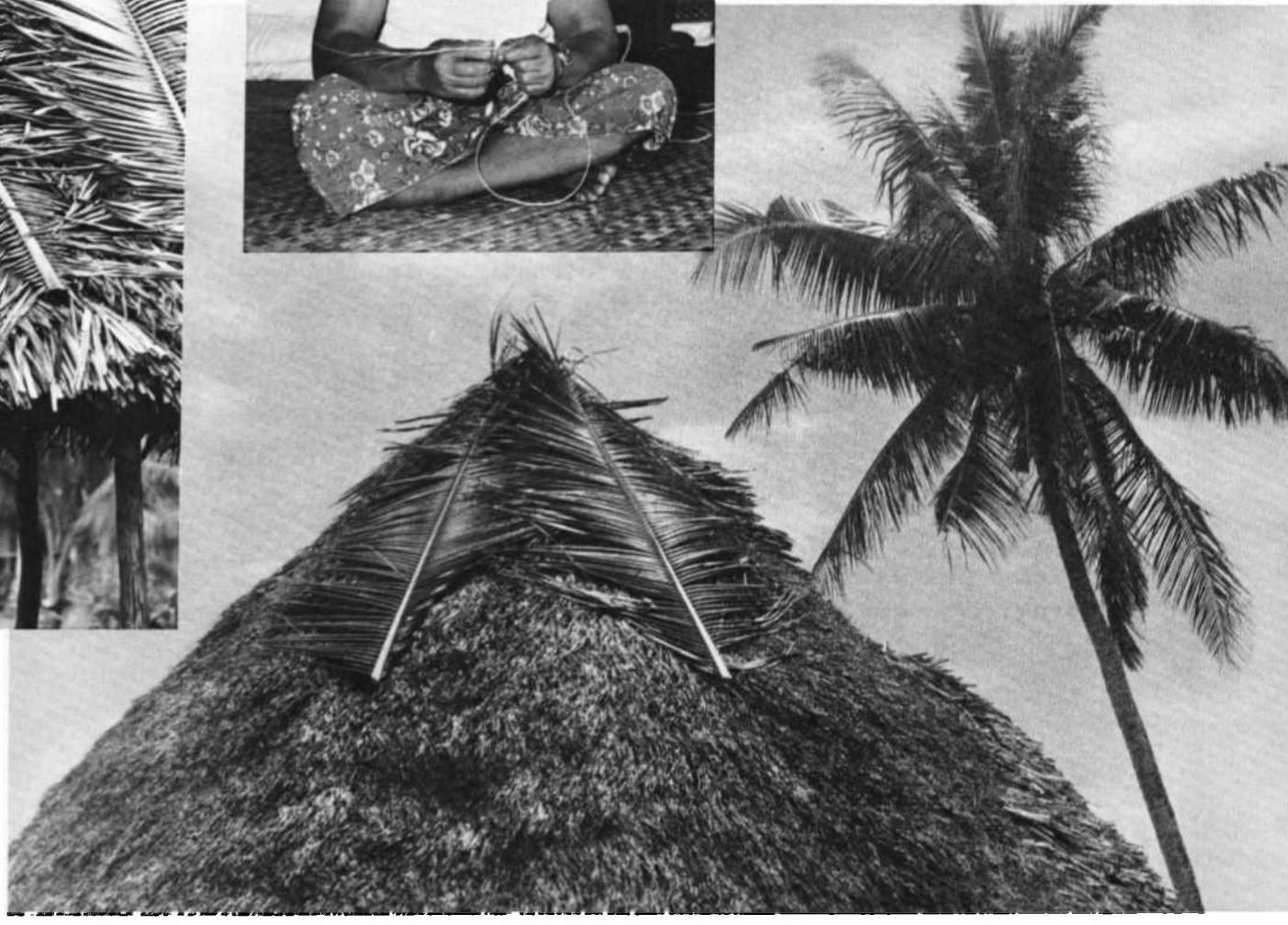
Most of the different types of timber needed for the construction are available on the family's plantations: breadfruit (*ulu*), coconut (*niu*) and *poumuli* trees. With the exception of the main posts, the ridge pole and the thatching support structure, only timber from the breadfruit tree should be used for a proper guest house.

Many, many metres of sennit, a braided coconut fibre rope, must be prepaired. To soften and untie the fibres of the husks from which the sennit will be braided, the coconuts are first submerged in the shallow waters inside the reef in a basket weighted down with stones. After a period of several days (or even weeks for some kinds of coconut), they are removed from the water, the outer husk peeled off, and the fibres beaten with a mallet to soften them. Once judged sufficiently pliable, they are separated, cleaned and left to dry in the sun.

Like hair, sennit can be plaited in several ways. The common three-strand braid is the one customarily used for house building though the many purposes, great and small, for which sennit is used have given rise to other methods as well. Its resistance to being eaten by cock-roaches and white ants and its ability to cling to smooth surfaces thanks to its spiny roughness make sennit ideal for fale construction.

Preparing enough sennit for the guest house construction is an enormous and seemingly endless job for the family. Many thousands of metres are needed and it is the responsibility of the *taufalealii* to ensure that the *agaiotupu* has all he requires throughout the many months of construction. As a consequence, while the women stitch the thatches, he and the untitled men will spend all their leisure time braiding sennit.

In fact, if the *taufalealii* has a particularly high title or is otherwise held in esteem by the village, the entire village council may become involved. If they do, they usually make a formal presentation of sennit to the *taufalealii* along with a gift of food to the family to help them in feeding the *agaiotupu* and his co-workers. Predictably, the occasion has a name - *umufono* - and is one in which the principal orator of the council will give a formal speech in which he conveys the good wishes of the council to the *taufalealii* and the *agaiotupu*. Acts of generosity are, however, always reciprocated in Samoa so the *taufalealii* will bear the occasion in mind when, once construction is completed, he will hold a ceremony to thank all concerned for their help and make presentations of fine mats, food and, increasingly, cash.



Tools and special techniques

Before proceeding to the more technical description of how guest house fales are built, a few words about the building tools and methods applied are necessary to complete the background information.

The tools traditionally used by the builders are neither sophisticated nor numerous. They consist primarily of different blades hafted to short handles. Several sizes of blades can be lashed with sennit to the haft of these small hand-adzes.

There are two main ones. One, known as the *toi fafau*, is used in the final shaping of the arches (*fau*), the thatching listels (*aso*), and the wood battens (*fatuga*). The other, the *sila*, is distinguished from the *toi fafau* by its narrower and longer blade. It is used to make the slanted joint of the curved end rafters (see p. 32). The handles for the adzes are shaped differently depending on the kind of job to be done.

Blue prints, cross sections, ground plans, scale plans, measuring tapes, straight edges, spirit levels and other familiar western building aids are totally unknown to the Samoan builder who relies on his skill and keen eyesight to build his country's extraordinary dwellings. The builders learn from experience and overall house plans are engraved in the memory. Any specific problems that may arise are easily overcome as they occur. A piece of sennit replaces the straight edge and measuring tape; a man's eyes are just as good as a spirit-level for the task at hand; and a bit of charcoal is good enough for any sketches or calculations that may be needed.

The units of physical distance are traditionally calculated in terms of a man's body. Thus, the outstretched arms (*gafa*) represent roughly 6 feet, the *vali fatafata* or one outstretched arm beginning at the fingertips to the chest is, obviously, a half *gafa*. The *vaeluaga o le lima*, a little-used measure, extends from the fingertips to the elbow, (a quarter *gafa*). Finally, the *aga* - likewise little used today - is the span of the outstretched hand from thumb to index.

Thatching

The thatching sheets measuring roughly 2 x 3 feet, are brought to the building site where, one by one, they are lifted up to the outside of the roof with the help of a special forked pole. Two or three thatchers standing on the scaffolding inside the fale lash the sheets in place, starting from the bottom row and working upwards. Each row is separated by a distance of eight thatching listels (*aso*) and overlapping the one below it by approximately a foot.

The 'needle and thread' consist of a special thatching crochet needle (*lave lau*) made of hard wood and a great deal of sennit. Because the narrow rows of thatching listels (*aso*) leave little space for the thatcher working from underneath to grab the thatches as they are hoisted up, canoe paddles used like oversized spatulas are passed through the narrow openings to assist in positioning each thatching element and steadying it while it is secured with sennit to the appropriate listel.

LASHINGS

The thousands of meters of sennit are provided by the *taufale's* family and friends and formally presented to the master builder in a ceremony to mark the raising of the main centre posts. The sennit will be used to lash the various elements of the structure together into what, in effect, appears like a gigantic inverted basket. Neither nail nor screw, mortice nor tenon is used, even temporarily, to bind the initially wobbly skeleton together.

Only two characteristics are common to all bound and secured pieces: first, the adjacent surfaces of contact are planed flat to maximize the interface; and second, one of four 'ties' or methods of lashing is employed, the type of lashing being selected to suit the nature of the pieces to be joined in 'synergic matrimony' to create a bond that is 'greater than the sum of its parts'. Such indeed is the finished fale.

All that appears to differentiate one lashing from another is the attention given to the potential ornamental elements of the finished lashing. If the lashings are easily visible from the floor of the fale, the master builder will ask that member of his team who has distinguished himself by his skill in this arcane craft to undertake the lashings. This specialist will be encouraged to use his talents to the fullest by weaving lozenges and other patterns into the lashing, often colouring every other strand with charcoal or chalk to heighten the decorative effect.

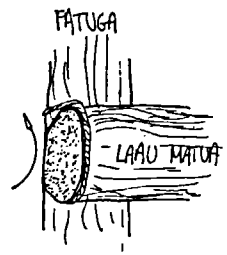
TYPE 1

This method of lashing is the most commonly utilized. It serves to bind two wooden elements which cross each other at right angles and consists of using transverse and diagonal turns. If one starts with a transverse turn across one element, a diagonal turn must follow on the other crossing element. All lashings are finished off with a few turns passing around the outside of the previous turns where they cross between the two wooden elements. This has the effect of putting the individual lashings together at this point and tightening the entire bond.

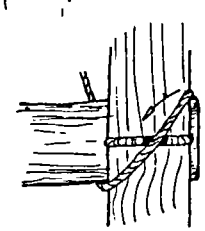
Type 1 is typically used to lash together horizontal round rafters (*la'au matua*) to battens (*fatuga*). It can also be used to lash *pou lalo* to *amopou lalo* and *fau lalo, pou* to *amopou, au'au* to *fatuga* and *poutu, soa* to *la'au matua* and *poutu utupotu* to *pou au'au* and *tuitui*.

The following description of the different kind of lashings should be detailed enough to make it possible to replicate them.

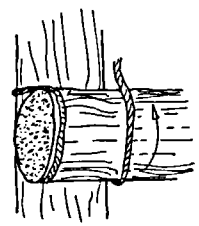
1
Inside view: the sennit is first brought up with a transverse turn around the *la'au matua* close to its outer edge.



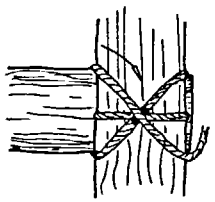
2
Outside view: it passes diagonally over the back of the *fatuga* to where its inner edge meets the *la'au matua*.



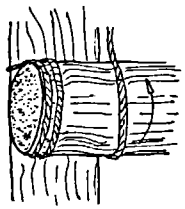
3
Inside view: the braid is continued across and upwards over the inner surface of the *la'au matua* to form another transverse turn, parallel with the first turn and separated from it by the width of the *fatuga*.



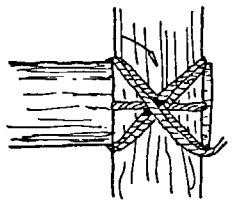
4
Outside view: the braid crosses diagonally over the back of the *fatuga* to its outer edge, where it reaches the starting point.



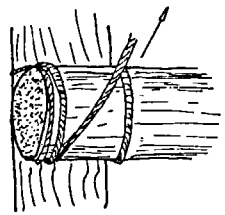
5
Inside view: the two previous turns over the *la'au matua* are repeated to form two pairs of transverse turns around it.



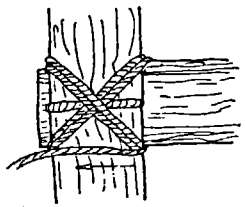
6
Outside view: the diagonal turns over the back of the *fatuga* have also been repeated to get the braid into position.



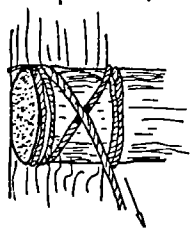
7
Inside view: diagonal turns are now made over the *la'au matua*, commencing from the lower outer corner and running upwards to the upper inner corner



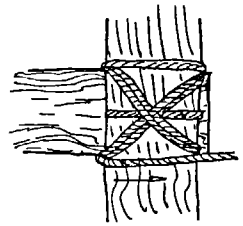
8
Outside view: from the upper inner corner, the braid passes straight across the back of the *fatuga* to its outer edge.



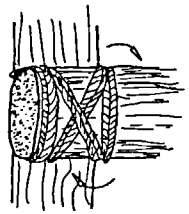
9
Inside view: from the upper outer corner, the braid makes a diagonal turn downwards to the lower inner corner, crossing the first diagonal turn in the middle of the space defined by the transverse turns around the *la'au matua*.



10
Outside view: the braid is passed across the back of the *fatuga* to its outer edge where it is in position to repeat the diagonal turns.



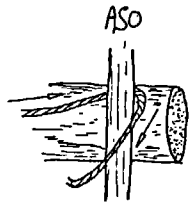
11
Inside view: two more diagonal turns are made just below the previous ones and these are sufficient for the lashing. After making the last diagonal turn, the braid is wound several times around the lashing between the *la'au matua* and the *fatuga* both to tighten the whole lashing and to secure the end.



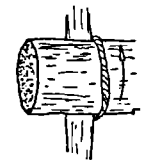
TYPE 2

Type 2 is used principally to lash thatching listels *aso* to the round curved rafters, *la'au matua* and *fau*. This lashing is a set of two vertical pairs of turns on the inner surface of the rafter.

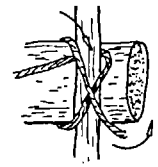
1
Outside view: the braid coming from the *fatuga* on the left is brought across on the outer surface of the rafter to pass beneath the *aso*, and above the rafter contact to the right of the *aso* over which it is crossed diagonally downwards to appear on the inner surface of the rafter to the left of the *aso*.



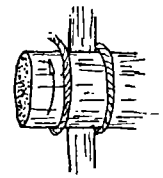
2
Inside view: the braid passes vertically up and turns over the inner surface of the rafter.



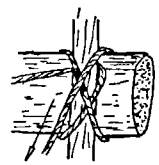
3
Outside view: the braid crosses over the back of the *aso* diagonally downwards to the right.



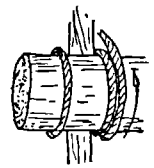
4
Inside view: the braid appears on the under side of the rafter and makes a vertical turn upwards on the left of the *aso*.



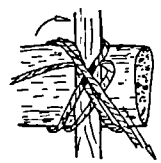
5
Outside view: at the back it again crosses the *aso* diagonally downwards but this time to the left.



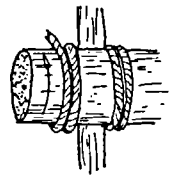
6
Inside view: appearing on the rafter to the right of the *aso*, the braid makes a vertical turn upwards to the outer side of the first turn.



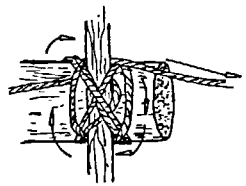
7
Outside view: the braid crosses the *aso* diagonally downwards to the right.



8
Inside view: the braid makes a second vertical turn upwards to the outer side of the previous turn on the left.



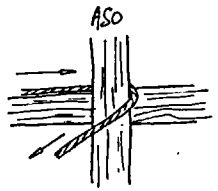
9
Outside view: the lashing is finished off by winding the end of the braid round the previous lashings. The sennit is not cut but passes on to secure the next *aso*.



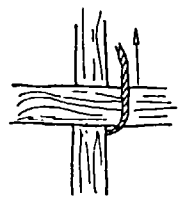
TYPE 3

Type 3 is used to lash thatching listels *aso* to intermediate listels, *pae aso*. The braid is attached to the *fatuga* and goes on to the right along the *pae aso* to lash each successive *aso*.

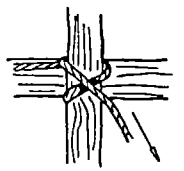
1
Back view: the braid coming from the left along the back of the *pae aso* passes under the *aso* and crosses over downwards to the left.



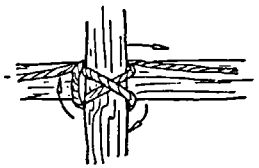
2
Front view: the braid passes upwards on the right side of the *aso* to make a single transverse turn around the *pae aso*.



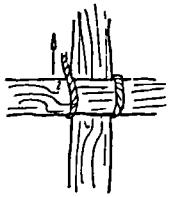
3
Back view: the braid appears over the upper edge of the *pae aso* on the left and crosses diagonally over the back of the *aso* downwards to the right.

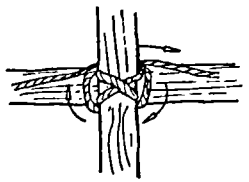


4
Back view: the braid from the right lower corner is wound around the joint between the *pae aso* and the *aso* and goes on to the right to continue the lashing to the next *aso*.



5
For a large fale, a closer lashing may be made by making two single turns around the *pae aso*.
Front view: before the last circular turn, the braid from the left lower corner makes a transverse turn around the *pae aso* on the left side of the *aso*.
Back view: the braid is then wound once around and continues on to the right in direction of the next *aso*.

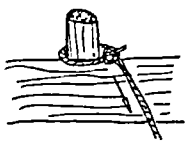




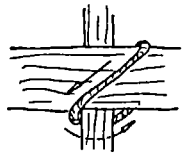
TYPE 4

Type 4 is used to lash eave battens *niufafo* to the thatching listels *aso*. The worker stands outside the fale, working from right to left along the *aso*.

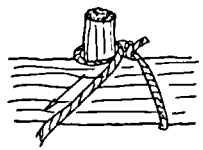
1
Upper view: the end of the braid is passed round the end *aso* above the *niufafo*, and secured with a slip knott. The braid passes across to the right over the outer edge of the *niufafo*.



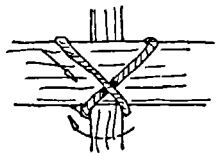
2
Front view: on the under side, the braid descends diagonally over the *aso*, and passes round the *aso* from its left side, under, and to its right side on the other side of the *niufafo*.



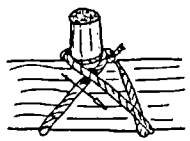
3
Upper view: from the right side of the *aso*, the braid passes diagonally to the left on the upper surface of the *niufafo* to cross its free edge a little to the left of the mid-point to the next *aso* on the left.



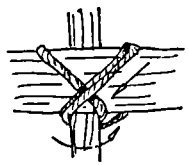
4
Front view: descending diagonally on the under surface of the *niufafo*, the braid passes over the *aso* around its right side, and under to the left side on the other side of the *niufafo*.



5
Upper view: from the left of the *aso* the braid passes diagonally to the right to cross a free edge on the right of the first turn.

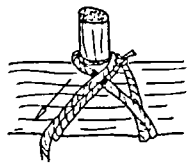


6.
Front view: descending diagonally on the under surface, the braid passes over the left side of the *aso* and under it to the right on the other side of the *niufafo*.



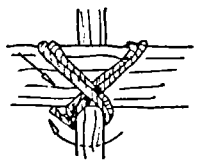
7

Upper view: from the right of the *aso* the braid runs diagonally across to the left over the outer edge of the *niufafo* on the left of the previous left turn.



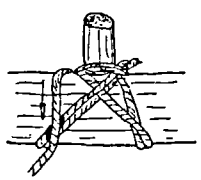
8

Front view: descending diagonally to the right over the *aso*, the braid passes around its right side and under it to the left on the other side of the *niufafo*.



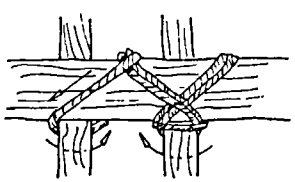
9

Upper view: from the left of the *aso* the braid passes directly across the *aso* and wounds tightly around the lashings between the *aso* and the edge of the *niufafo*. The braid then passes vertically to the free edge which it crosses on the right of the two previous turns.



10

Front view: after the last circular turn, the braid now passes diagonally down to the left, over and around the left side of the next *aso* and under it to its right side on the other side of the *niufafo*.



The lashing of the second *aso* is a repetition of the movements involved in the first. Each *aso* is thus bound with two turns to either side of the free edge of the *niufafo*.

Ornamental lashings

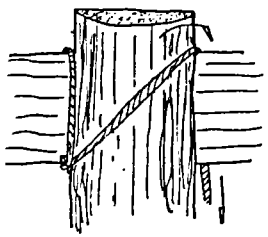
The ornamental sennit lashings, coloured in natural brown, yellow, red, purple and black, are put on in patterns with the greatest precision, the sennit strands used in this fine work being made with care to produce regularity and smoothness.

The diagonal and transverse turns complement each other, the turns being made carefully so that the ornamental design is easily visible. Of the various designs used, the most common as well as the simplest is the diamond shape.

Creating the diamond shape

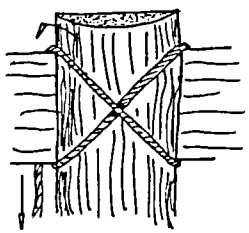
1

Front view: the end of the braid is fixed to the *amopou lalo* on the left by a slip knot, drawn taut at the lower border and the braid carried diagonally upwards across the *pou lalo* to the right upper corner where it passes vertically downwards behind the *amopou lalo*

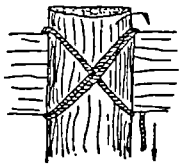


2

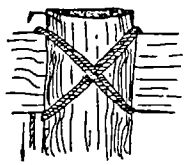
From the right lower corner, the braid is carried diagonally upwards across the *pou lalo* to the left upper corner and vertically downwards behind the *amopou lalo*.



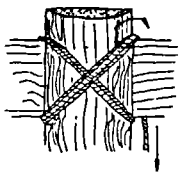
3
The third turn is kept immediately below the first turn.



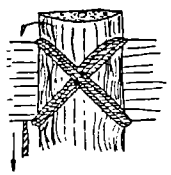
4
The fourth turn from right to left follows below the second turn.



5
The fifth turn must now pass from left to right immediately above the first turn to produce the diamond design.

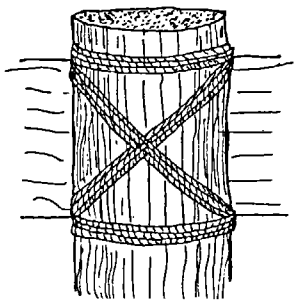


6
The sixth turn passes from left to right immediately above the second turn to complete the foundation of the diamond design. From the last diagonal turn, the braid is brought to the back and is wound around the previous lashings.

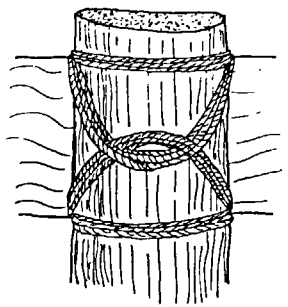


Variation: Diamond design with horizontal turns above and below.

