

thread to the increasingly rich and intricate pattern that adorns the literary cloak of New Zealand history.

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*The Accidental Missionary. Tales of Elekana.* By Michael Goldsmith and Doug Munro. Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 2002. 142 pp. NZ price: \$24.95. ISBN 1-877175-33-1.

ELEKANA was the Apostle of Tuvalu. In this small Pacific nation, in which allegiance to Christianity is practically universal, he is still honoured today as the one who first brought the new religion (in 1861). Not a European but a Cook Islander, not sent by a missionary society but arriving in Tuvalu after an epic drift voyage, not ordained or trained but merely a lay office-holder in the church of his native Manihiki, Elekana challenges the pattern often assumed to be normal in the history of Pacific evangelization. The agency of Pacific Islanders in religious change since the first contact of Oceanic peoples with Europeans is in fact enormously important, though historians have often ignored it. Part of the reason for this is the difficulty of documenting indigenous activity from sources largely created by Europeans for their own purposes. In this book our knowledge of a significant early Pacific Christian is considerably extended, probably as far as we can reasonably expect.

The two authors of this study are experienced and authoritative scholars, well known for their previous writings in Tuvaluan history. Here they are assembling and extending the published and unpublished work on Elekana they have been doing for many years. Careful and detailed research in mission archives and assiduous searching in newspaper files and obscure publications have been combined with oral evidence from Tuvalu itself to produce a very rich compilation of historical and biographical information. The 'accidental missionary' who is the subject of the book eventually left his flock of converts for formal training in Samoa, was officially appointed to a Tuvalu mission post and later removed from it, travelled to Australia for participation in a mission publicity tour and then lived out his remaining days back home in the northern Cook Islands. His last appearance in the historical record came many years later when he asked to be sent to Papua as a replacement for his missionary son, who had been killed there. As well as delineating an interesting Pacific life-history and revealing less public aspects of the London Missionary Society's ways of operating, the book sheds light on the dynamics of conversion and religious and cultural development in a Polynesian setting.

*The Accidental Missionary*, however, is more than just the last word in Elekana studies. It is a vehicle for what the authors present as 'a series of reflections on the limits of history and biography'. By identifying the provenance of the various oral and written versions of the Elekana story, and by reproducing and closely analysing the texts themselves, Goldsmith and Munro have opened many doorways to better understanding of how Pacific history is known. They demonstrate how historically important 'stories' emerge from a variety of sources that were originally created for diverse purposes both by the various actors in the events and by subsequent interpreters. Beyond the substantive Elekana material, the authors' reflections are a valuable contribution to discussions of the problems of representing the Pacific past.

Clearly written and well presented (although lacking illustrations), the book has a good index and is largely free of mistakes (but I did notice 'Tauraka' several times for Elekana's son Tauraki, the missionary killed in Papua).

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