

The Australian National University

CANBERRA
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TELEGRAPHIC AND CABLE ADDRESS
"NATUNIV" CANBERRA

BOX 4, G.P.O.
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

9th May, 1956

Dear Mr. Maude,

I enclose a copy of a trader's journal which may be of some interest to you. The original came into my possession last year along with a large quantity of early manuscripts on Samoa. I have made no serious attempt to identify the author; the information contained in the enclosed notes came to me by the way, and not as the result of investigating this journal.

Lest the mysterious inscription "GP - 20" throw you, it means Gurr Papers, folder 20. I have finished going through the Gurr collection and have presented the lot to the Turnbull Library in Wellington, the Beru journal included.

Of course, my principal interest in this document concentrates on the activities of the Samoan LMS pastors. Our trader's outlook may have been - and no doubt was - rather biased, but his accounts might be worth using in some context if he could be identified.

Many thanks for suggesting to Nancy Phelan that she send me a copy of the offprint from LIFE. It was a pity that some of the original photos - including the one of ^{our} now-departed beachcomber friend - did not find their way into the offprint. However, it is useful to have the other photos, as they illustrate the extent of romanticism which still surrounds the Pacific.

I hope the Conference went off all right. We understand that Bombs are bursting in Bikini in spite of it all.

Yours, with best wishes,

Alfred Wilson

2 Netherby Street,
Wahroonga, N.S.W.,
17th May, 1956.

Dear Gilson,

Thank you so much for sending me a copy of the Beru trader's journal. As you can well imagine, it made me quite excited, for there is so very little early material on the Gilberts: the entries dealing with the governmental set-up in the pre-Protectorate mission era are particularly interesting.

As to the author, I think I can prove conclusively to you that it could have been none other than Prout. Firstly, in the leaflet "Statistics respecting certain islands in the Western Pacific for the period 1880-3", by J.B. Thurston (Australian No. 109), it states that there were then three traders on Beru:-

- (i) J. Prout (British), trading for Henderson and Macfarlane;
- (ii) F. Volliero (Austrian), trading for the same firm; and
- (iii) an unnamed Chinaman, trading for Ong Chong and Company of Sydney.

Then in the diary itself it narrates how the author (entry for 30.5.86) was fined (with Volleiro) for visiting a ship on a Sunday; but that (entry for 12.6.86) the matter was later settled by Commander Eustace Rooke (H.M.S. "Miranda").

Now in Commander Rooke's report on this visit he writes:-

"58. Mr. Prout, an Englishman, trading here on his own account, complained to me that the Kaupali had fined him, and the other white trader, Mr. Valliers, 5 lb. of tobacco each for going on board the schooner "Ebon" on the previous Sunday, although they only went to dinner with the captain. After a long interview with the members of the Kaupuli, and the Samoan missionary, they said they would in future permit going on board a vessel on Sunday, provided no work was done, and they remitted the fine."

Incidentally, there is quite a bit about Prout in the correspondence relating to proceedings taken to punish the Beru people for looting Henderson and Macfarlane's schooner "Orwell", which was wrecked there on 25.8.81. Captain Cyprian Bridge (H.M.S. "Espiegle") visited Beru on 5.6.83 and fined the people 30 tons of copra, to be delivered to Volleiro and Prout. The following is an excerpt from his report:-

"17. I was compelled to have recourse to the assistance of Messrs. Volleiro and Prout in receiving the copra to be paid, as they are the only white men on the island, there being absolutely no other way of arranging for the receipt of the article. I had, very reluctantly, to consent to their consigning it - to await instructions from the proper authority - to Messrs. Henderson and Macfarlane, as both the two persons above-named are traders for that firm and would not agree to ship the copra to any other.

.....
18. Messrs. Volleiro and Prout appear very respectable men, indeed exceptionally good specimens of the class of resident traders, and on friendly terms with the natives, so that no complication is likely to ensue from their employment."

Prout mentions the visit in his entry for 5.6.83.

Again many thanks and hoping to see you before long. If you ever visit Sydney do please come up and see us.

Yours very sincerely,

JRM