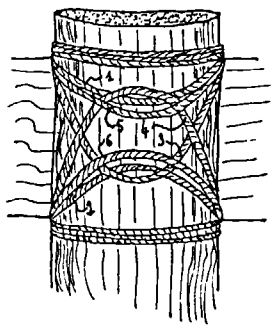
1
On finishing the last diagonal turn, the braid passes diagonally downwards to the right behind the *amopou lalo* and crosses horizontally from right to left over the front of the *pou lalo*. It then passes diagonally upwards to the right behind the *amopou lalo* and makes a horizontal turn from right to left over the front of the *pou lalo* above the diamond design. The above turns are made alternately below and above until transverse bands of three or more turns have been added to the simple diamond lashing design.



2
Alternating curves to pass above and below the middle transverse line are finished off with transverse lines across the *pou lalo*.

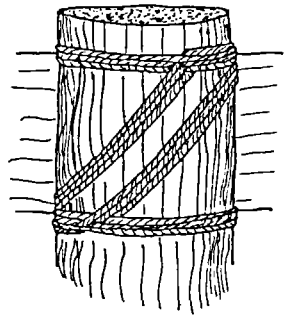


3
A series of two short upper and lower curves not reaching to the middle transverse line are formed with two longer single loops passing between the elements of the short pairs (the numbers indicate the order in which the individual turns are made).



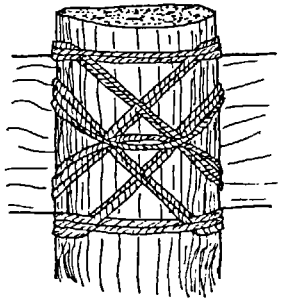
4

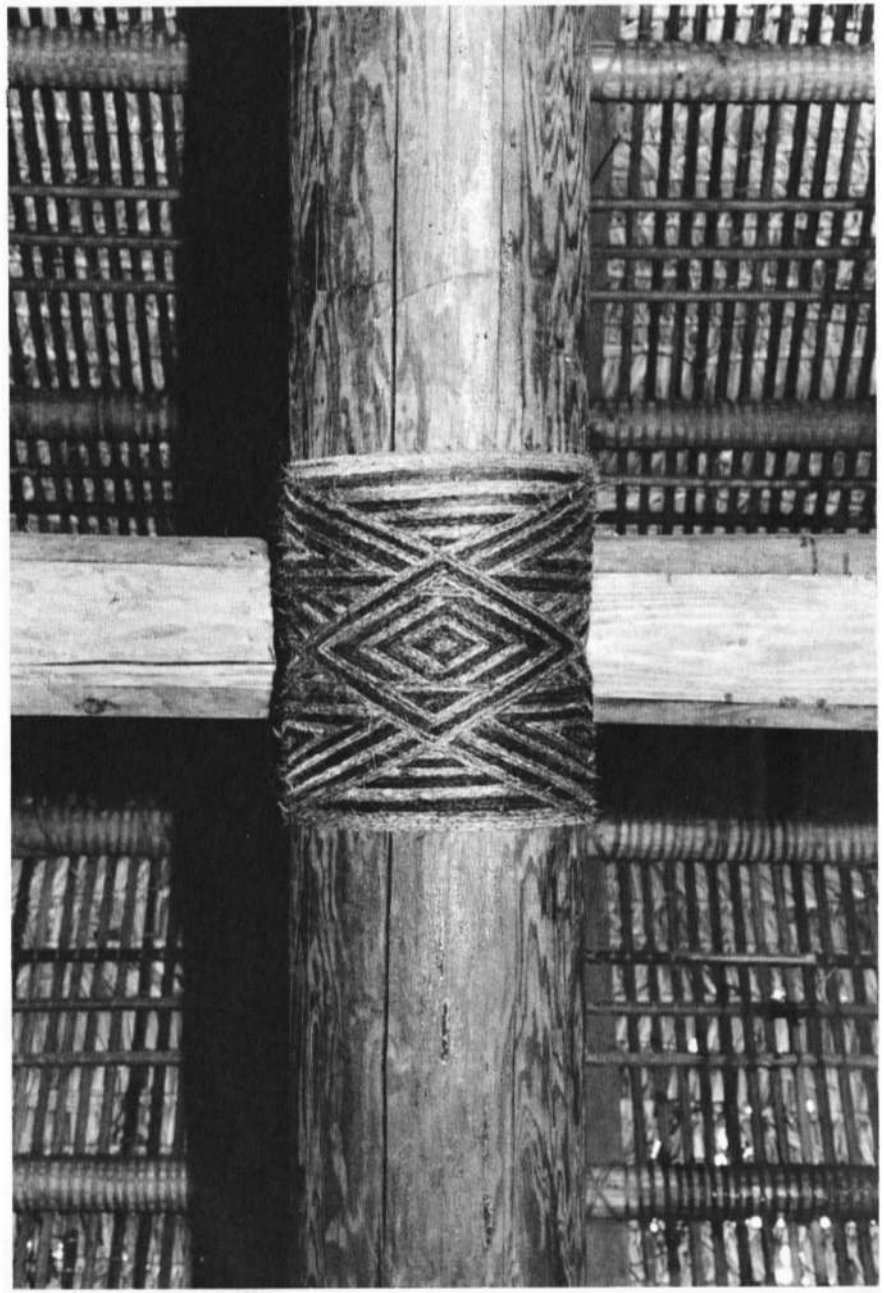
The design is formed of alternate diagonal and transverse turns. The set that goes obliquely upwards from the left lower corner does not go direct to the upper corner but in a line to the left of it and then turn outwards to the corner. The lower set of diagonals runs transversely inward from the left lower corner and then turns obliquely upwards to the right upper corner. The transverse turns cross the diagonal turns where they turn in towards the corners and thus fix them in their relative position.

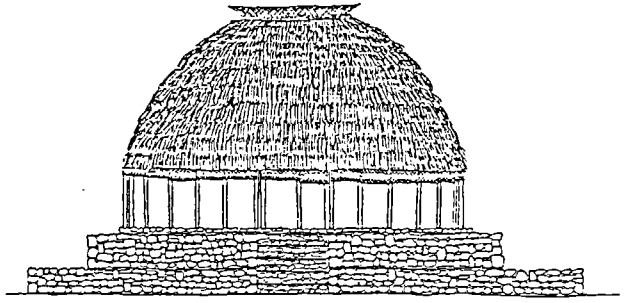


5

A variation of the former example is formed by crossing two sets of diagonal parallels which may be finished off with two curved loops which cross each other in the middle transverse line.

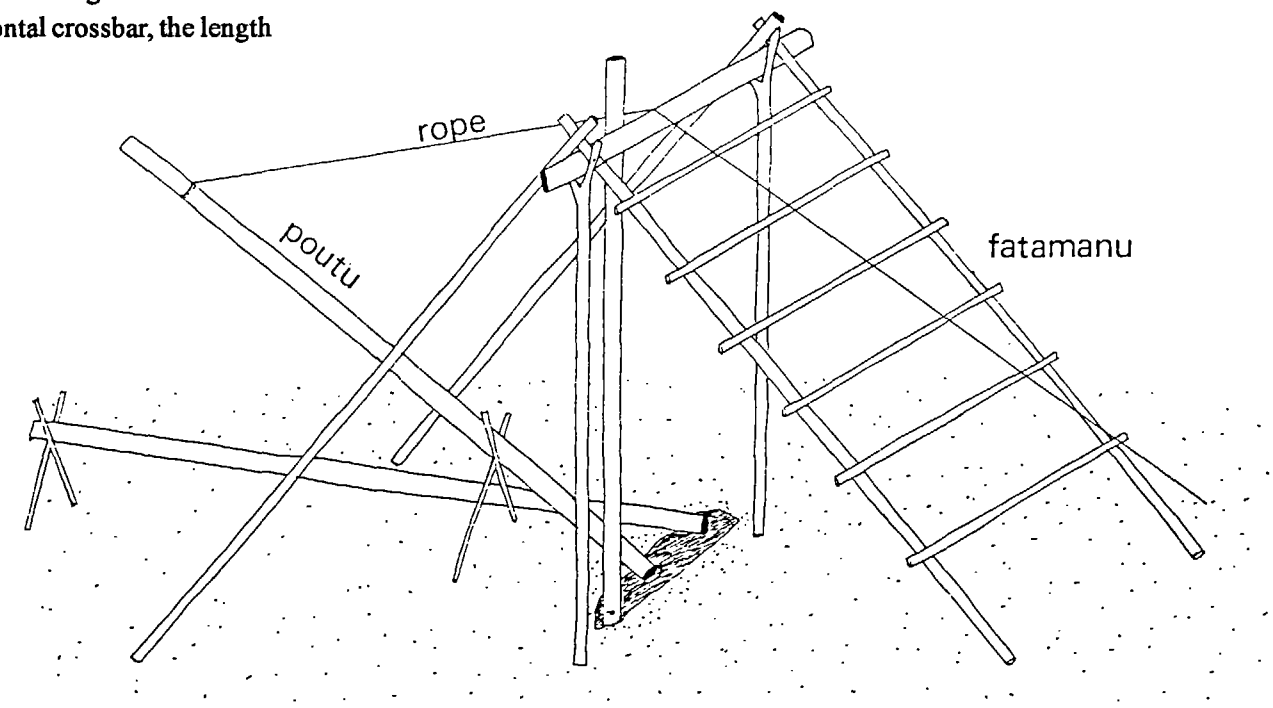


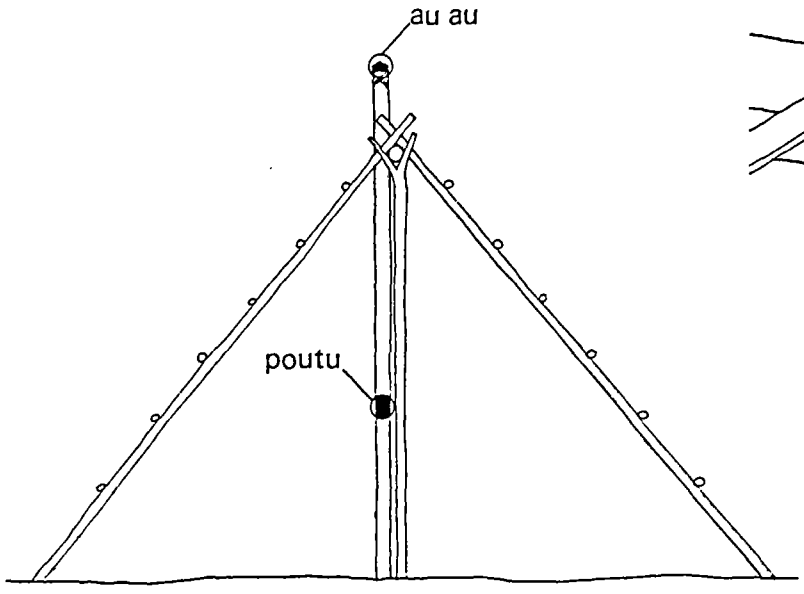


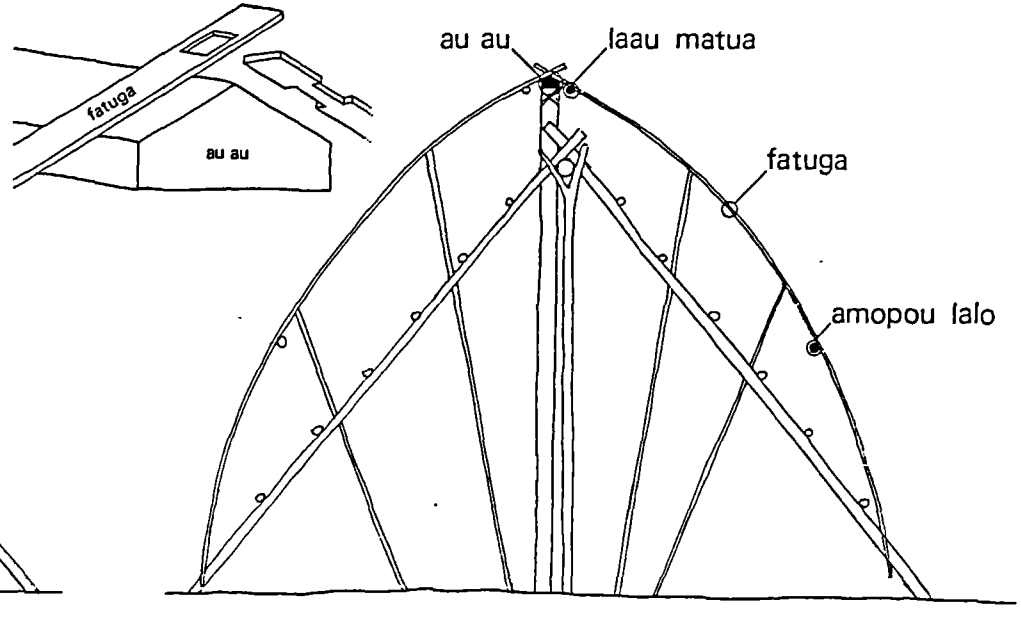


Chapter 4: Building the Fale Tele

A preliminary scaffolding (*fatamanu*) of rough timber is erected on the house site by the family. Two long forked uprights about 5 feet shorter than the intended height of the house are planted in the ground on either side of the position of the main posts. A horizontal crossbar, the length of the future middle section, is laid over the forked ends against which timbers, positioned outside the position of the future wall posts, are leaned. The staging foot-rest poles are then attached after which the main posts (*pou-tu*) are positioned for raising. They are laid on the ground at the edge of a hole roughly 6 feet deep and then hauled up vertically with a rope passed over the crossbar. Once upright, the posts are temporarily lashed and the scaffolding itself is completed, looking like two wide ladders joined at the top and forming inverted v's. This skeletal structure is set at a height enabling the builders who will be standing on it to build up the frame of the house both above and below it.







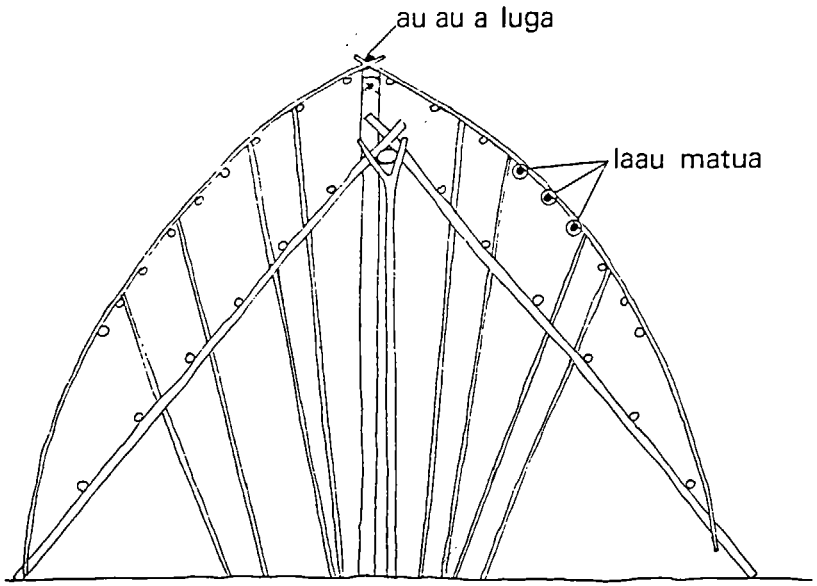
The significance of the raising of the main posts (*poutu*) is analogous to the laying of a cornerstone in a European house and a feast is given to mark the event. The owner's entire extended family (which can be several hundred) gathers, bearing an abundance of food for the builders and frequently, a great deal of sennit.

Then, helped by the young untitled men (*aumaga*), the builders simultaneously raise the three posts and lash their upper ends to the scaffolding. The great post holes are finally filled in with great formality, thereby completing this ceremonial part of the construction.

The ridge pole (*auau*) is placed on top of the *poutu*. Any uneven surfaces are filled in by coconut husk fibre pushed into the vacant spaces. The *auau* is lashed with sennit to the *poutu* in a diamond motif; neither nails nor even mortice and tenon are used to secure the two joined pieces of these often massive elements.

Long coconut wood battens (*fatuga*) are shaped on their upper ends (see drawing) and tied in pairs on each end of the ridgepole with one in the middle. Their lower ends are temporarily tied to the scaffolding, and they pass over the outer ends of two poles temporarily set in place. The resulting curve actually lightens the weight of the total structure.

Next the upper round rafters (*la'au matua*) and the roof plate (*amopou*) made from the wood of the breadfruit tree, are lashed at precise intervals to the three pairs of *fatuga*. The roof plate (*amopou*) which is the same length as the ridgepole, is lashed to a height determined by the master builder.

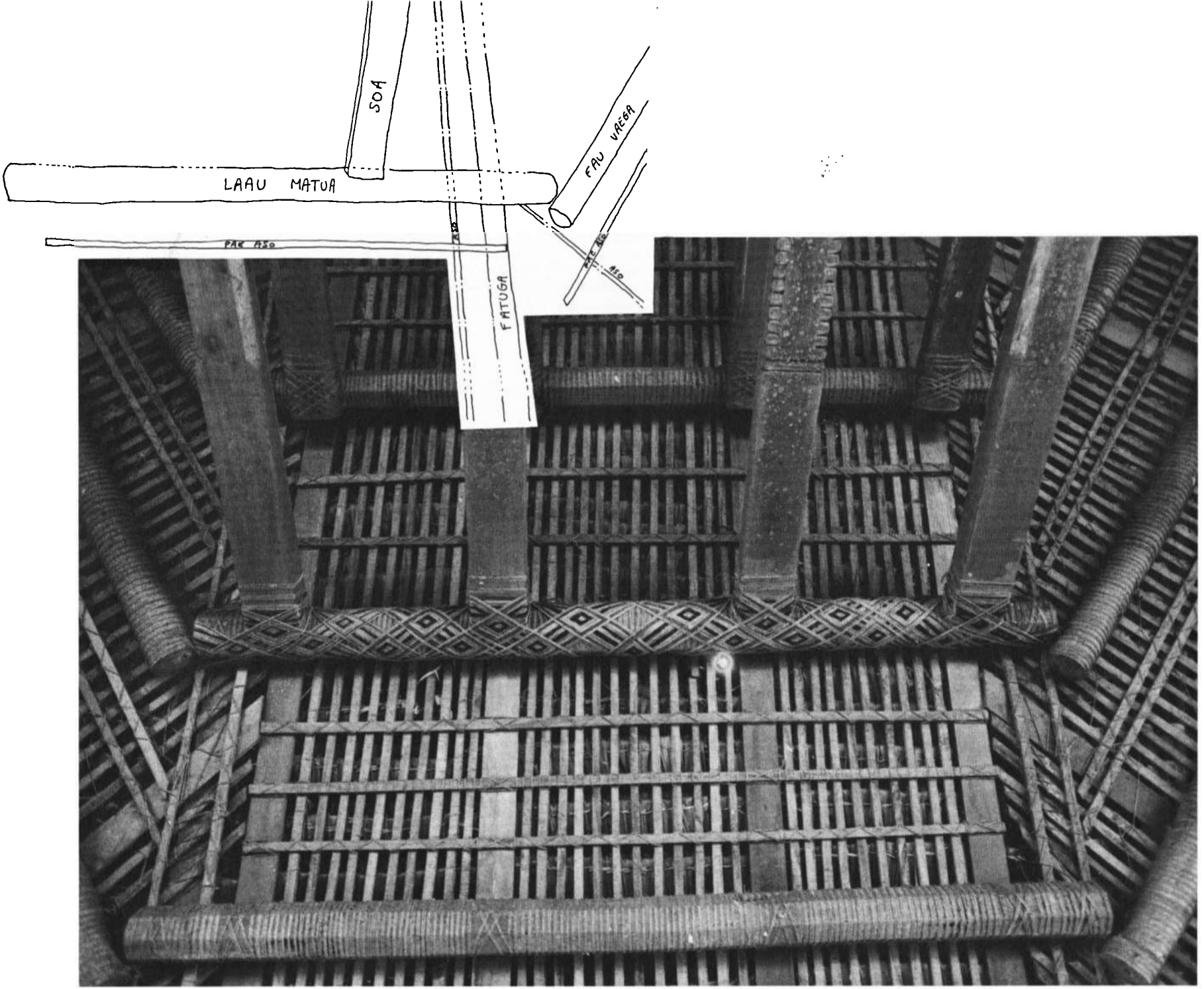


Equal spaces are calculated between the *la'au matua* with a length of sennit and marked with a piece of charcoal, the number corresponding to the number of horizontal collar beams (*so'a*) the owner wants for his fale. The number of *so'a*, it is recalled, determine the height of the fale and curvature of the roof and reflect the status of its owner. Each opposite pair of *la'au matua* is separated by a *so'a*.

The *la'au matua* are then temporarily lashed to the *fatuga* which are then bent around with the aid of additional long poles acting as levers.

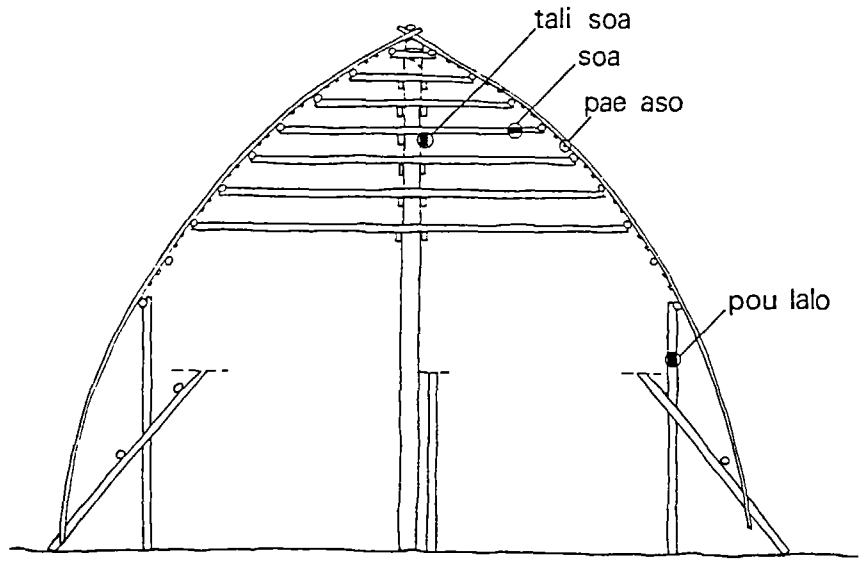
The master builder standing back from the construction determines the precise degree of curvature required. Each pair of *fatuga* is curved in the same manner and the temporary lashings are replaced by permanent ones.

An upper ridgepole, (*auau-a-luga*) slightly longer than the ridgepole (*auau*) is lashed to the ends of the *fatuga*.


SOA
LAAU MATUA
FAU VAEGA
PAE ASO
FATUGA

The thatching listels (*aso*) are long narrow struts from a half to one inch in width. Made either of breadfruit or coconut, they are first fashioned in the builder's fale by attaching short lengths together, the ends of which have been cut in a bevelled and notched configuration. Placed parallel on the outside of the frame, from the ridgepole (*auau*) to the roof plate (*amopou*) and spaced at about two finger's distance from each other, the *aso* which cover the entire middle section are then tied to the rafters (*la'au matua*). The number of tie points seems to be infinite and in addition to ensuring the stability of the roof frame, they obviously contribute to a powerful decorative effect.

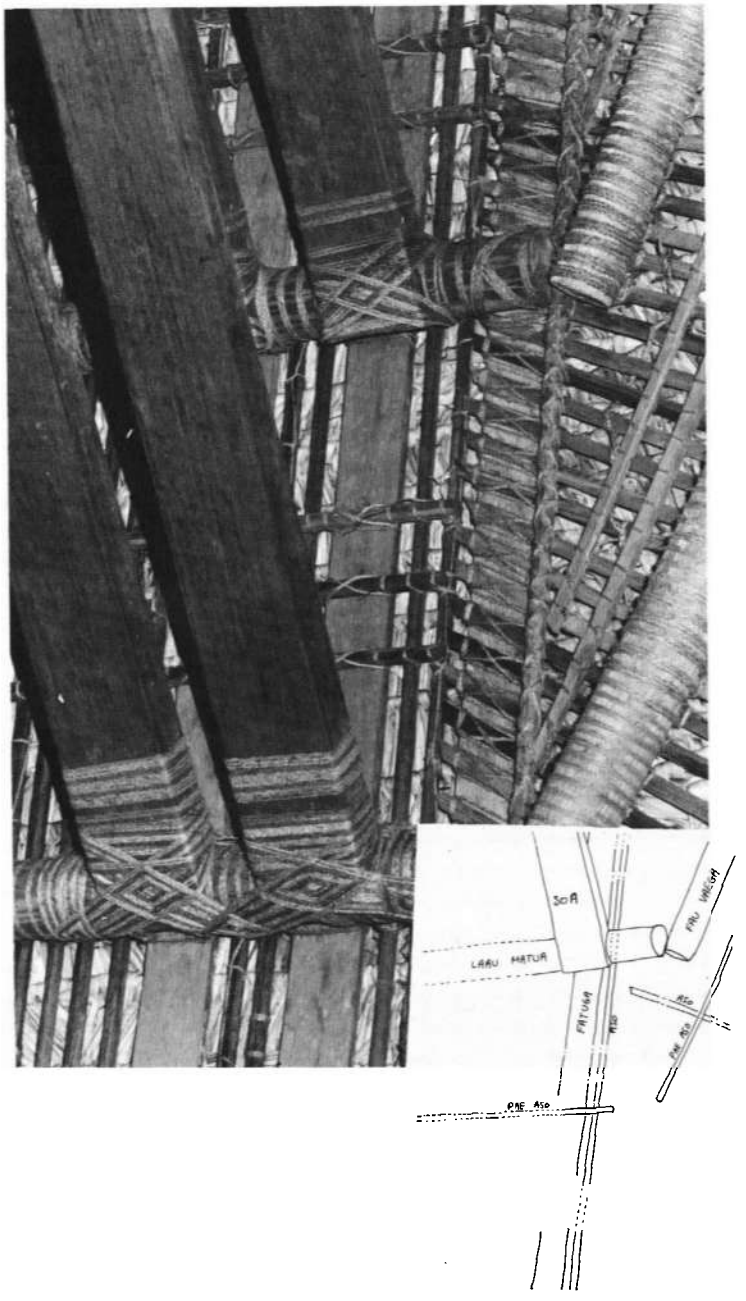
Intermediate listels (*pae aso*) are lashed under the *aso* and the wood battens (*fatuga*), which, like the *aso*, add to the strength of the whole structure. The repetition of shape and form combine to contribute to the elegance of the structure and bear witness to the skill of the builders.

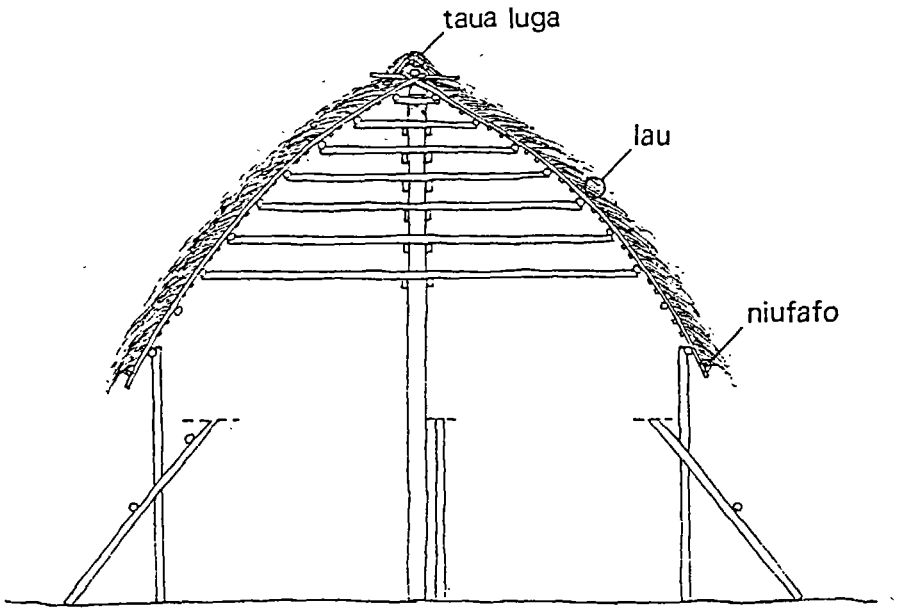


The *so'a* transverse the fale, connecting opposing pairs of *la'au matua*. They are temporarily suspended to the *fatuga* so that they can be the precise length to ensure the roof does not cave inward from its own weight when the poles are removed.

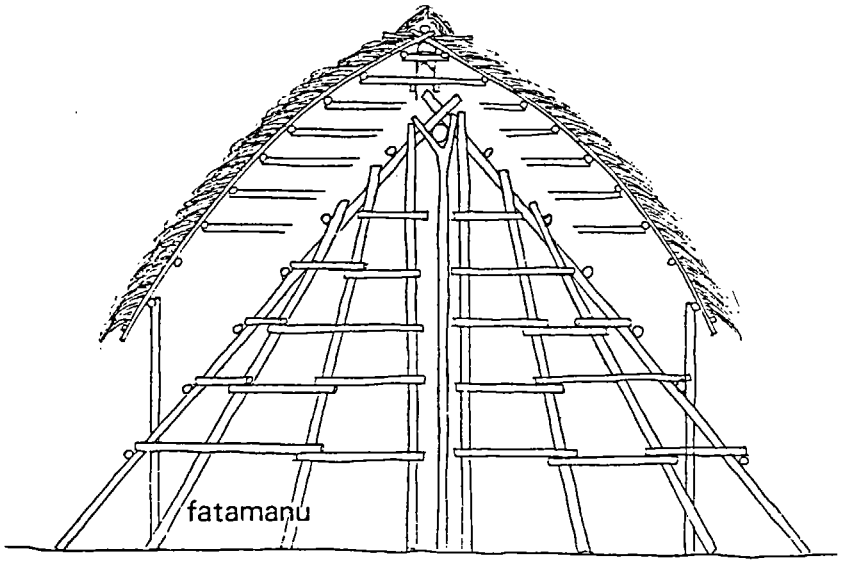
There are usually two pairs of *so'a*, one on either side of the outer main post (*poutu*). Here again, the lashings of the *so'a* are important for the whole frame as well as for the ornamental effect; the reputation of a famous builder is partly established on the basis of his skill in producing these particular lashings. With the exception of the lowest, the *so'as* are tied to the opposite pairs of *laau matua* and to the main post *poutu*. As an additional support, they rest on - and are lashed to - short rafters (*talisoa*) which are considered essential to bear the weight of the *so'a*.

The long poles can be finally removed one by one and, with the help of the owner's family, the wall posts (*pou lalo*) are planted in holes in the ground. There are three on either side set under each pair of *fatuga* with their upper ends fitted and lashed to the roof plate.

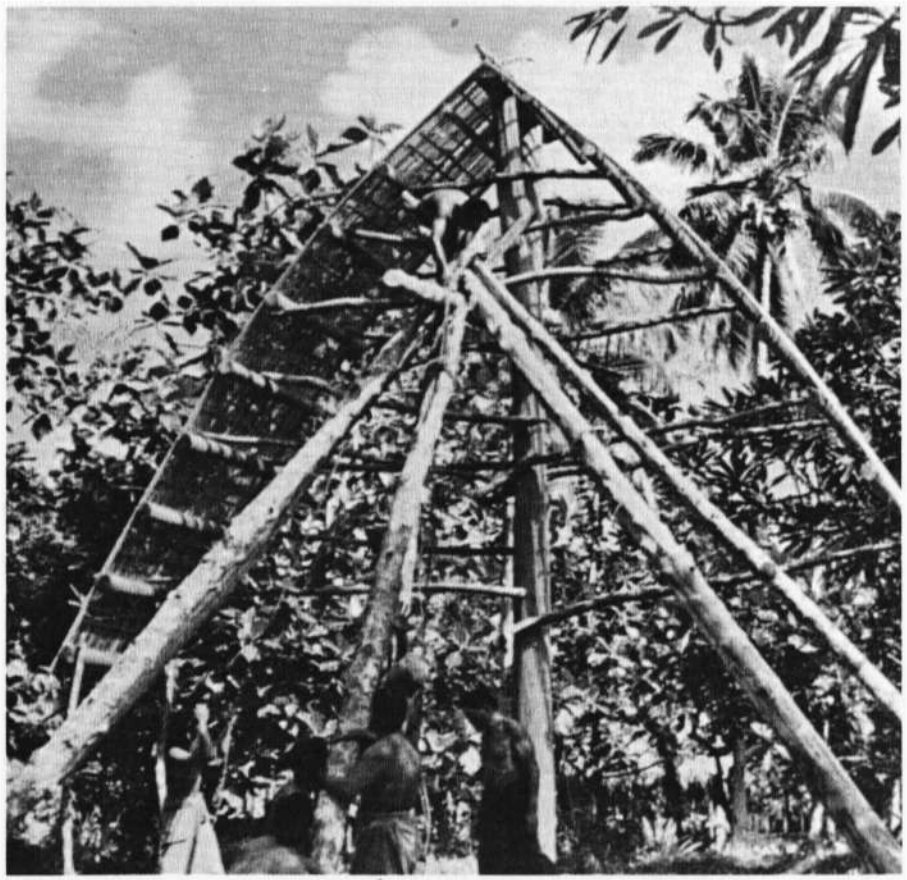


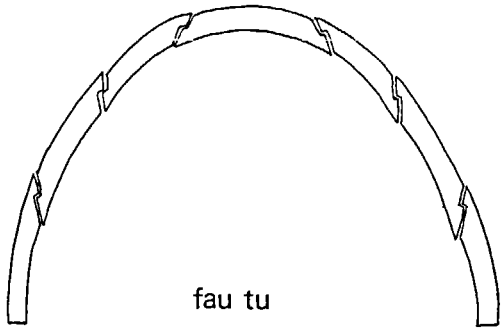


Work on the middle section (*itu*) is considered completed when the builders fix a 2x2 inch square cleating timber (*niu fafo*) along the bottom of the ends of the *aso* and *fatuga*. This cleat holds them in place. The shaping and bending of one rounded end (*tala*) commences while the family works on the thatching of the *itu*. The thatching leaves are lashed to the frame in successive rows starting from the bottom and working up. A special wooden crochet about ten inches long is used as a thatching needle (see photo on p. 17).



The scaffolding is extended so the builders can reach one of the two sections. Three new timbers are set in position and leaned against each branch of the inverted v's of the original scaffolding where they are lashed in place. As before, their lower ends rest on the ground beyond the projected line of the wall posts. With the new staging foot-rest poles tied on, the structure now looks like a half cone.





fau tu

The main elements of the rounded end (*tala*) are long curved round rafters known as *fau*. The graceful sweep of these curved rafters is certainly what impresses one the most and are what distinguishes the Samoan fale from all other Polynesian dwellings. Entering a guest house and gazing up into this three dimensional geometric maze is not only dazzling but comparable in its own way to staring into the lofty heights of a gothic cathedral ceiling. It has the magical effect of drawing the entire being of the viewer upward to break 'the surly bonds of earth'.

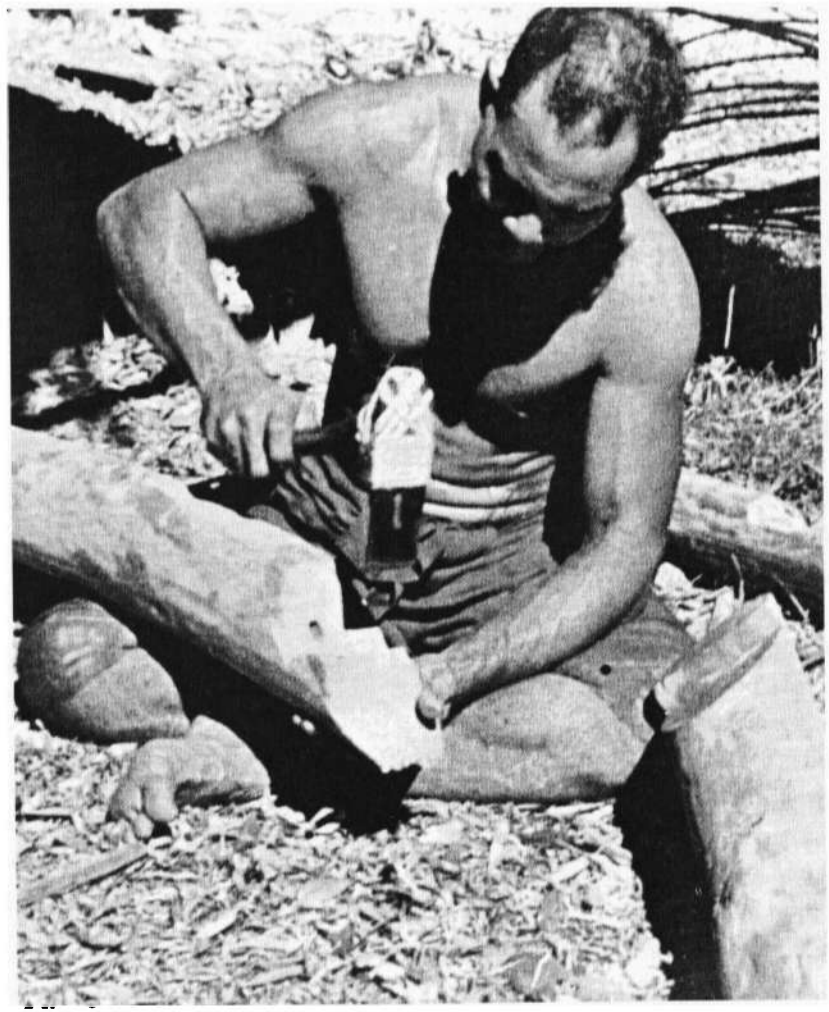
The *fau* are prepared on the ground so that the whole arch can be laid out as a single piece and precisely adjusted. First, the curved roof plate (*fau lalo*) is assembled. The length between the opposite ends of the roof plate (*amopou*) is measured with a piece of sennit. After locating the mid-point with a peg stuck in the ground, a semi-circle is drawn, "chalk and string" fashion.

Breadfruit wood is used for the *fau*. A single arch is made from several lengths joined end to end, the ends themselves cut in a notched bevelled slant to increase the area of the joined surface. (see Fig. 9). The sides are shaped with adzes in order to produce a slight curve.

With the exception of the middle piece which is bevelled on either end to form an extended keystone, each piece has an inner and outer slant joint so the end surfaces are parallel to each other rather than trapezoidally sloping in. Each piece is then temporarily tied in place so that it can be shaped and reshaped until the master builder is satisfied that a perfect joint and the curvature he requires have been exactly achieved.

The middle arch (*fau tu*), slopes at a 45 degree angle, equidistant from the vertical end rafter of the completed middle section and the horizontal curb plate which forms the end of the fale. It is assembled in the same manner. The exterior of the central "keystone" piece is placed so that it just touches the inner side of a peg marking the midpoint of the arch, its lower ends lining up with those of the end curb plate (*faulalo*).

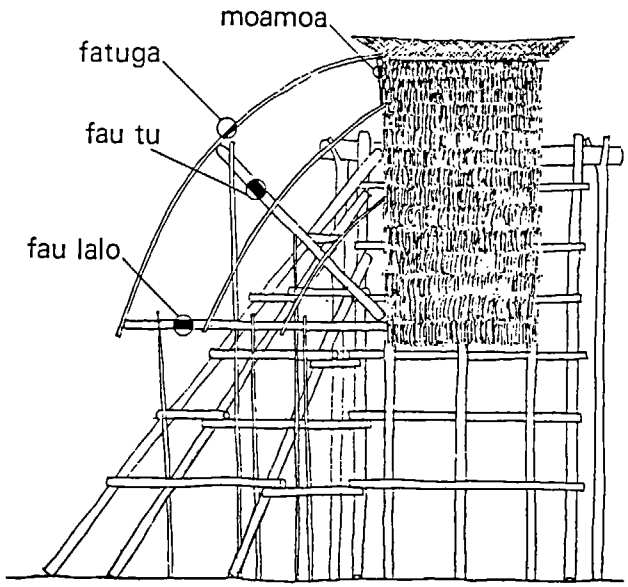
The builder continues until the upper and lower series of arches are completed. All these arches are known as *vaega o fau* save the *fau tu* which, as stated above, divides the roof in two equal parts.



The arches of the upper series are next assembled as follows: because the first of the *fau* follows the inner curve of the *fau tu*, the next ones will be laid out following their inner surface, the lengths of the sides being calculated later, once they are positioned on the roof frame.

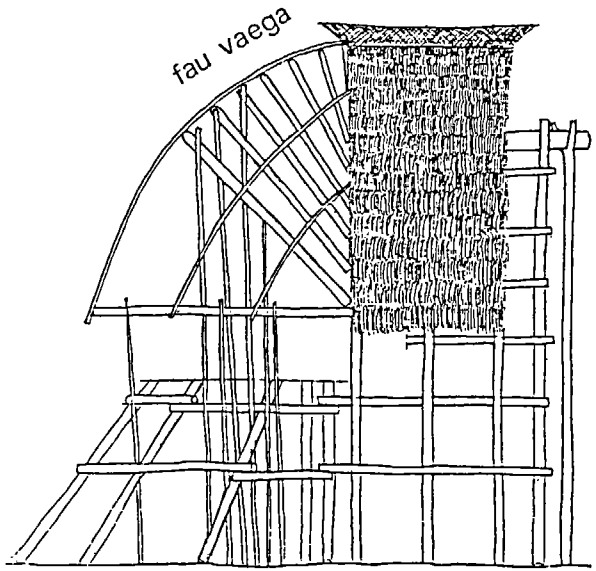
The last *fau* positioned up close to the ridgepole (*auau*) is called the *fau tali aso* and its curve is obviously very much sharper. The ends of each of these curved rafters line up precisely with those of the straight *laau matua* rafters.

The arches (*vaega o fau*) of the lower series are likewise assembled on the ground, using the *fau tu* which, lying at the midpoint, is still used as a point of reference for calculating each of the curved rafters. For the lower series, the first *fau* follows not the inner but the **outer** curve of the *fau tu*. Each successive *fau* of the lower series will thus be laid out following the **outer** curve of the one above it.

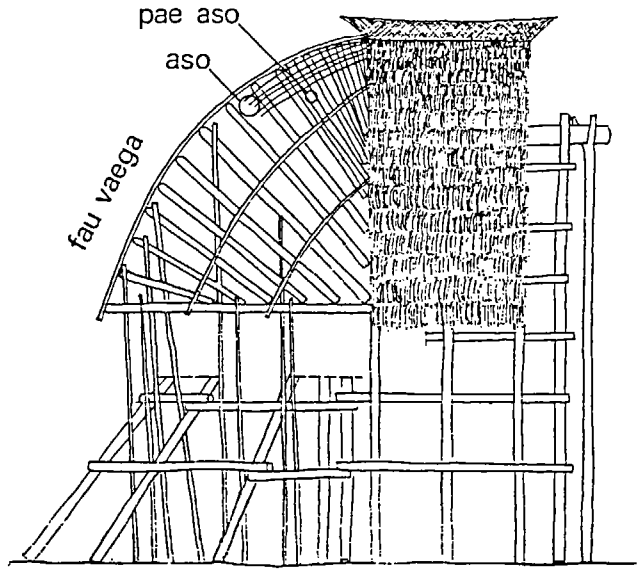


The end curb plate (*faulalo*) is the first of these elements to be raised up and set in place, the ends being lashed to the *fatuga* fitted against the roof plate (*amopou*), the curved part being held in place by poles stuck in the ground. Next, the *fau tu* is hauled up into position at the mid-point of the upper and lower sections. Two methods are used to ensure that the apex at the curve is situated precisely at the mid-point between the ridgepole (*auau*) and the *faulalo*. One is to use several *aso* evenly positioned (though not yet permanently) around the *faulalo* and rising in parallel arches to be lashed to the *fatuga*. The other method is to use a pair of *fatuga* which are often decorated and painted, bearing the builder's 'trade-mark'. Both methods serve the same purpose, namely helping to determine the proper curvature of the rounded end of the fale. Irrespective of the method used, the upper ends of the laminated *aso* or *fatuga* are firmly secured to a wooden yoke called a *moamoa*. The *moamoa* is itself lashed to the underside of the end of the ridgepole (*auau*). From it, the *aso* or *fatuga* pass across the outside surface of the middle of the *fau lalo* and each subsequent *fau* is attached thereto. The wooden *moamoa* is doubly important because in addition to the above role, it also serves as a kind of specialized cleat which joins the *itu* and *tala* - the central and rounded-end sections - components of the total structure. Its shape may be round, rectangular or even pentagonal and is usually decorated with symbolic geometrical motifs representing the moon and stars.

The spacing of the fau in the middle section is calculated in the same manner as the wood battens, namely by stretching a piece of sennit down the middle, crossing the apexes of the ridgepole, the middle arch and the end curb plate. The length is then divided by the number of *fau* to ensure they are equidistant. The position of each is then marked on the *aso* or *fatuga*.



The upper arches (*vaega o fau*) are then lifted into position, beginning with the highest, the *fau taliaso*, the lower ends of which are brought into line with the pair of the third highest round rafter of the middle section (*la'au matua*).



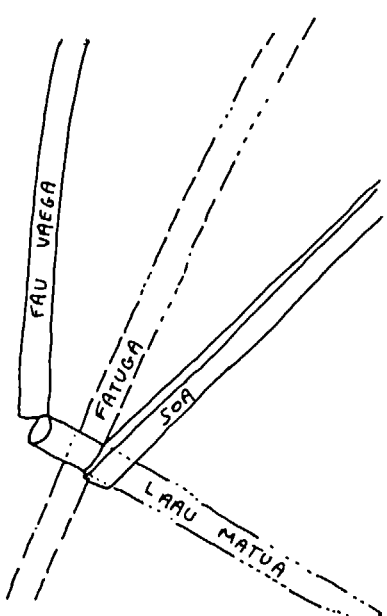
The *vaega o fau* in the lower series are progressively positioned working from the top down while some of the builders commence lashing the *aso* in place to straighten the frame.

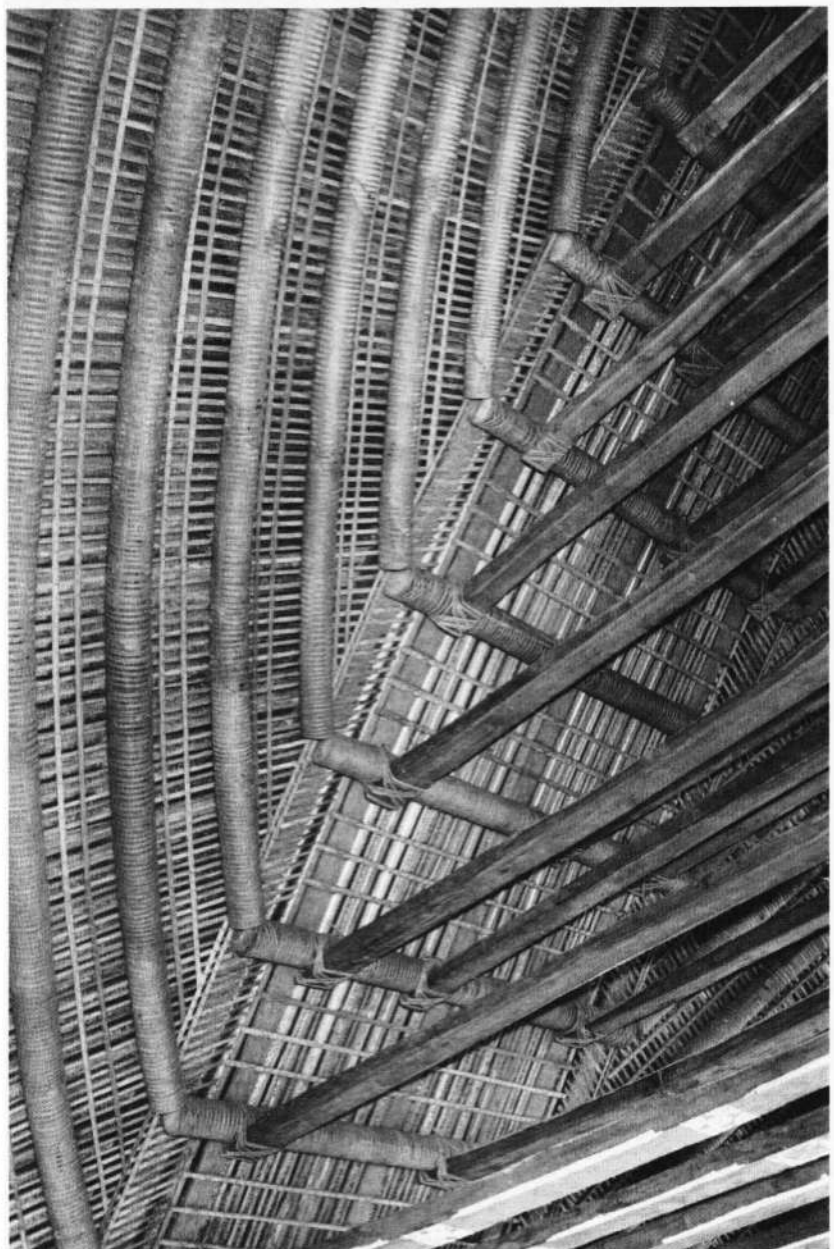
All the *fau* are set in place parallel to the middle *fau tu*, their lower ends sitting on but not yet fastened to the end curb plate, the *faulalo*, their upper ends being held in place by temporary support poles set at the required heights marked with charcoal or a pencil.

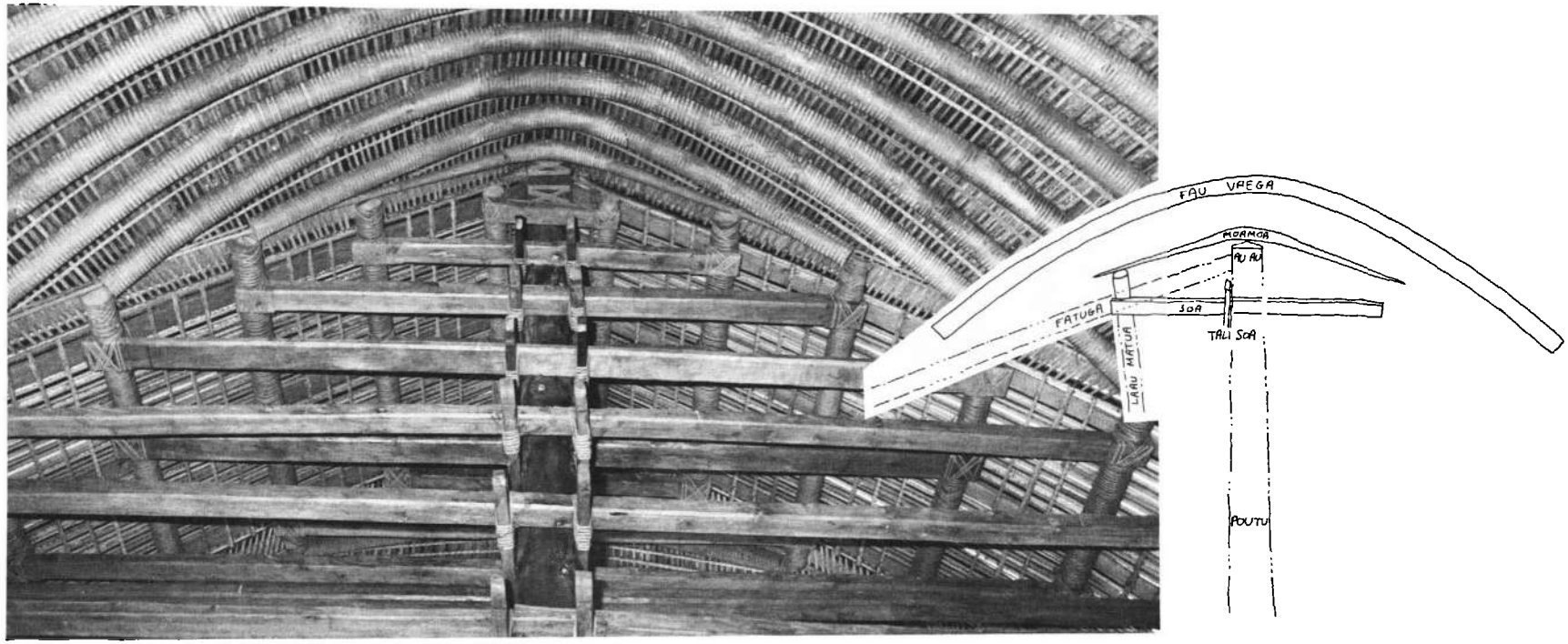
The total number of *fau*, which depends on the size of the house, is determined by the number of the *so'a*, and can be calculated using the following equation. From the total number of *so'a*, subtract 2, multiply the remainder by 2, add one for the middle arch and the result is the number of *fau* required:

Example: 7 *soa* - 2 = 5 x 2 = 10 + 1 = 11 *fau*

The middle arch (*fau tu*) is both the largest in diameter and the longest of all the *fau*.


FAU VAEGA
FATUGA
SOA
LAAU MATUA

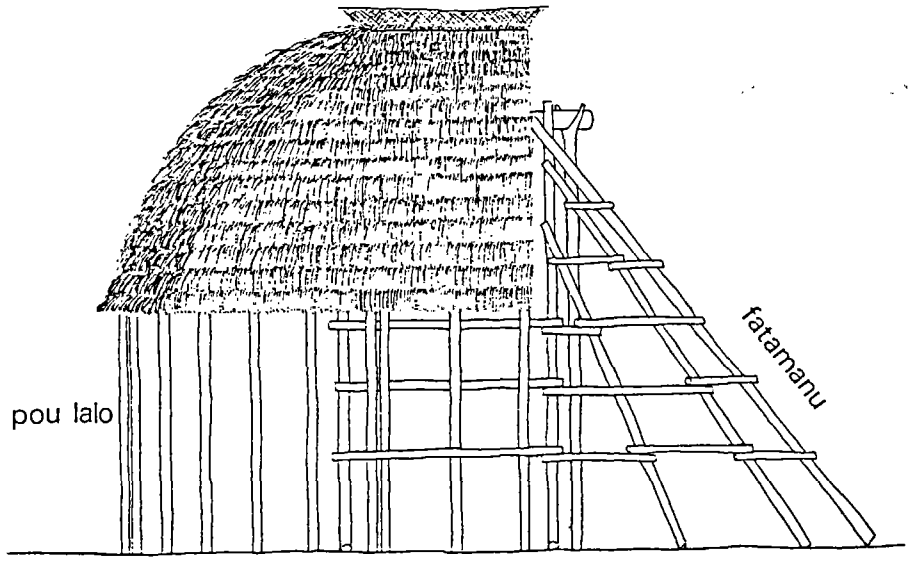


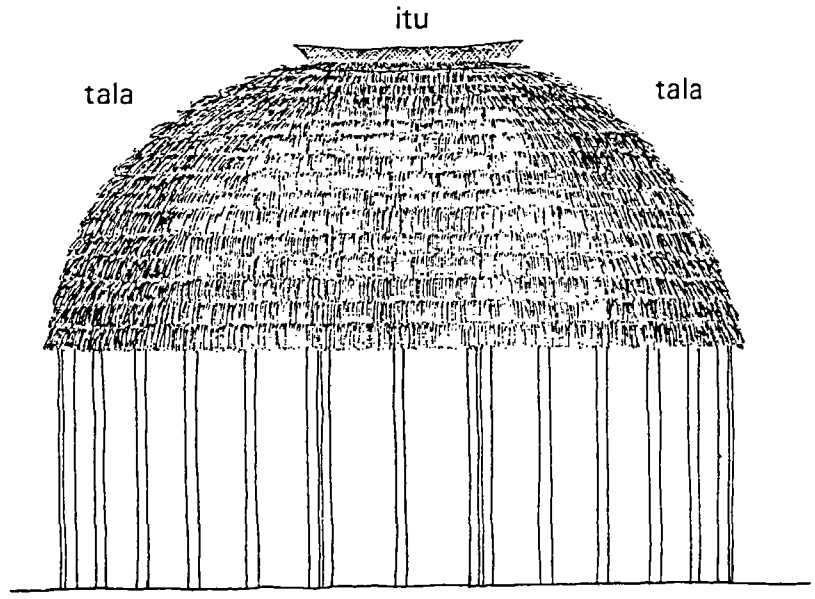


The *aso* are now lashed on to this frame, placed perpendicularly to the *fau* at about 2 finger's width apart, as in the case of the middle section of the fale. If the builders have used *aso* to guide the *fau*, they can loosen them progressively to bring them increasingly into line with the new *aso*. The *aso* ties are of prime importance since they are what hold the connection between the middle and rounded end sections of the fale together. The yoke or *moamoa*, is important too as stated earlier but its small size is not sufficient by itself to join two such big frames. The thatching listels are fastened from the wood battens of the middle section passing over each *fau* until they reach down to join the end curb plate.

The remarkable rigidity of the total fale is achieved through the application of an ancient physical principle, namely the binding together of a multitude of weak elements to create a single large strong one. For example, thatching listels are tied perpendicularly to single listels on their inner side, a process which both straightens and strengthens the whole frame further. There are usually two laminated thatching listels between each *fau* and three between the lowest arches and the end curb plate.

To complete the combination of small elements, the 2x2 inch cleating timber is fixed to the lower ends of the thatching listels just as it was for the middle section but is cut in shorter lengths to follow the curve.



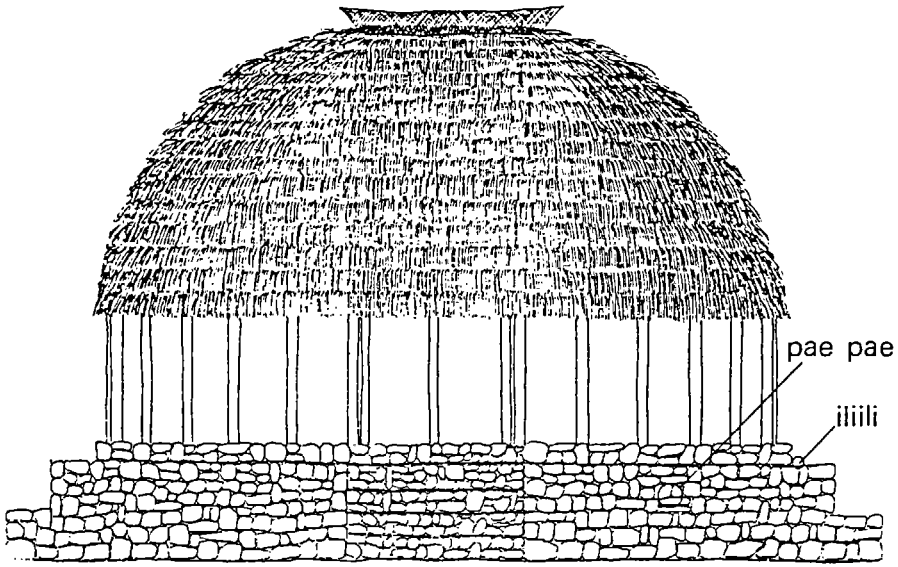


The wall posts (*pou lalo*), are normally hewn and secured by the builders but they are set in place by the family. The lower ends are planted in holes in the ground, their lengths depending on the height of the future platform which will constitute the floor of the fale. There is one wall post in the middle of the rounded end and irrespective of the total number, an equal number on each side is foreseen. Two closely-positioned *pou lalo* are set in place, one supporting the roof plate of the middle section, the other the end curb plate of the rounded end section, and this on each side of the fale.

Another remarkable aspect of the fale tele's design is that few wall posts are used as supporting elements for the roof. In fact, the ultimate proof of the *agaiotupu's* skill would be to let the fale remain in the form of the umbrella it emulates at the outset. But for the northeast trade winds and occasional cyclones it would undoubtedly stand on its centre posts. While they thus may not be structural necessities, a sufficient number of wall posts is foreseen by the family to ensure that visiting chiefs, however numerous they may be, will each have his/her "own post" in traditional ceremonies. A "chief without a post" a so-called *vai-matai*, is a chief without a say in the gathering, and therefore a chief with no power.

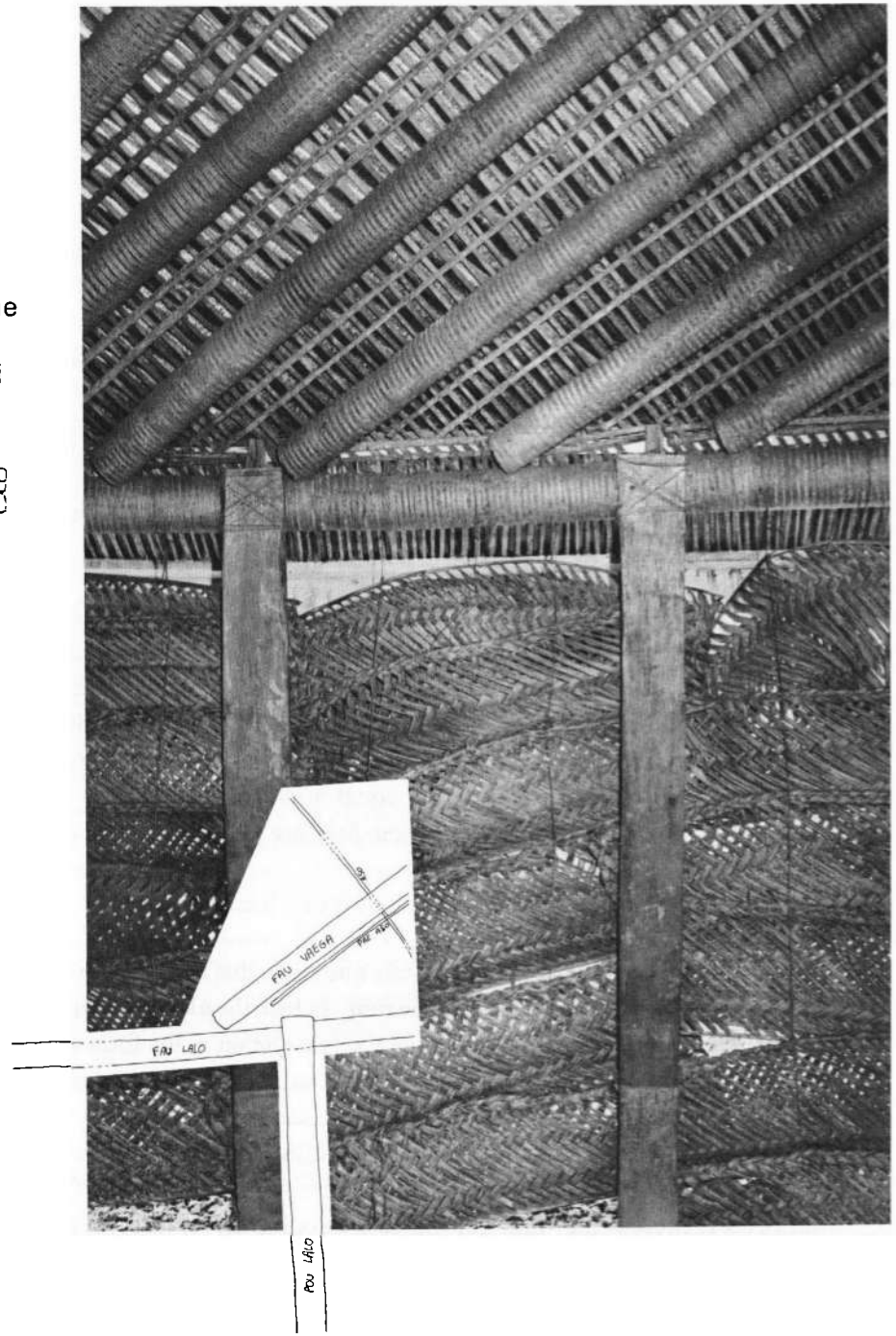
The thatching of the one completed curved end (*tala*) can now be started by the family while the builders turn their attention to the other *tala*, for which a new scaffolding is built. The second *tala* is built in exactly the same manner as the first.

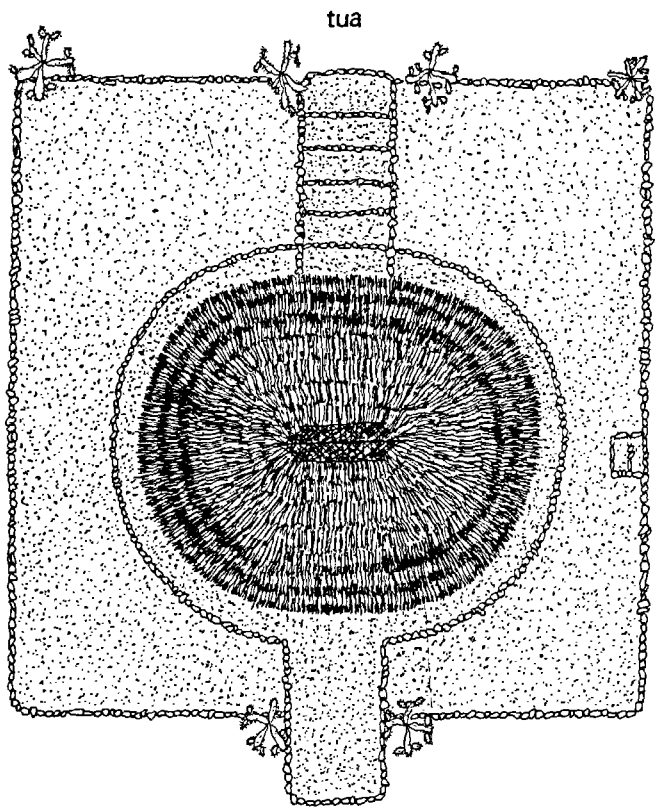
The three sections of the fale, the middle section and the two round ends, are each built and thatched as separate units and one is not started until the preceding one is virtually finished. The chief carpenter starts working on building the second rounded end section (*tala*) leaving the last details to his helpers.



While the carpenters are working on the roof to tie up the thatches starting from the cleating timber (*niu fafo*) up to the top roof (*taualuga*), the family turns to the task of building up the stone platform (*paepae*).

Since the status of the owner in the village establishes the overall height of the fale, the height of the *paepae* has already been taken into account by the builders in setting the height of the main post and wall posts. The owner is, however, free to extend the perimeter of the platform as wide as he wants, the only limitation being the availability of accessible stone. The *paepae* is then covered with small pieces of coral gravel *iliili* (if available) which are both cool and soft or alternatively, basalt, lava gravel, or pebbles from the sea. Steps are made all around the fale, from the ground up to the level of the fale floor which traditionally is also covered with the best small stones so that, when covered with mats everyone can sit comfortably. Today however, most floors are made of cement.





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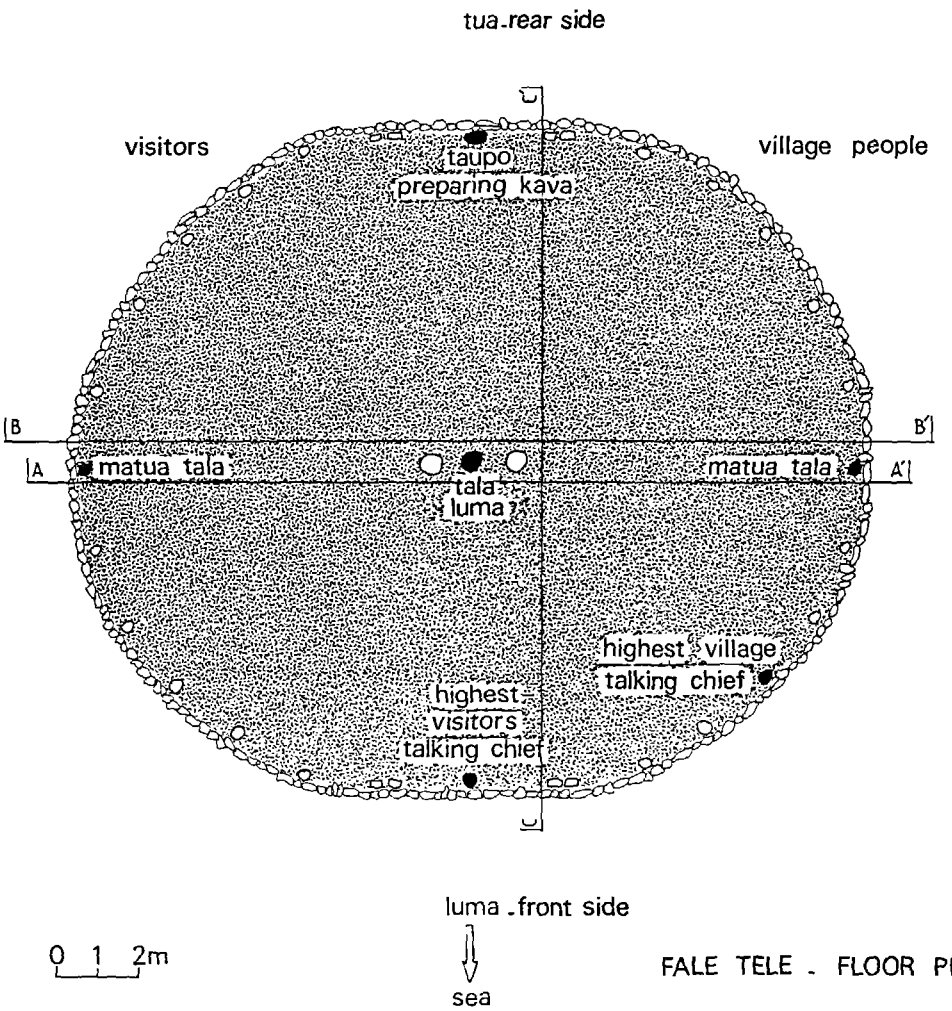
FALE TELE
ROOF PLAN



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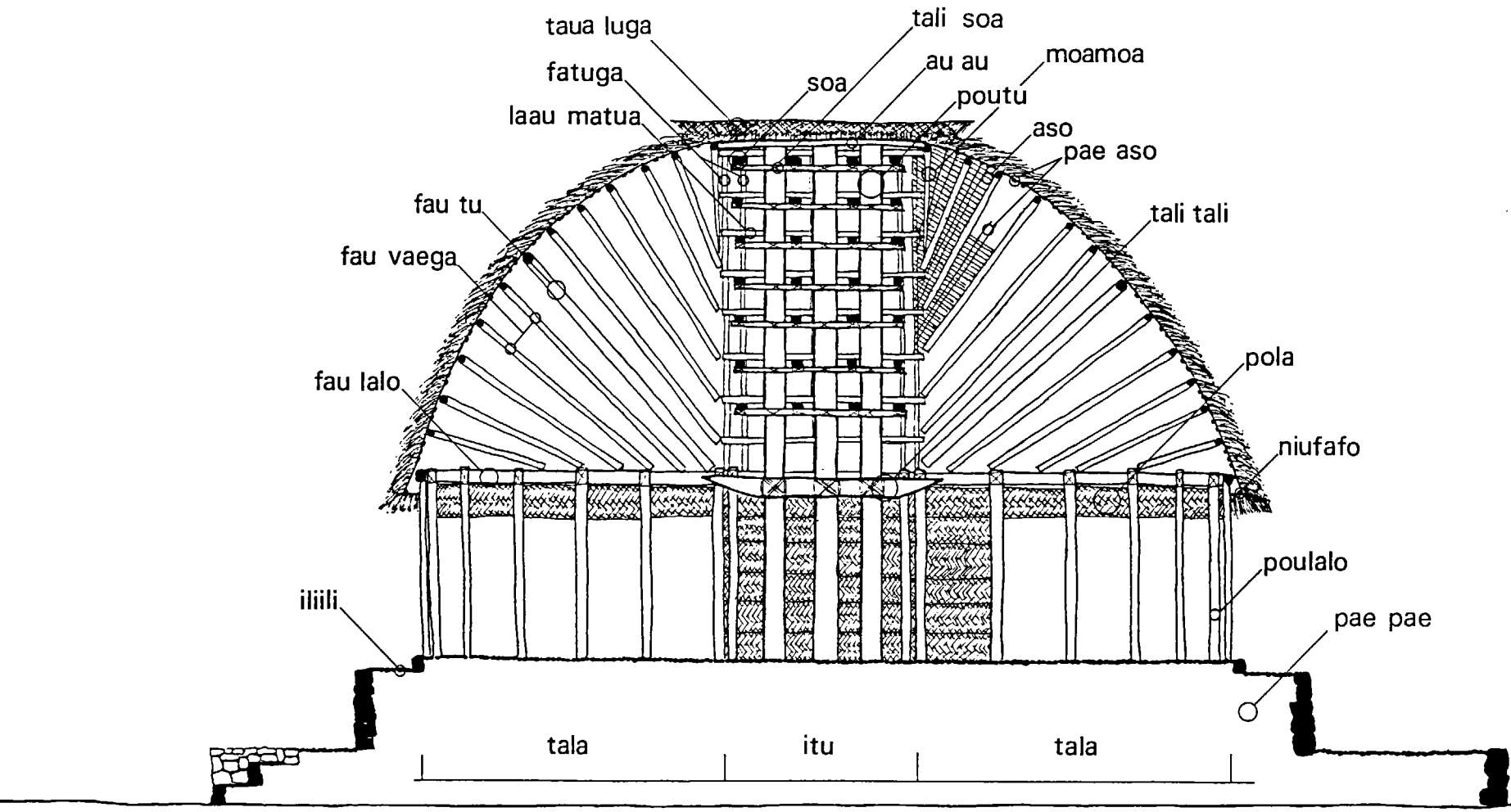
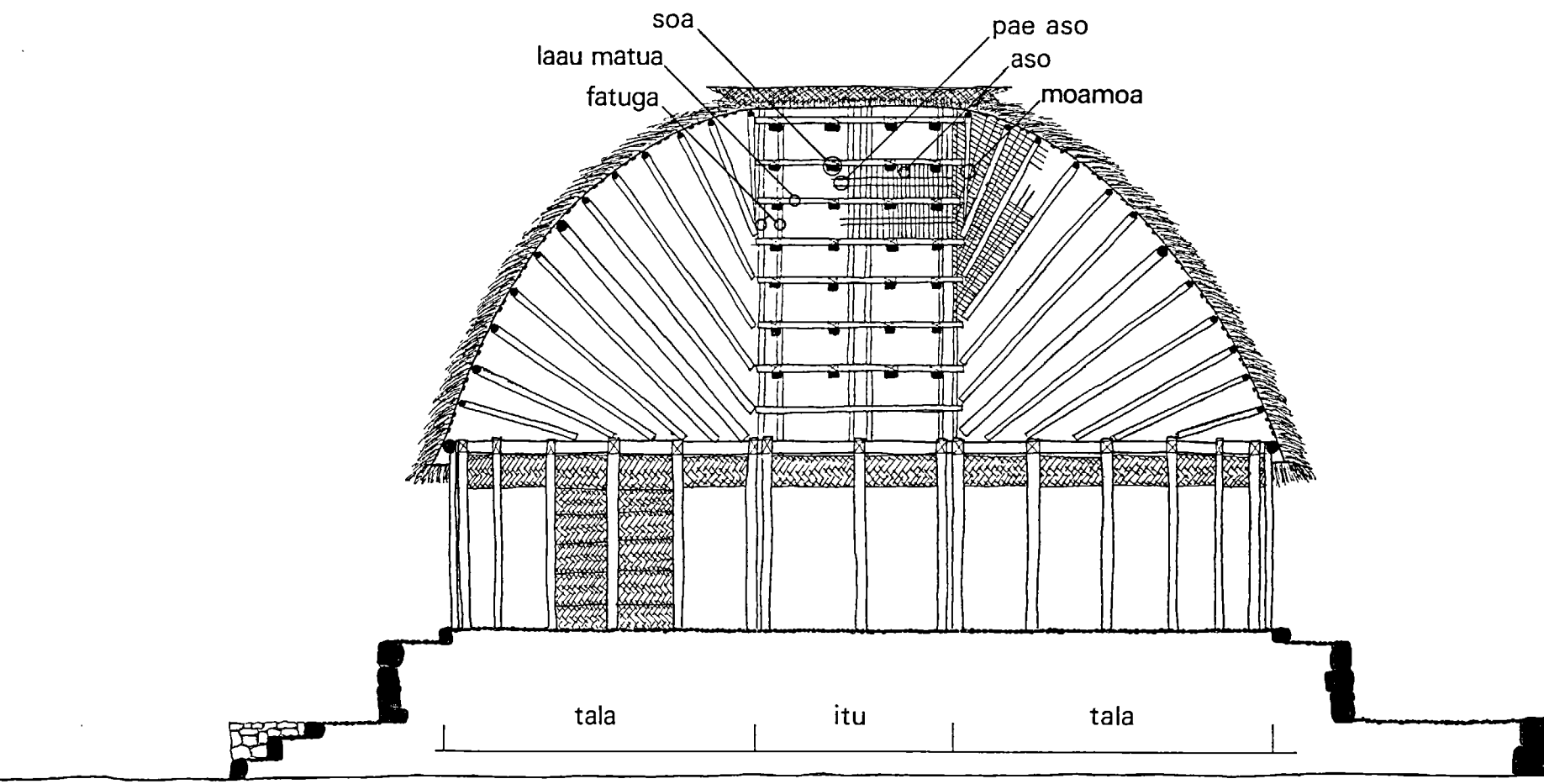
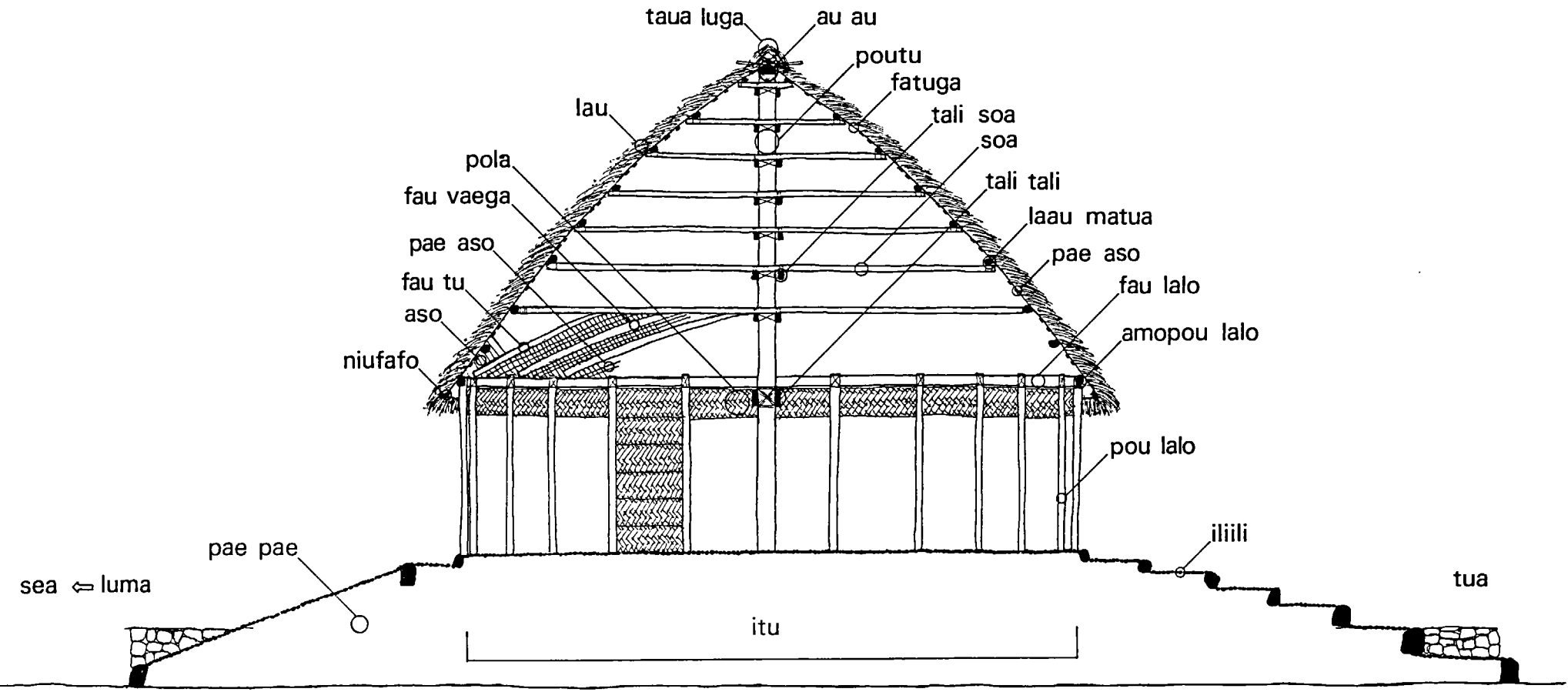
FALE TELE - FLOOR PLAN



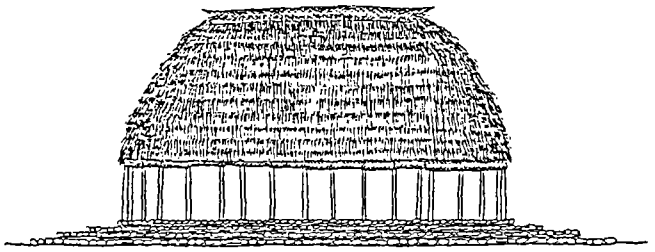
FALE TELE CROSS SECTION A A'



FALE TELE CROSS SECTION BB'



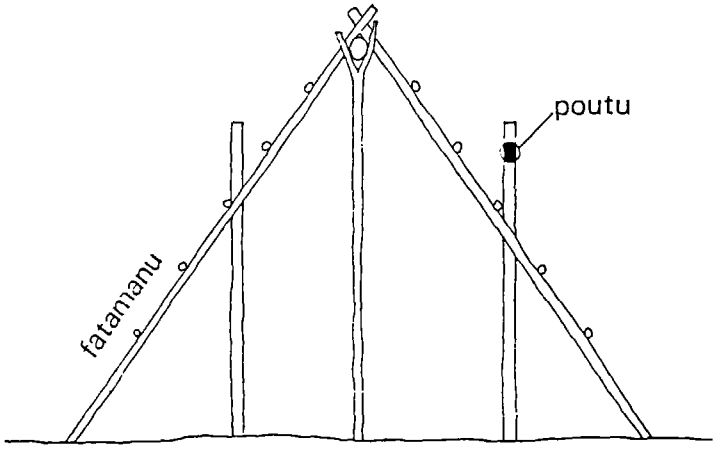
FALE TELE CROSS SECTION CC'

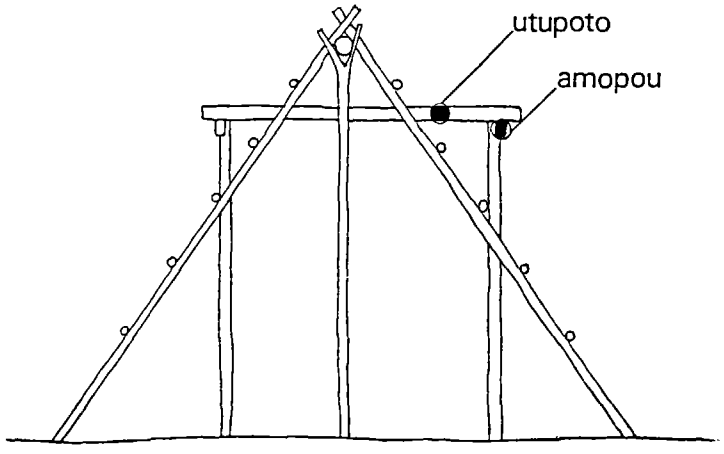


Chapter 5: Building the Fale Afolau

Like the *fale tele* the middle section of the *fale afolau* is the first section to be built. The scaffolding is erected in the same manner, but since the total structure is long, several inverted v's are erected and held in position with long staging foot-rest poles bound horizontally along the sloping timbers which rest on the ground outside the line of the future wall posts. The length of the house determines the number of inverted v's supporting the scaffolding.

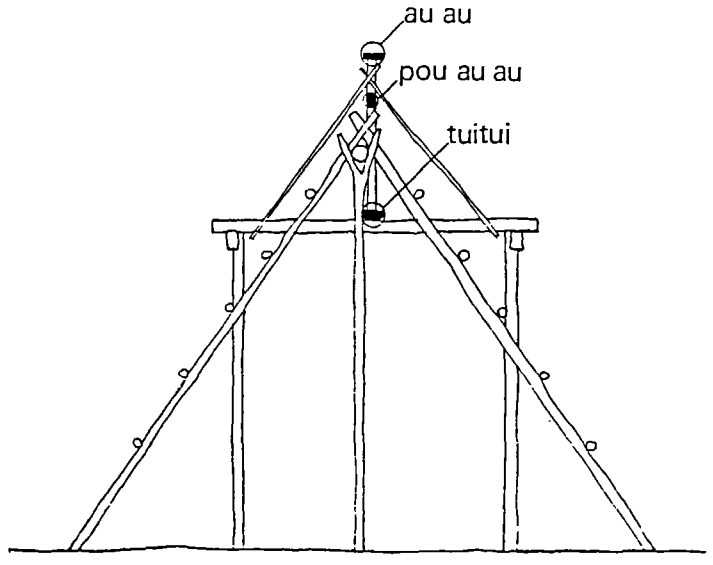
Two rows of main posts (*poutu*) are placed in holes in the ground and temporarily lashed to the scaffolding. The number of *poutu* is determined by the number of tie beams (*utupoto*) required by the owner. In fact, that is the first question the master builder will ask since the answer will help him estimate what he will need in the way of timber, sennit and other building materials.



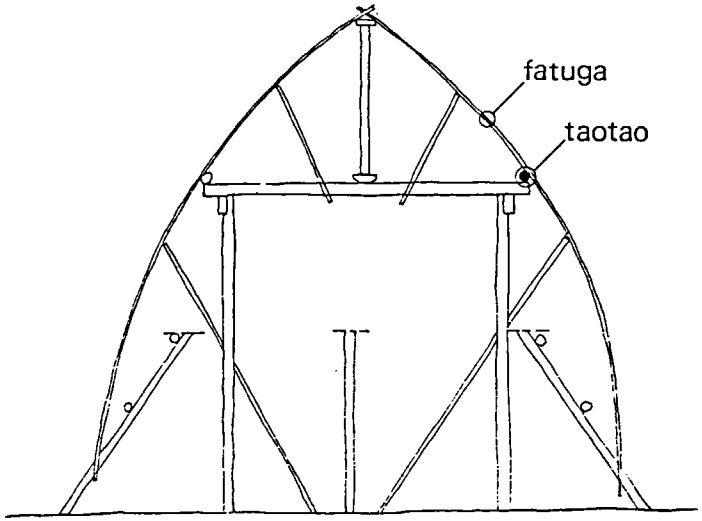


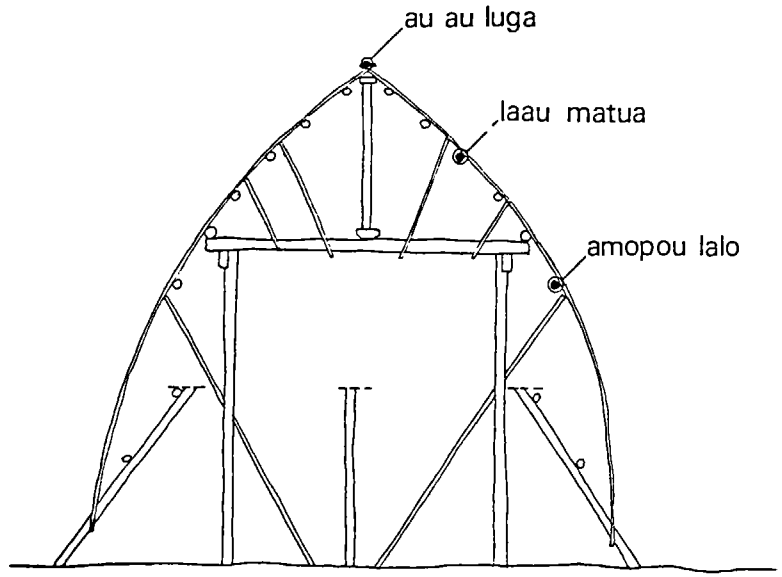
The upper ends of the *poutu* are notched to hold the two longitudinal beams (*amopou*) which run the length of the straight section. These are fitted flush to the tops of the *poutu* setting and lashed securely in place. The heavy tie beams (*utupoto*), which may be either square or round, are then rested at right angles on top of the *amopou* connecting each pair of *poutu*.

The *amopou* and *utupoto* are usually made of breadfruit; the *poutu* are, however, always made from a different sort of wood, such as teak.



Bisecting the middle frame section, another longitudinal beam (*tuitui*) is rested on the mid-points of the *utupoto*. The *tuitui* is usually carved and painted. To enhance the decorative effect, the builders lavish great care on how the *tuitui* is lashed both to the *utupoto* and to the main posts (*pou 'au 'au*) which support the upper ridgepole (*'au 'au luga*). At this stage, the structure is very wobbly and the builders must hold it in place themselves until temporary struts can be fastened connecting the *poutu* and *pou 'au 'au*. Here again, coconut husk fibre is stuffed into any remaining cracks before definitively binding the pieces together. The *amopou*, *tuitui*, and *pou 'au 'au*, are made from single beams. Running the entire length of the middle section, they are usually made of wood from a local hardwood family such as '*ifilele*', a wood belonging to the mahogany family.



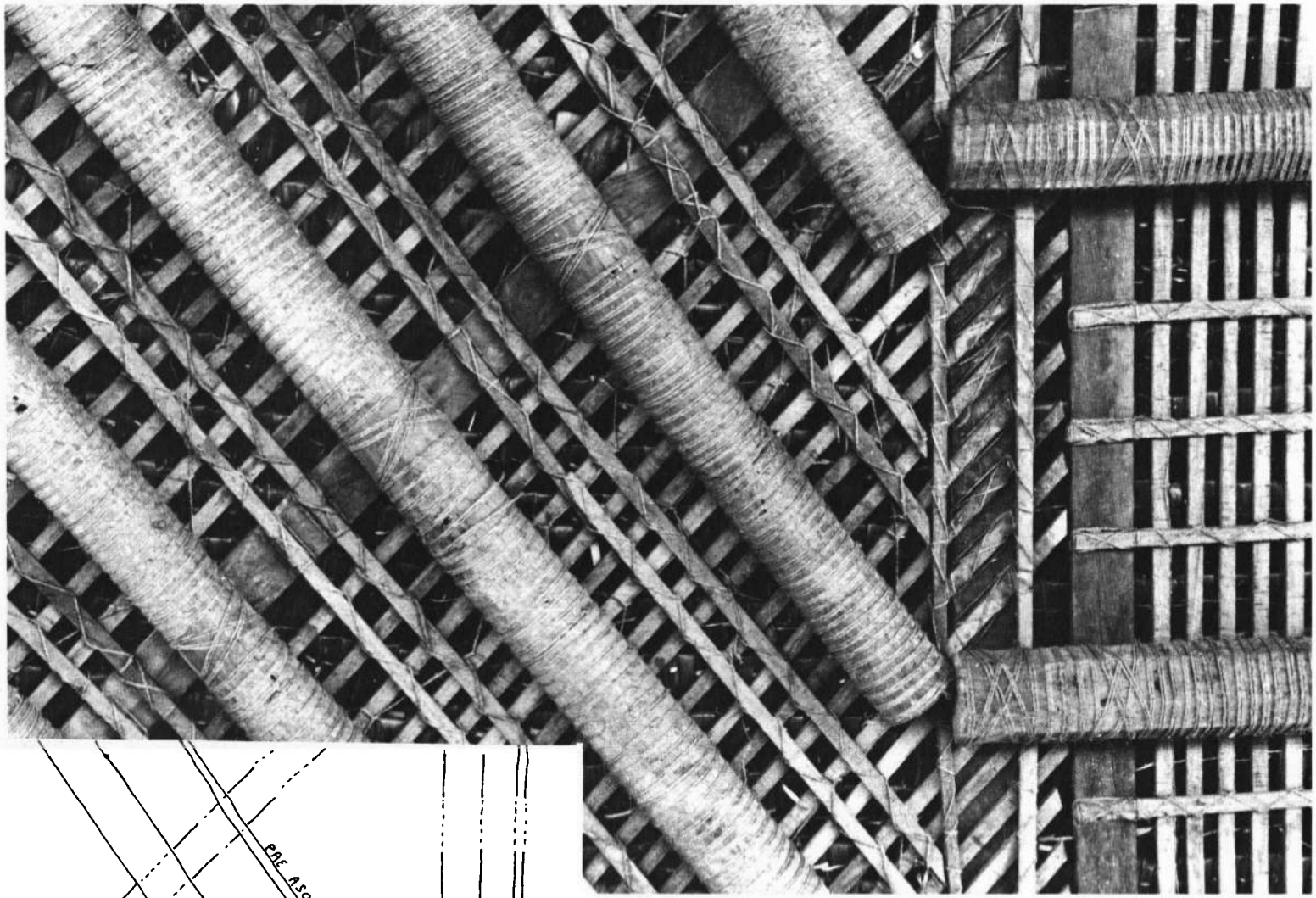


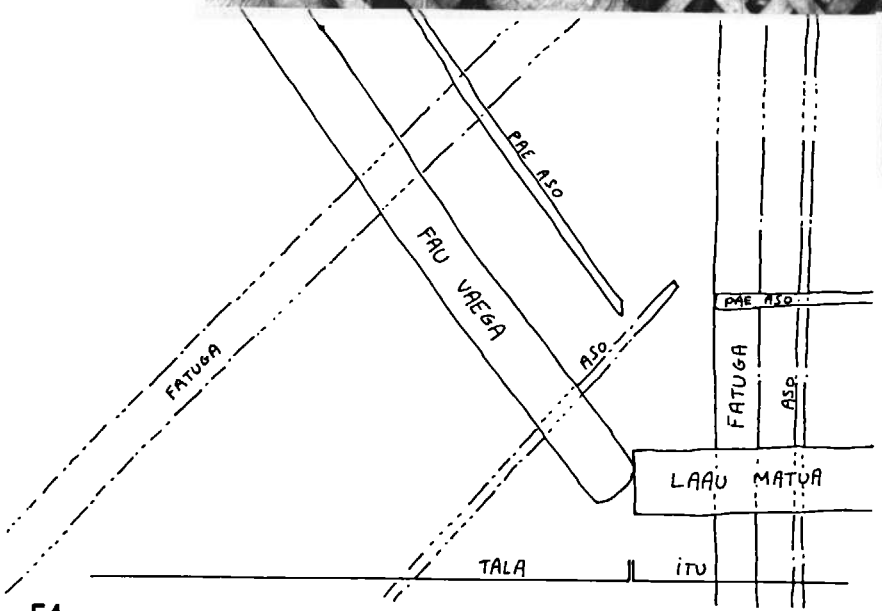
Next, as for the *fale tele*, the long coconut wood battens called *fatuga* are shaped and fitted above the *pou'au'au* and assembled in pairs corresponding to each *poutu*. Descending almost to the ground, their lower ends are temporarily tied to the scaffolding. Temporary struts extending from the tie beams and from the ground are lashed in place to give the roof its desired curvature.

Two horizontal round rafters are placed over the ends of the tie beams (*utupoto*). Tied to the *fatuga*, they maintain an equal spacing between them. Because of their specialized use, they are designated as *taotao* to distinguish them from the regular rafters (*la'au matua*) which are made of several lengths of breadfruit timber diagonally cut and lashed as other composite components.

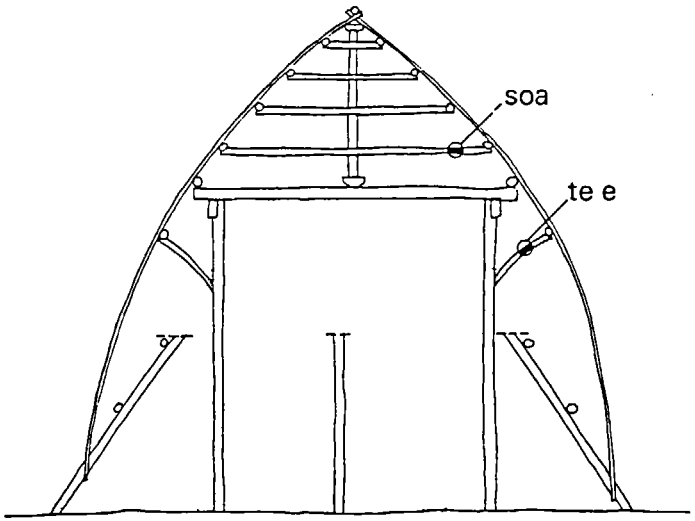
Sennit is stretched between the main supporting posts (*pou'au'au*), the *taotao* and the future roof plate (*amopou*). This distance is divided in equal spaces and the places where all the horizontal round rafters will subsequently be situated are marked on the inner sides of the *fatuga*. The other *la'au matua* are now lashed to the frame still curved by several temporary struts.

The upper ridgepole (*'au'au luga)*, which is usually but not necessarily cut from a single timber, is then lashed on the outside ends of the *fatuga*.

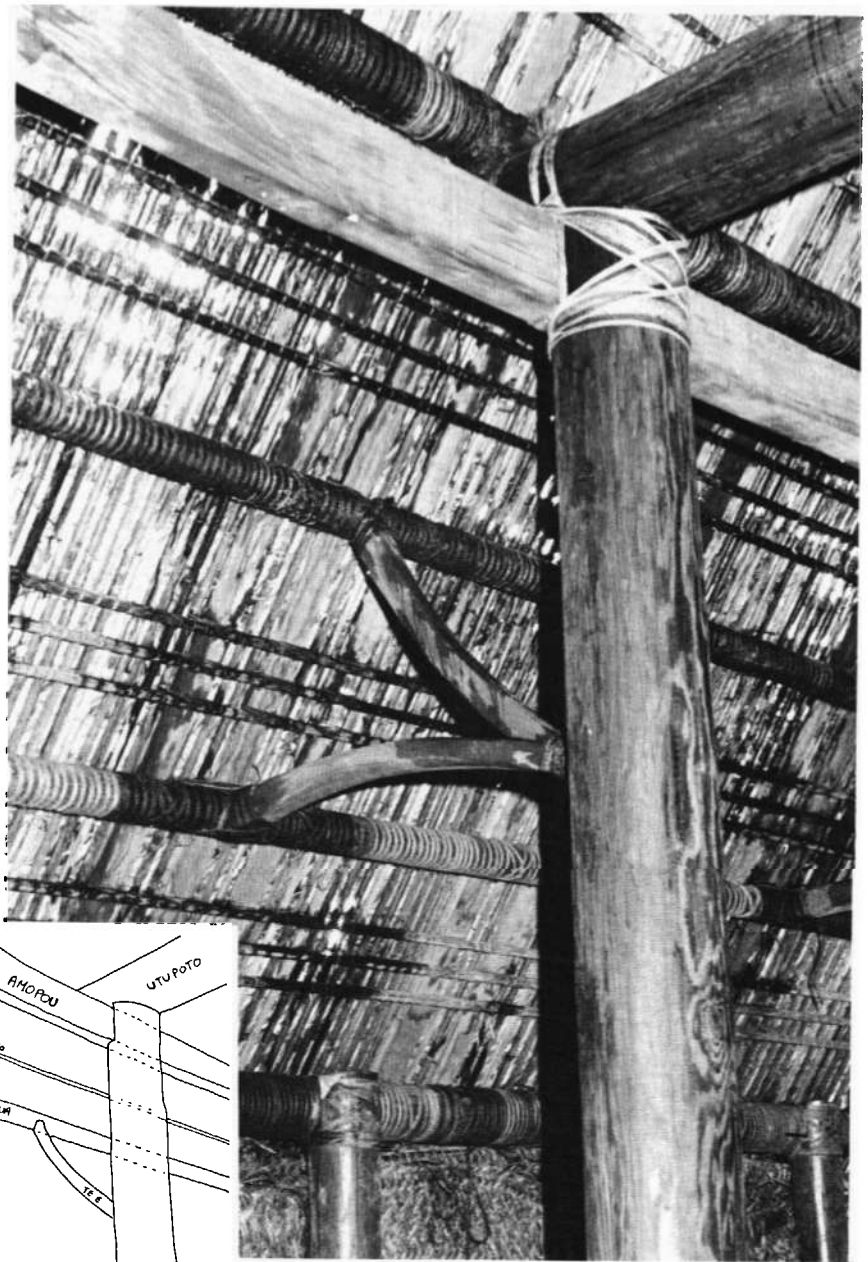


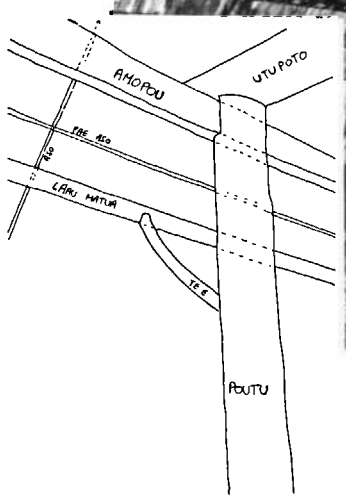


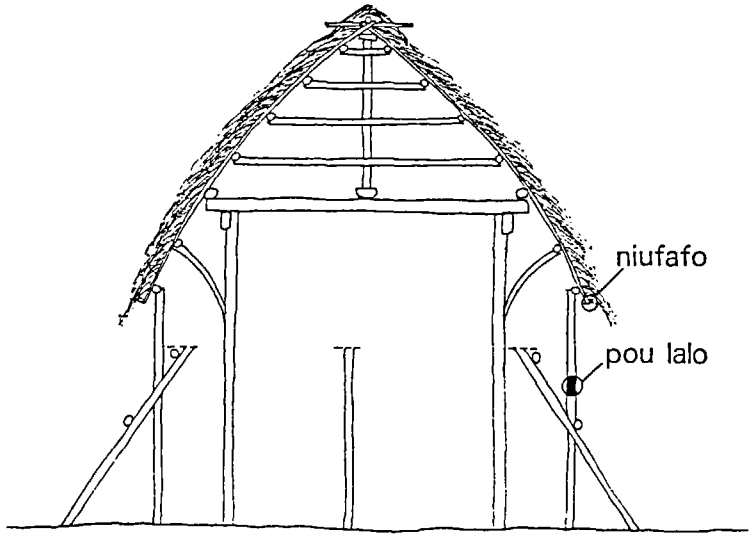
The main thatching listels (*aso*) and intersecting thatching listels (*pae aso*) are shaped as before, their ends bevelled and notched. Their function remains unchanged - stiffening the whole structure while adding the same architecturally rhythmic effect to the entire construction.



Cut to coincide precisely with the opposite *la'au matua*, the *soa* are lashed in pairs round each *pou'au'au*. They maintain the proper curvature and the temporary struts can now progressively be removed. Under the *amopou*, one or a pair of curved supporting braces (*te'e*) are added, connecting the outer side of the main *poutu* to the lower rafters.

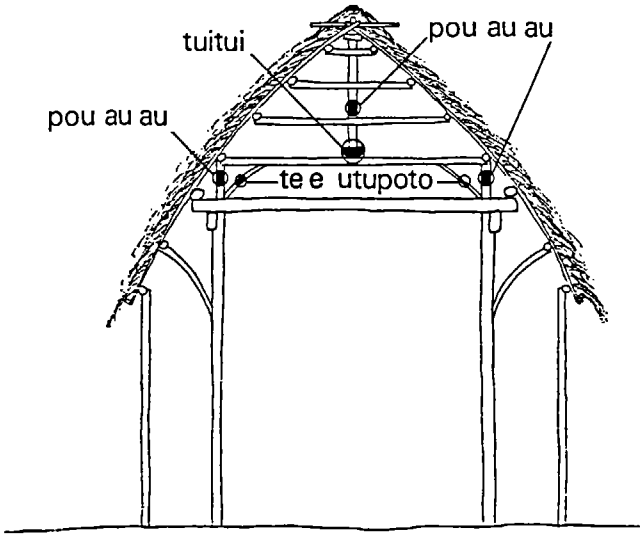


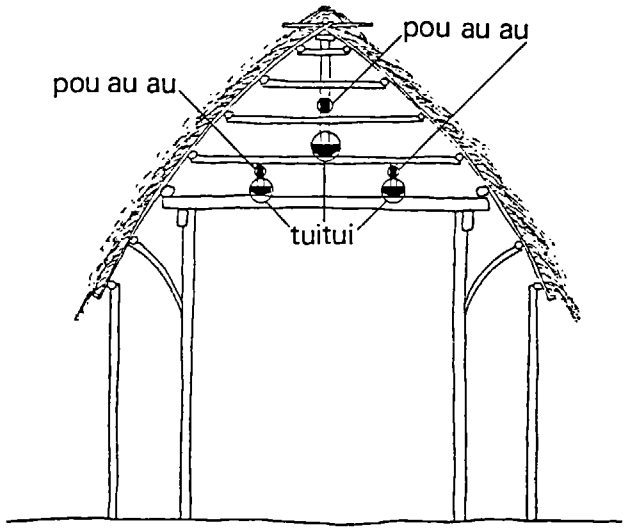




The lower roof plate (*amo pou lalo*), shaped in the same manner as all the horizontal *la'au matua*, are lashed to the *fatuga* at a height decided by the head builder. The wall posts (*pou lalo*) are then set in holes, fitted and lashed to the *amo pou lalo* in the same way they were for the *fale tele*. The lower ends of the battens are cut, their final extremities bound to the horizontal cleating timber. At this point, the entire middle section is thatched by the carpenter's assistants or turned over to the family.

The scaffolding is then erected first for one *tala*, then for the other. The *fau* are prepared on the ground and the two *tala* built just as they are for the *fale tele*. Similarly, once the thatching has been completed the family will build up the stone platform (*paepae*).





Many structural variations of the middle section exist though the one described in the preceding pages appears to be the oldest. Four examples are shown in Figures 8-11. Some are adopted purely for their aesthetic contribution to the total structure; others, however, are structurally desirable if indeed not essential. The curved *te'e* braces described on p. 53 are often braced on the *utupoto* and used to support the *so'a* or the *la'au matua.*

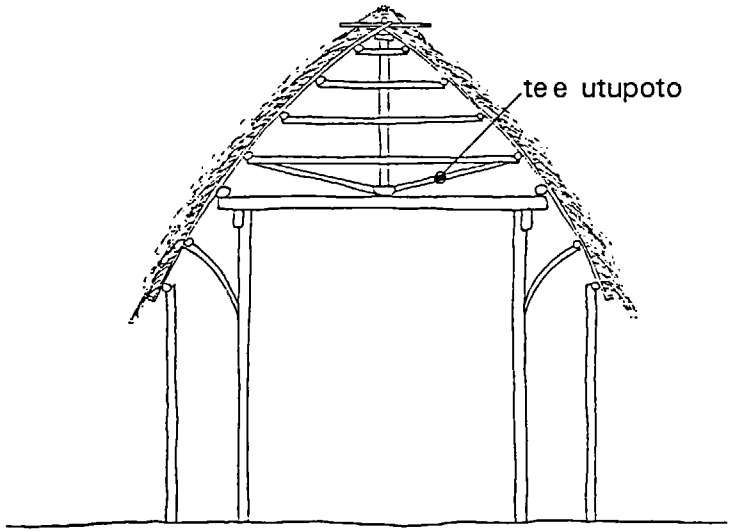
Similarly, and particularly when the span of the *utupoto* lying atop the *poutu* is great and correspondingly increases the weight of the roof on a single point, the traditionally single longitudinal beam (*tuitui*) bisecting the middle frame is eliminated and replaced by two, one on either side dividing the *utupoto* into three equal parts. Needless to say, the vertical king posts (*pou'au'au*) on which the lower *so'a* rest are similarly displaced to either side and are lashed to the upper side of the *tuitui.*

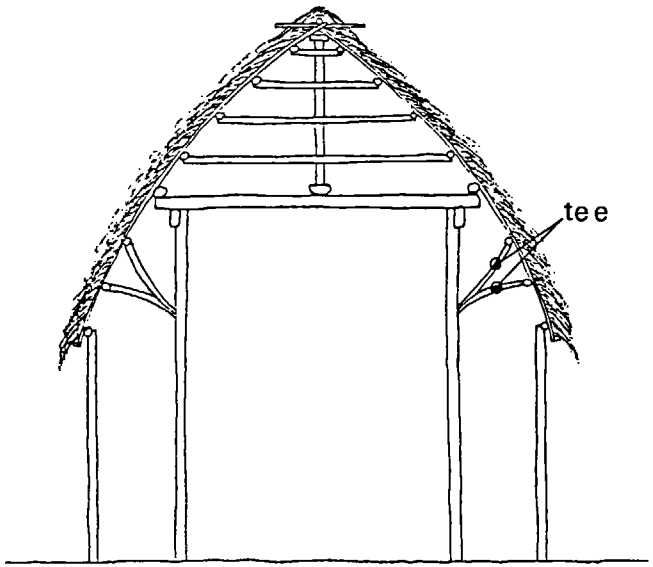
Once the builders have completed the frame, thatching commences. When the middle section is completed, the ridging thatch (*tauaIuga*) is placed on the upper ridgepole (*'au'au luga*). The *tauaIuga* is made of one central tightly-plaited coconut frond, consisting of two joined halves. Short wooden rods are passed through the *tauaIuga* to fix it in place.

The thatching of the rounded end section commences at the middle of the rounded end leaving the point where the middle and rounded end section meet to the last. The final step is the trimming of the thatch at the eaves so that the lower edge has a neat appearance and drains water properly.

A thatched roof lasts from 5 to 9 years before the deterioration caused by weather and insects forces the owner to replace it. To prolong the life of the thatch, it is sometimes covered with pairs of coconut fronds tied together at the butt end and placed to straddle the roof crown. The fronds reduce the deteriorating effect of the wind, rain and sun (see photo on p.54).

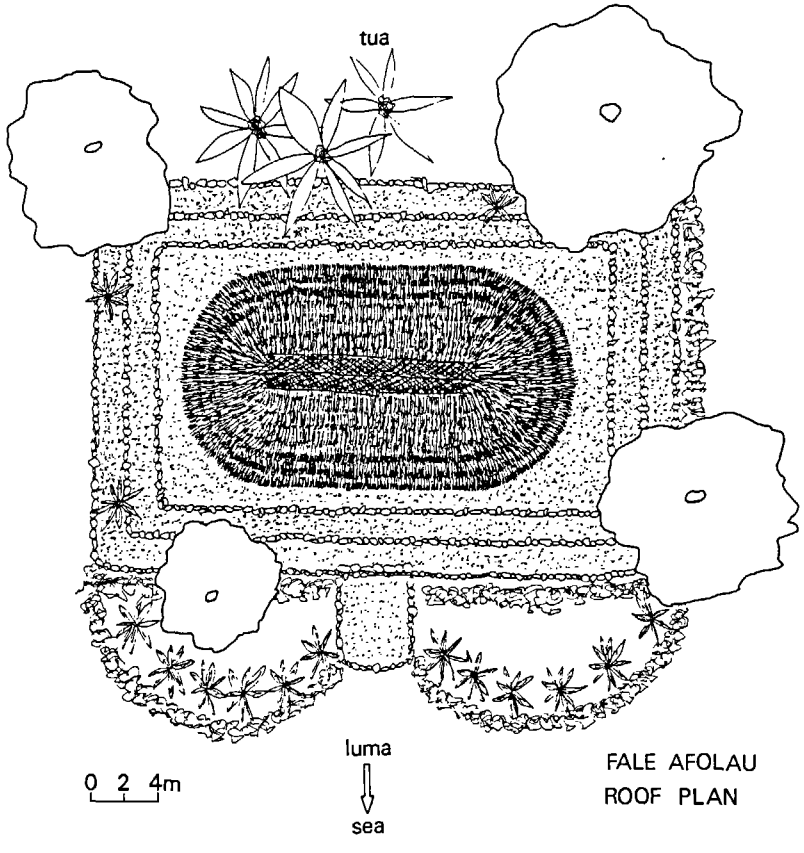
With the thatching completed, and while the family completes the steps and fills and levels the fale floor, and plaites and hangs up the wall screens, the *agaiotupu* puts the finishing touches on the decoration.



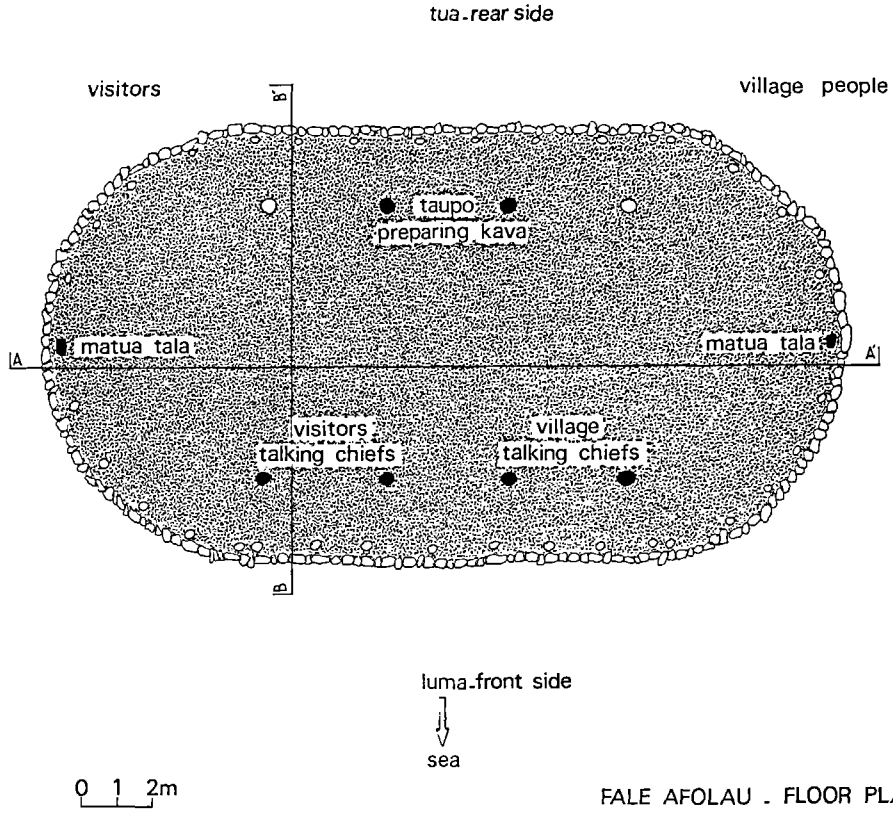


The day before the formal dedication (*umusaga*), the *agaiotupu* leads his helpers in cutting the top ends of the first and bottom line of thatches. No one is allowed to perform this task until a date for the dedication has been set.

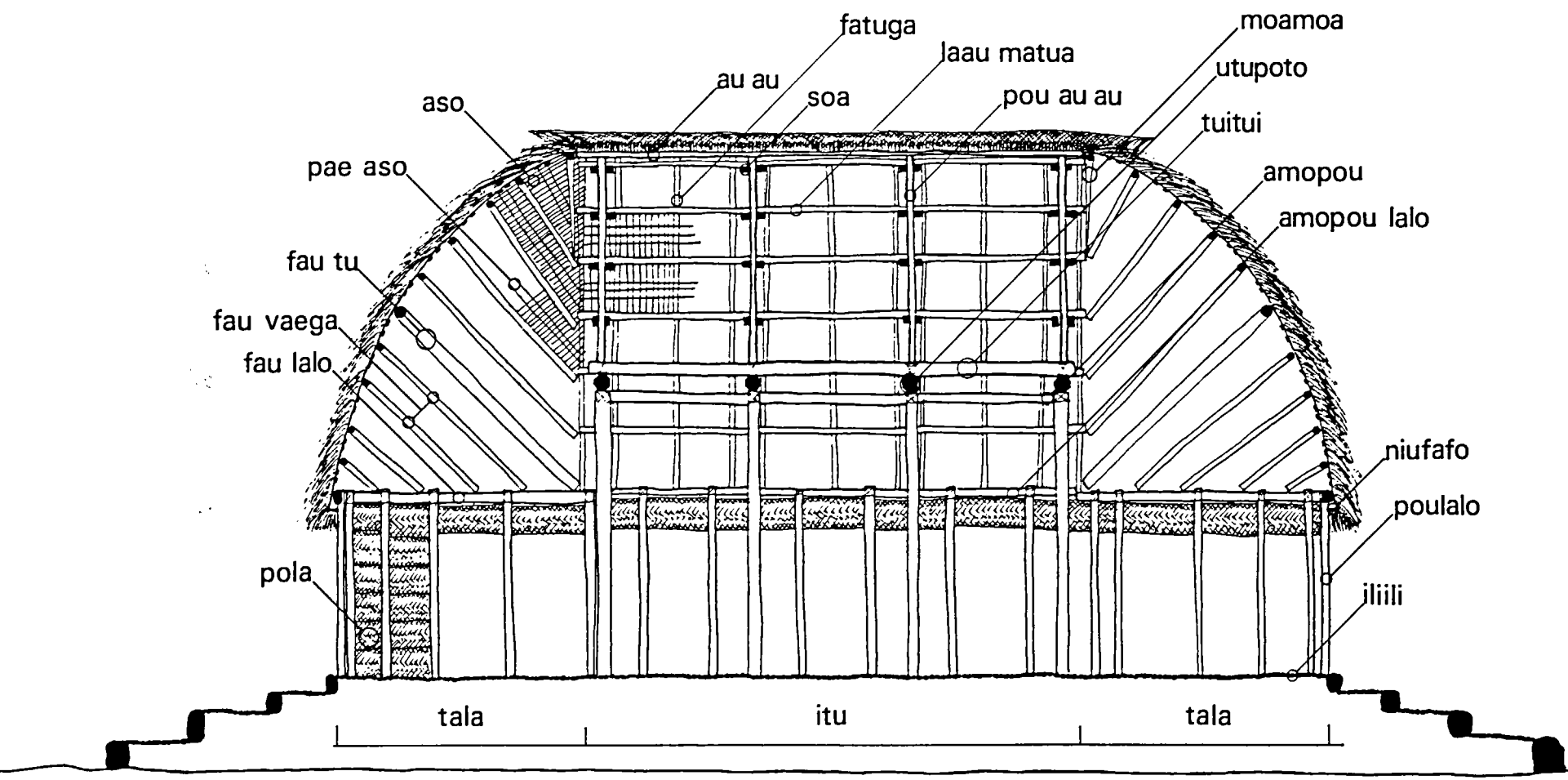
When the floor, the steps and the screens are ready and the thatch trimmed - all to the satisfaction of the *agaiotupu*, everyone is free to go inside, inspect the completed work and sit wherever they like. This tradition is called *Soli-le-mogamoga* which translates as "the house can be used now".



FALE AFOLAU
ROOF PLAN



FALE AFOLAU - FLOOR PLAN



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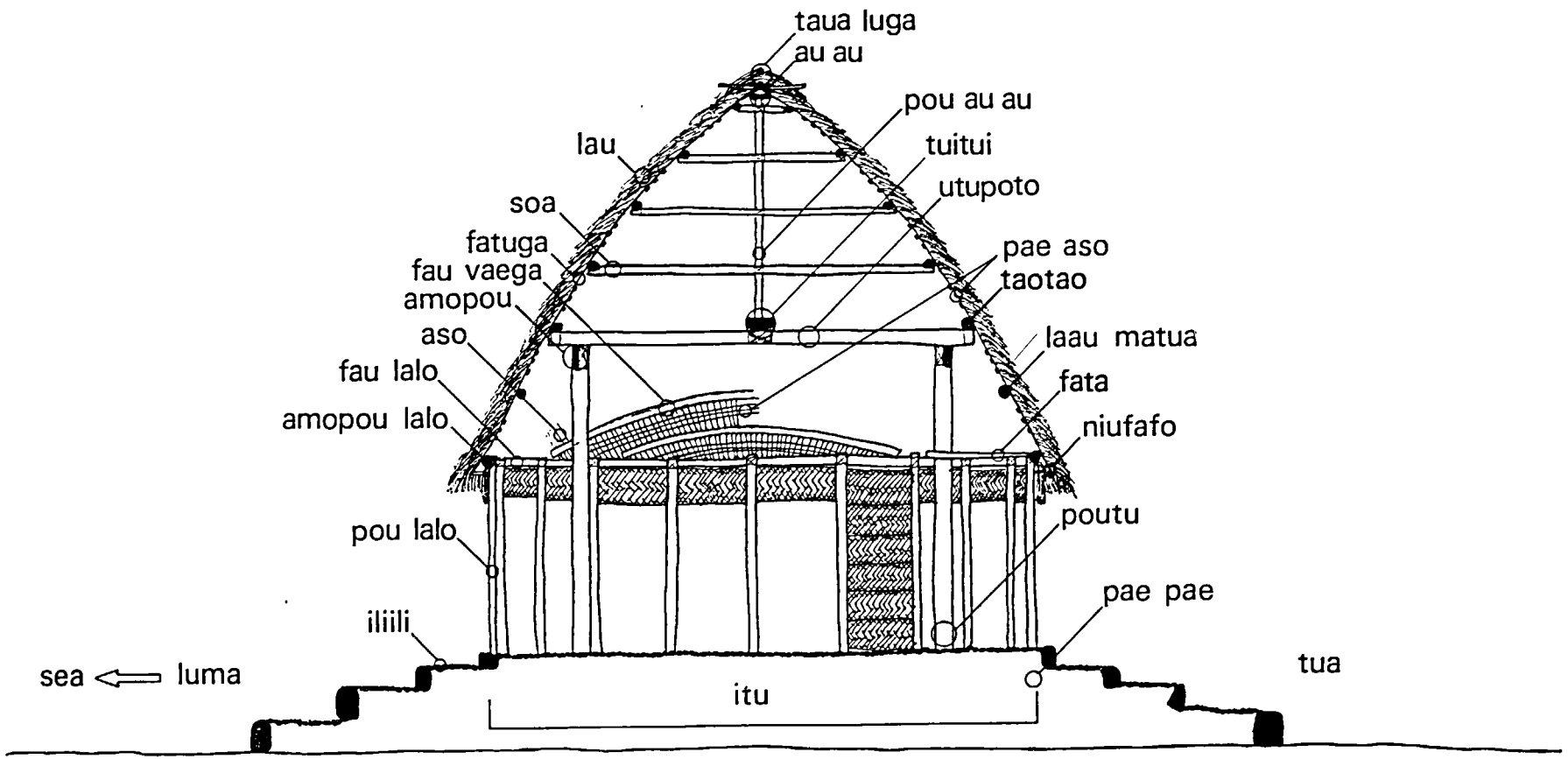
FALE AFOLAU CROSS SECTION AA'

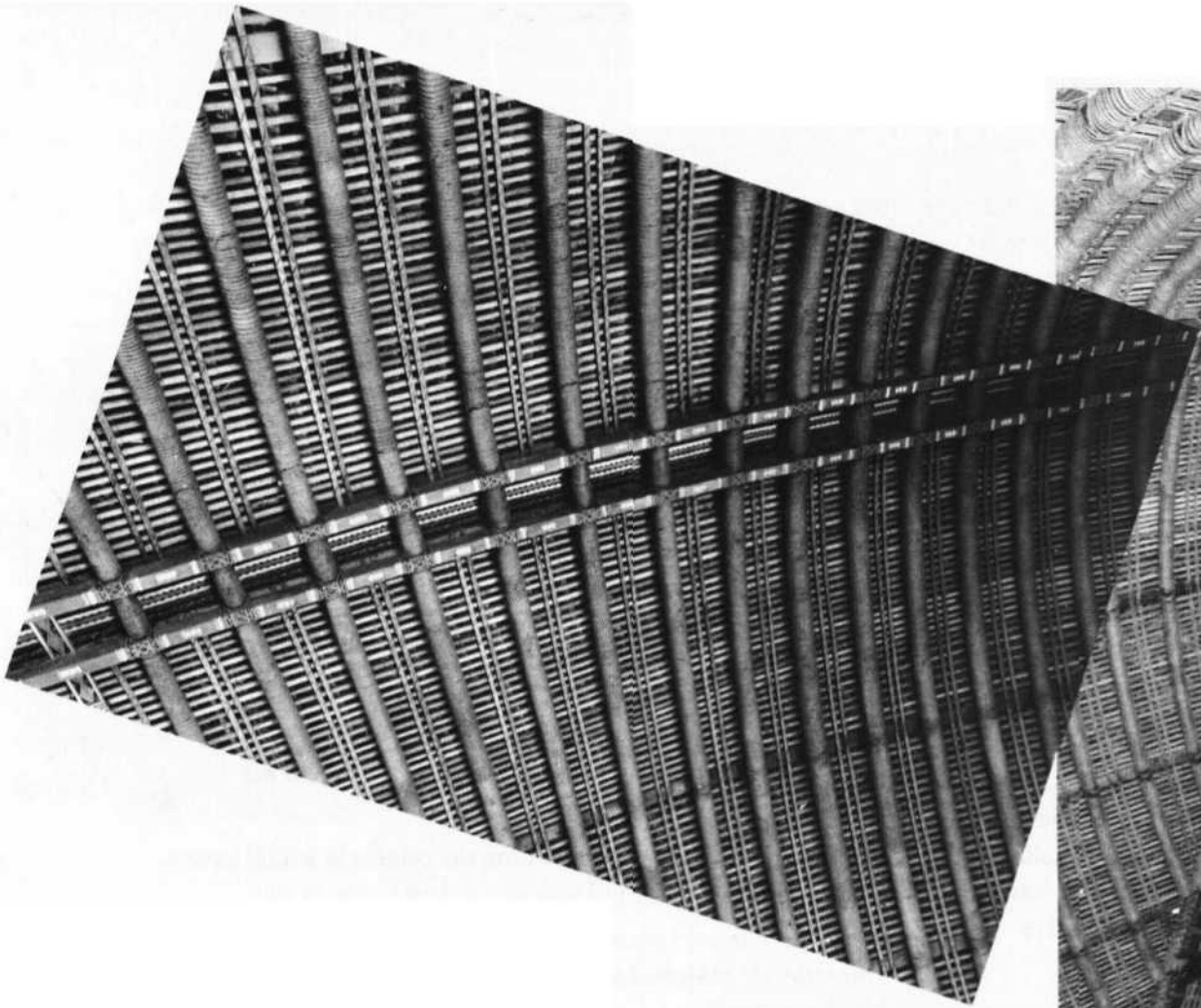


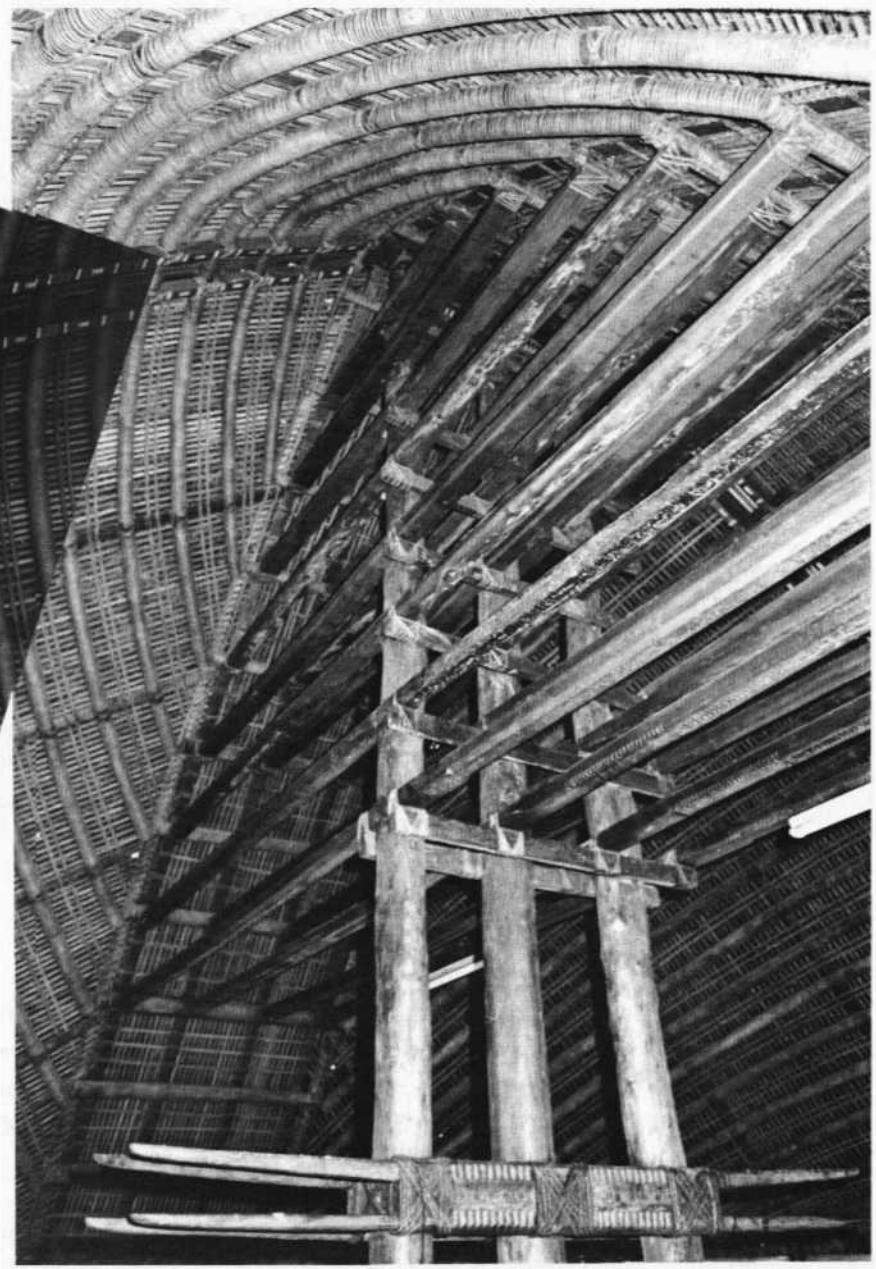
FALE AFOLAU CROSS SECTION BB'

Chapter 6: Furnishings

When people enter a fale to rest or meet for a formal meeting mats are put down on the pebble or gravel floor of the guest house. The mats, which measure approximately 3 x 8 feet are laid out in whatever number are needed to cover the whole floor. If the family is rich there may be a thick layer of three mats or more. Most mats are made of coconut but the better ones are woven of the tougher, smoother pandanus leaves. If no visistor is expected, they are not left on the floor but rolled up and stacked on shelves along other items like the traditional kava bowl, the *tanoa*. The family collection of photographs, diplomas and other memorabilia are typically placed on the upper surface of the end curb plate, hanging from the lower roof plate or placed on special shelves.

Because of their unusual appearance, these shelves deserve comment. One kind of shelf, called *talitali*, resembles a sort of yoke made of two pieces of wood. It is lashed about 6 feet from the floor, on either side of the main posts of the fale tele. The second type, typically used in the *fale afolau*, are known as *fata*. They consist of a platform made of several poles tied within easy reach between the first rafters and the main posts. Less frequently used items like kava sticks, additional mats and the like can also be stored higher up on *the so'a*, where they can only be reached using a ladder.





Chapter 7: Feast and Ceremonies

As the reader will certainly have gathered by now, many rituals and ceremonies are connected with the construction of a fale. Part of this tradition stems from the formality of Samoan social intercourse itself in which a highly stylized form of the language is spoken. Both the language and pronunciation differ from everyday Samoan and only matais bother to learn to speak it. Ceremonies offer the only opportunities to demonstrate one's skill in its use. Yet the central place of the fale in Samoan tradition as a symbol of all that is great and chiefly in the *fa'a Samoa*, is an equally powerful stimulus for the holding of feasts and ceremonies.

Finally, and not to be forgotten, is the importance attached in Samoa to giving and to sharing. It is principally in these ceremonies that wealth is shared. The powerful chief is thus not so much the one who has accumulated riches but rather the one who acquires them and gives them away in support of his *aiga* and of the village at large.

In the case of the construction of the fale, feasts held in honour of the builders at which presentations are made and kava is drunk are a conventional, even expected way of encouraging them but in no way constitute payment for the work. The actual payment, be it in cash or in kind, is made upon completion of the second rounded end of the fale tele.

When making the presentations, the *tulafale* (orator) will, on behalf of the matai, outdo himself in calling attention in the most exalted, flowery language, to the future or past contributions of the recipient of fine mat, piece of tapa or whatever:

> *"for the strong hands lacerated and martyred in the work"*
>
> *"for the peerless lashing of the fatuga"*
>
> *"for the all-seeing eyes who shaped the precise curvature required"*
>
> *"for the blameless and co-operative children of the builders who were thrashed by the ungrateful children of the owner""*
>
> *"for the steadiness of the noble hands holding erect the pou 'au 'au"*
>
> (the vertical king posts supporting the ridgepole which have a tendency to wobble until securely lashed to the *so 'a*)
>
> *"for the workers' uncomplaining endurance of the elements - mercilessly scorched by the sun, buffetted by the wind, pelted by the rain ..."*
>
> *for the meanaitaua who endured the tortures of hell itself from the head-to-toe itching caused by the countless coconut leaf thatches she raised up to the thatchers" ...*

In the event, after the *agaiotupu*, the *meanaitaua* (the wife of the master carpenter) is singled out second in recognition of her help in keeping the sleeping fales clean, tidying up the compound, washing and contributing in a thousand other ways.

Arrival of the carpenters

The arrival of the builders (*tufuga*) is a moment keenly awaited by the entire village. The carpenters arrive with all their tools along with a number of roasted pigs, taro, strings of reef fish, buckets of salted beef and the like as a sign that they have accepted the work and are ready to begin. The *matai tufuga*'s offering is called the *momoli o le tufuga*.

The *taufalealii* and all the matais in his *aiga* welcome the workers in the traditional manner - speeches, presentation of fine mats, kava sticks and so forth - and of course also produce food to complement that brought by the *matai tufuga*. A large feast is held to commemorate the occasion.

The Village Council chiefs also attend, bearing their own traditional offerings. It is at this point when they make speeches in which assurances are given to both the *taufalealii* and the *agaiotupu* that should there ever be a shortage of sennit, thatch or any other material, the Village Council stands ready to provide more. This part of the ceremony also has a name - *usu taeao*.

Following the speeches, the *taufalealii* presents the Council members with portions of the master carpenter's *momoli o le tufuga* and formally thanks them for supporting the undertaking.

At this point, the *taufalealii* conducts the *agaiotupu* and his wife to the special fale (*apisa*) in which they will live for the duration of the construction. Simultaneously, an old matai in the *aiga* is designated as the one to look after the other builders. Referred to as the *taufalemau*, he will accompany them to their own *fale*, the *faleta*.

It is the *taufalemau's* duty to remain with the workers throughout the construction, attending to their needs for tobacco, kava and *niu* (green coconut water), and recounting legends and jokes many of which are more than a little spicy (the Samoans are second to none in their appreciation of 'colourful' humour). It is all part of a strategy to encourage them to redoubled efforts. In his spare time, like everyone else, he will braid sennit and call out words of exhortation: "*faamalosi, malo lava, malo le silasila*".

Thereafter and for his part, the *taufalealii* will spend a great deal of time actually at the building site, helping out in small tasks and generally demonstrating his interest in the progress and quality of the work. He will never arrive at the work site where someone is building without speaking words of encouragement, offering a cigarette, drink, or the like.

Raising the main posts

"*Raise high the roof beam, carpenter*" says the happy western family to the builder as that symbol of protection against the elements is hauled up and nailed fast. Whether it is the roof, the main supporting posts, the foundations, the hearth or the front door, most cultures are powerfully moved by the spectacle of some significant part of their home or extension of it taking shape before their very eyes.

And the main posts of a large *fale tele* or *fale afolau* are nothing if not massive, particularly in the *fale tele* the roof of which, it is recalled, rests entirely on them, the wall posts not being an absolute structural necessity. Their sheer size indeed conveys a sense of unlimited strength and timelessness which in turn inspires sentiments bordering on awe and even reverence.

An interesting variation which has crept into fale construction and which seems so small as to appear insignificant is the fixing of a bouquet of flowering shrubs on one end of the *auau* (ridgepole) once it is set into position. Samoans questioned about the origins of the

practice confess to uncertainty but conclude that it has its roots in ancient Samoa. It does not, however: they learned the custom from Scandinavian and German builders who came to Samoa in the middle of the last century, took Samoan wives and remained there.

The forebearer of the floral bouquet was a small fir tree which Scandinavian builders in Europe and North America continue to tie to the end of the newly-erected ridgepole to this day. In Samoa, the many Rasmussens, Hellesoes, and Nielsens are the nevertheless very Samoan-looking descendants of obviously Scandivanian forebearers. Their great grandparents who settled and became well-known traders, brought the tradition with them, but finding no fir trees in Samoa they took the next best thing: frangipani, hibiscus and ginger flowers. Some would argue that the Samoa variation which is still in use today is an improvement on the original.

The final ceremony - Umusaga

The *umusaga* marks the completion of the guest house. It is the occasion in which services to the *taufaleali'i* great and small are acknowledged following the formal rituals of the *fa'a Samoa*. Predictably, it is the grandest, most high-spirited, and certainly most costly of all the many gatherings in which thanks are given throughout the many months of construction.

If the *taufaleali'i* has a high title and great influence, he may count on the donations of friends and relatives from very distant villages as well of course as on those provided by his own *aiga*. If not, the members of his own *aiga* can be counted on to do their best.

Starting several days before the *umusaga* and continuing right up to the arrival of the invited guests, a constant procession of people arrives in the family's compound bringing fine mats, sleeping mats, bottles of coconut oil scented with the highly perfumed essences of frangipani, *moso'oi* and other typical blossoms and leaves, bottles of sea slugs, edible seaweed elegantly wrapped in fortune cookie-shaped packages made of breadfruit leaves, octopus cooked in coconut cream, mud crabs, flying foxes, *palolo* (a kind of seaworm that inexplicably rises out of the coral on only two days a year and is Samoa's own caviar), and of course the quantities of pigs, chickens, fish, corned beef, taro, breadfruit and other staples that invariably accompany any *fiafia*.

Armed with that ubiquitous, most polyvalent tool, the three-foot bush knife which Samoans wield with stupefying accuracy and use for every imaginable cutting task, young boys are sent to 'mow' the lawns around the family's compound. When they are done, the grass will look as though it had been cut by a power rotary mower.

From the back of the family's compound (and from those of others who are helping), thick white wood smoke billows out of the *fale umu* making the entire area - even the whole village - appear to be plunged into a 'pea soup' fog. Here, some of the young men are wrapping fish and chicken in banana leaf 'parcels' which will be placed on the hot rocks of the *umu*. Others tear the stiff central veins from the backs of the young taro leaves to make them pliable. They will be turned into small 'pockets' into which coconut cream will be poured. When cooked in the *umu* this rich dish called *palusami* will taste like a spicy spinach sweetened by the now-thickened coconut. It is eaten at every feast, usually along with a piece of baked or steamed taro. Since it is rare indeed to find anyone who does not like *palusami* it is a pity that coconut oil is the worst of the saturated fats!

Green coconuts - *niu* - are needed in great numbers and must be brought down from trees, some of which sway in the wind 50 feet off the ground. Different methods are used to climb the trees but a common one involves binding one's ankles together with an old rag and, bracing one's splayed feet on the trunk (toes out/heels in) and grasping it with

either arm, 'leap-frogging' vertically. Any young Samoan who knows how to climb a tree can get to the top in little more than ten seconds. There, with a one-armed steely grip on the trunk, he will use his free hand to twist the nuts on their stems until they come free. Someone who is fast will literally release a cascade of nuts and those below have to be careful not to get hit with these nearly five-pound projectiles.

Unlike many Asians who neatly 'top' them like an egg, Samoans almost always husk their coconuts, whether they are to be used for drinking or cooking. Husking is a skill acquired young and requires very strong arms. Samoans have them. A stake is planted at an angle in the ground. The husker grasps the nut in either hand (the point towards the stake) and jams down hard onto the stake tearing up the green fibrous husk as he (or she - girls may be slower but even a 10 year old can do it) does so. In very little time - 20 seconds - this seemingly impregnable fortress is stripped of its encasing husk which lies in disarray wherever the pieces fall.

If the nut is to be drunk, the standard method is to hold it in the palm of the left hand and to open a roughly 2-inch hole in the top by cracking it with the back of a knife-blade at various points around the circumference of the intended opening. Coconut shell is hard but also brittle and thus gives way after four or five sharp blows.

Making coconut cream from the meat of the ripe coconut is another task for the boys at the *umu*. Sitting astride a wooden stool with a projecting iron grater, the one given the task rapidly removes the ripe flesh from halved shells. Once a substantial mound of grated coconut has built up, he will take a tangled bundle of *tauage* fibres (from the banana tree trunk) in which he will make a sort of birds-nest pocket. In this pouch he will place a sizeable fist-full of coconut.

Folding the *tauaga* over so that the pieces of coconut cannot get out, he will twist the fibre as hard as he can, wringing it 'towel-fashion'. Miraculously, from these apparently dry shavings emerges a stream of thick coconut cream which pours into the basin placed to catch it. When he is satisfied there is no more in that bundle, he will open the mesh and throw away the now completely dry coconut which the chickens are only too happy to dispatch. This process is repeated until he has a basin-full. Now the consistency of dairy cream, the coconut cream will be used in the making of many dishes besides the *palusami*: crab, chicken, fish, octopus ...

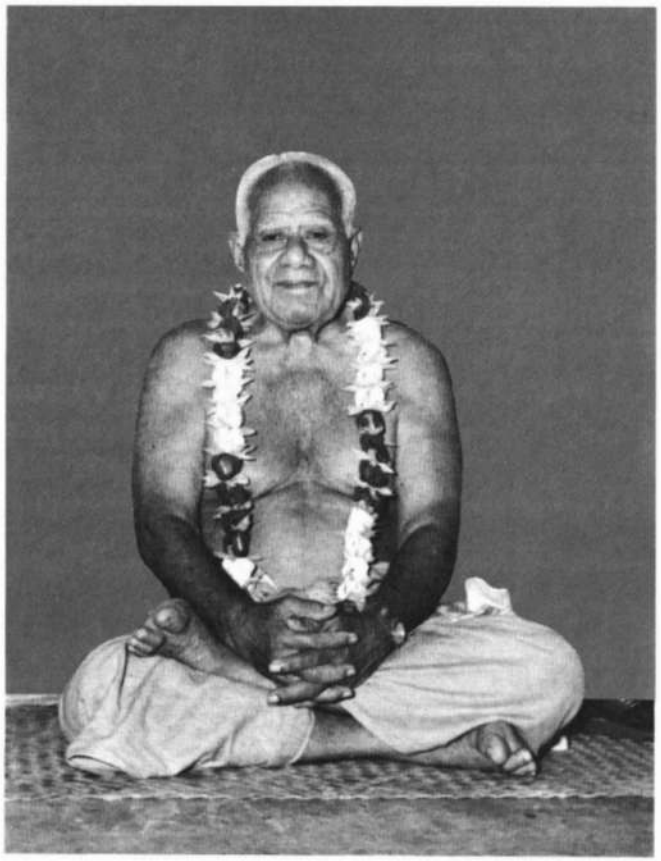
A final word on a typical way of getting another chicken for the *umu*, or a ripe mango if it is the right season. Samoans, men and women, all learn how to throw stones and at a very young age, acquire the ability to hit a very small target nine out of ten times. This includes a moving target. It is not at all uncommon to see a group of laughing children pursue a squawking chicken in the general direction of a young man planted in the middle of the compound. In a flash, the young Samoan 'David' has let fly a stone at the small feathered 'Goliath'. The comparison with the biblical counterpart stops there however since the chicken is running away as fast as its scaly yellow feet can carry it. The stone makes no noise when it hits the chicken but a flurry of feathers is the sign that it has met its mark. Instantly the children pounce on the dead bird and in a matter of minutes, it is plucked and ready for the *umu*. Many young men throw with such accuracy that they are able to knock a mango off a tree 30' in the air. Skills such as these seem wasted when one knows the high salaries earned by professional cricket bowlers and basefall pitchers!

The scenes described above are not by any means only associated with the *umusaga*. Indeed they are typical of Samoan village life and are only provided to lend some depth and local colour to the description. It is, however, accurate to say that all of these activities would be carried out during the *umusaga* with greater than usual vigour amidst laughter and jokes. The spirit of the umusaga would infect the entire village, not just the family.

Chapter 8: Guild of Builders

Among several legends about the origin of Samoan houses, one relates that the first house was built by *Sa Tagaloa* in *Faga* on the island of *Tau*. He and his family were living in caves and trees and they felt the need for a shelter. They were unable however, to decide whether first to build a fishing boat or to build a house. In the best Samoan tradition a compromise was decided upon: they decided to build a house inside which they could build a boat.

Perhaps that is why the shape of this first house was long (*afolau*). Today the famous 90 foot *fautasi*, an elongated version of a whale boat and rowed by as many as 50 oarsmen, is in fact built inside a house and many traditional canoes (*paopao* and *vaalo*) continue to be made inside houses. The guild of builders includes boat builders as well as house builders.



Tradition has it that there were four well known builders on the islands: *Selefuti, Moe, Segi* and *Leifi*. Called *Falefa o le Aiga-Sa-le-Malama* these four are considered the patrons of any chief builder. Later others became famous as well.

Some elements in the fale's construction have taken their name from the names of these mythic builders.

Manufili was the first to build a temporary framefor erecting the main posts *(poutu)*; and the scaffolding has come to be called *Fata-a-Manufili*.

Tagaloa-Matua came up with the idea of using the horizontal round rafters which are now called *la'au matua*.

The builder *So'a-fa* introduced the tie beam called *so'a*. *Mata'afa* introduced sennit (*afa*) for lashing.

The professional house builder is a *tufuga fai fale*. The *matai tufuga* is the head of a large team of *tufuga*. Though this profession most often stays within a family, a young man can be taken on as an apprentice without necessarily being a relative of the *tufuga*. Working in the team, he can himself become a *tufuga* through election in one of the builder's societies. There are several main guilds whose importance is based on the closeness of the relationship with the original guild founded by Malama. The *tufuga*'s rank in the guild depends on how many generations of his family have been professional *tufuga*.

There is no examination or testing, but a successful completion of a *fale tele* generally provides the opportunity for a young builder to become a *tufuga*. Having demonstrated his skill in his work, the apprentice will offer fine mats and gifts to his *matai tufuga* during a ceremony after which he is officially admitted to the guild.

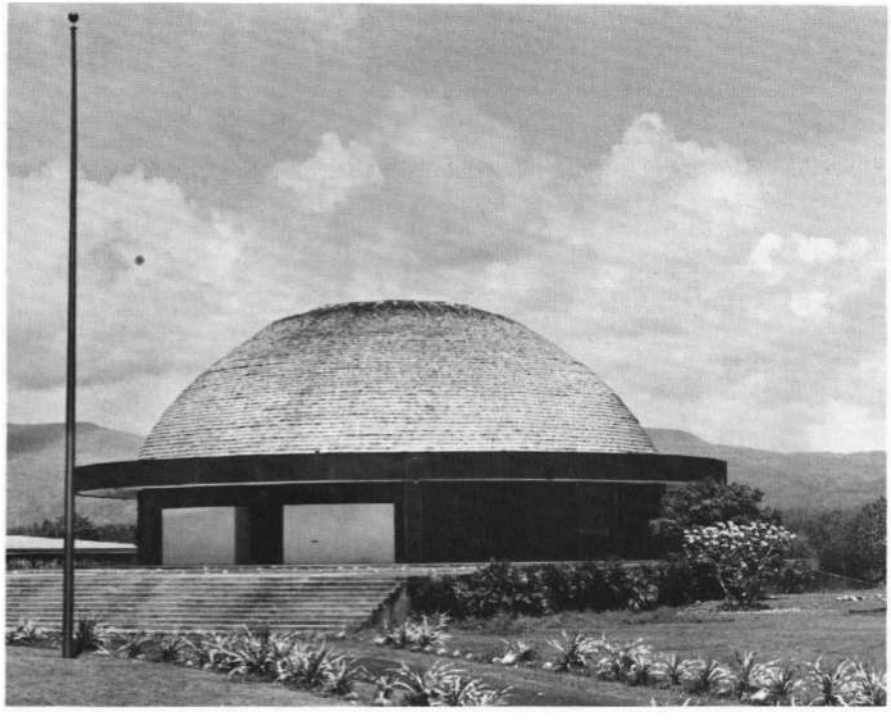
An average team includes around 10 builders but some have as many as 60, with some members being specialized in certain kinds of assembling. As stated in the previous chapters the reputation of a builder is partly based on the elegance of his lashings and other decorative aspects of construction.

Tauiliili Moamau who in 1991 was 78 years old (see photo opposite page) commenced his building career when he was 15; he was a member of three different building teams before he himself became a *matai tufuga* when he was 30.

Stressing innovation more than competition, *Mulitalo*, an 83 year old carpenter from *Saanapu* (a village reputed for its *tufugas*) has specialized in building a *fale tala fa* which looks like a traditional *fale afolau* with two smaller rounded ends added in the middle of the long section. His master piece is a *fale tala ono* which has got four supplementary rounded ends.

The skillful *tufuga* will have a high status in Samoa and will probably be wealthy and, with or without an actual title, he will be treated as though he were a high-ranking matai.

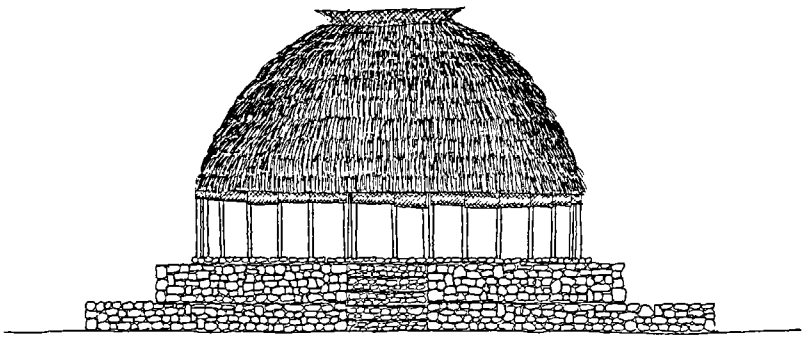
Chapter 9: Fale for Non-Traditional Purposes



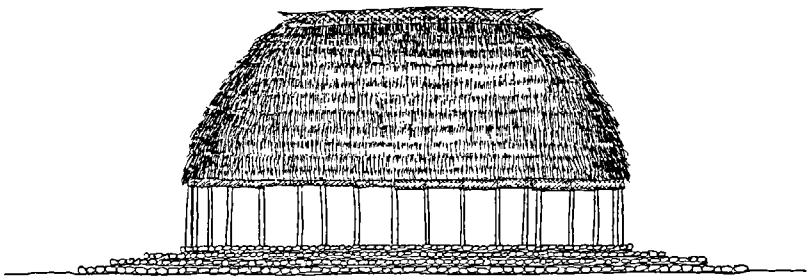
Samoans are proud of their buildings which is why they often are used and built for institutional purposes. The Samoan Parliament Building (*fono*) is inspired by the *fale tele*; the VIP house at Faleolo International Airport in Western Samoa is a *fale afolau* as is the very elaborately built Visitors' Bureau in Apia; and the Tusitala Hotel in Apia boasts a fale of staggering proportions, the roof beam soaring nearly 60 feet in the air. Together with the fale at Aggie Grey's Hotel, these two 'modern' fales boast some of the finest, most decorative workmanship to be found anywhere today.

A great number of schools and colleges also have their own *fale tele* or a *fale afolau*. They are used for Samoan language and culture training lessons. The atmosphere in the fale in itself represents the traditional Samoan life style making it easier for teachers to teach the students about Samoan culture and simulate traditional Samoan situations like seating arrangements, kava ceremony procedure, speeches and entertainment and dancing during feasts. These fales are also used to welcome visitors, guests and visiting teachers.

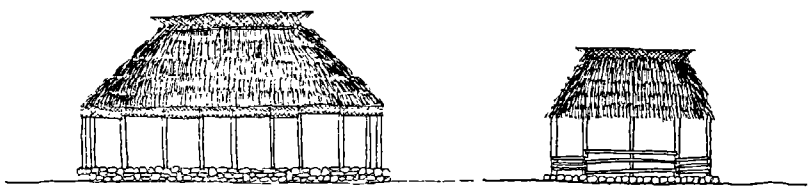
Because the traditional Fale is in demand for more modern purposes, the craft is given a real chance to survive despite the modernization of society and the rising costs of building these remarkable constructions. Very few chiefs can actually afford to build a fale today; it is so much easier and cheaper to build a 'New Zealand' style rectangular house in Samoan style that uses poumuli posts to support the roof, but as long as government institutions and private enterprises are willing and able to pay for the construction of a fale, there is hope that the famous and skillful Samoan architects and builders will remain in business in the 21st century and beyond and that the tradition will stay alive.



fale tele



fale afolau



fale o'o

fale umu

Pronunciation guide

Because this study includes many Samoan words, a disservice would be done to the reader if it failed to provide insights into the sound of the language. A reader wishing to acquire a better grasp of the phonetics and structure of Samoan would have to consult a dictionary, grammar, or a Samoan mother-tongue speaker. A few pointers will, however, help him/her to 'hear' the words being read in this volume.

Samoan is completely phonetic and there are no variations. All words end in vowels, save of course for those that may have been assimilated into the language and even then, they are usually 'samoanized' — e.g., pikiapu - pick-up truck; aisakulimi - ice cream; Kerisimasi - Christmas.

Samoan words frequently have glottal stops which are represented by apostrophes but, like the vowel signs in Arabic, modern usage has resulted in their increasing disappearance from the written word. A non-Samoan would have difficulty in guessing where they belong but double vowels (e.g. alii) are always separated by a glottal stop.

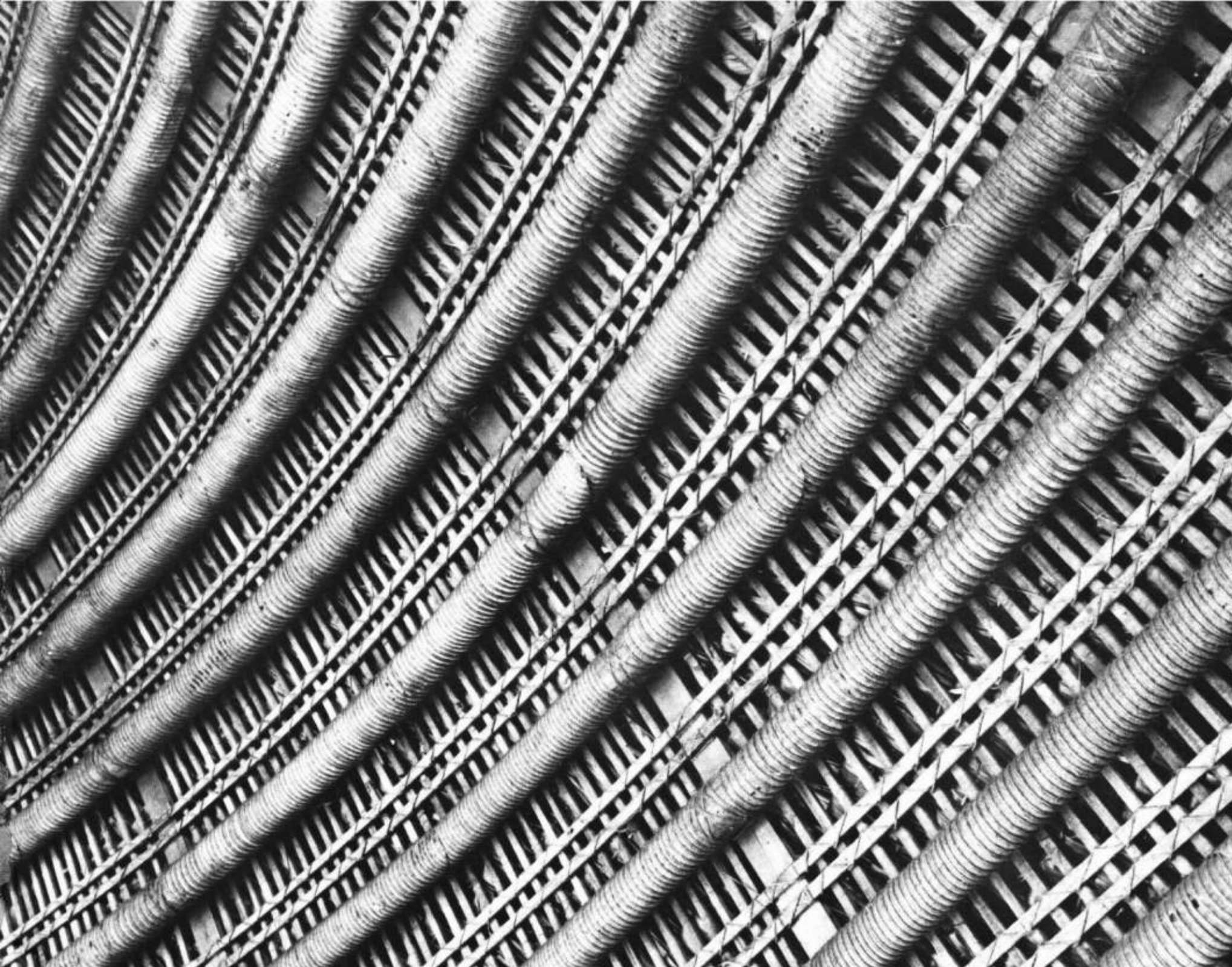
Samoan makes use of macrons as well (horizontal accents of emphasis placed over a vowel) but these too are rarely written today. The 'g' in Samoan is pronounced like the 'ng' in 'sing' irrespective of whether the letter begins a word (e.g. gutu - mouth) or appears in the middle (e.g. aiga - extended family).

Selected Terminology

aga	span, outstretched arm
ali'i	equivalent of 'gentleman'; as a form of address, 'Sir'
ali'i sili	high chief's title (matai)
amopou	roof plate in long guest house, fale afolau which sits on top of the main supporting posts
amopou lalo	lower roof plate which rests on top of the wall posts
aso	thatching listels
'au'au	ridgepole
'au'au a luga	upper ridgepole
faileuga	high talking chief or orator
tulafale	talking chief or orator
fafa	shelves connecting the main rafters and posts in fale afolau
fafamanu	scaffolding
fafuga	flat coconut wood battens which extend from the ridgepole downward and are tied to the lower cleating timber (niu fafo) giving the preliminary convex curvature of the roof
fau	general name for all the curved, round, end rafters which provide the rounded shape of the end of the fale
fau lalo	curved roof plate used in the construction of the end sections
fau tallaso	upper fau close to the ridgepole
fau tu	middle fau
fau vaega	intermediate fau
gafa	distance between fingers of outstretched arms (approximately 6 feet)
lago lau	the lowest row of thatch cut short to increase its strength and general neatness
laulaufasi	food provided by the village chiefs to carpenters (also known as umufono)
moamoa	wooden yoke lashed to the underside ends of the auau; also means ridgepole end piece

ili'ili	pieces of coral or pebbles used to level the fale floor
itu	middle section of fale
laau matua	horizontal round rafter
lau	thatch
lave lau	thatching needle
luma	front of the fale (normally facing the road)
niu fafo	2 x 2 inch lower cleating timber
pae'aso	intermediate listel between fau and laau mafua
paepae	stone platform on which the house is built
pola sisi	wall screens or weather blinds
pou'au'au	upright king post resting on the longitudinal beams (tuitui) in a fale afolau
pou lalo	wall post
poutu	main supporting post
sila	carpenter's knife
so'a	1. horizontal collar beam; 2. vertical collar beam
tala	rounded end section of fale
taliso'a	rafter supporting the soa
talitali	shelves in a round guest house (fale tele) lashed to main post
faofao	horizontal round rafter laid on tie beams (utupoto) in fale afolau
taupou	unmarried daughter of the village's high chief, who traditionally prepares kava for chiefs in ceremonial meetings
taualuga	specially tightly-plaited thatch used to crown the roof along the entire length of the ridgepole
te'e	bracing strut in fale afofau
toi fafau	carpenter's hand-made axe
tua	rear of the fale close to dwelling houses
tuitui	longitudinal centre beam in fale afolau
ulu	breadfruit-wood
utupoto	the beam is fale afolau
vaifatafata	one outstretched arm (a unit of measurement)
vaega o fau	arches
agiotupu	chief carpenter
apisa	fale specially designated for the chief carpenter and his wife to live in during the building of the guest house and a necessary part of the building contract
au tufuga	the assistants to the chief carpenter

falefa-o-le-alga	carpenter and his helpers (another name given to the chief Sa-le-malama)
falevao	toilet
fale afolau	long house
fale tele	round house
fale talimalo	the traditional guest house
faa-le-aganuu moni	true cultural values
fale fono	a meeting house or village council meeting house
fale tofa	house where a chief and his immediate family sleeps
fale tuitui	vs. talking chief's house
fale apifagota	hut built for fishermen beside the sea
fale lalaga	house where women plait mats (usually fine mats)
fale laufao	bush shelter
fale tapuai	1. house where village chiefs sit to watch and call encouragement to their (cricket) teams when playing with other villages 2. house where people pray (another name for falesa)
faleoloa	store or small village shop
faleoo	small size dwelling house usually for resting
faleaoga	school building
falesa	church
fale ta-tatau	house for tatooing young men
fale tautu	house where village orators stay who are serving the Taupou family indicating their wish for the taupou to marry their high chief.
fale vaa	canoe shed
fale leoleo	observation shed built near the water to watch for fish, or in the bush to watch for birds, or beside the water pool for women to guard the pool
meanaitaua	chief carpenter's wife
taufale-alii	chief for whom new house is to be built
taufale-mau	an old matai o taufale-alii family who stays with assistants to keep their spirits up and attend to their needs
tufuga-usu	other carpenters who bring kava sticks to the chief carpenter on the day of the dedication umusaga, as a sign of respect for his skill and the completed work
umusaga	feast to mark completion of the new fale



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