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Tokelau Islands

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Monday, November 17, 1975

*A birthday party  
for the prince,  
fit for a king*

By MARY COOKE  
Advertiser Staff Writer

Eli Hunter Matangitokelau (Winds of Tokelau) Thompson, the littlest alii of Swain's Island (an atoll of the Tokelau Islands), was hailed at a Tokelau feast in Honolulu yesterday.

To honor the one-year-old son of showman Tihati Thompson and his wife, Cha, people from virtually every Polynesian island group brought gifts, outpourings of love, overtones of reverence, thunderous drumming, irrepressible song and dance—and food that wouldn't quit.

Hundreds of guests were received and entertained at the Thompsons' Portlock Road home where the entire lawn was covered with fala mats and tapa cloth for the occasion. It was a regal birthday fete for a prince of a baby who could, someday, become "king" of Swain's Island.

WHAT MATTER that his now-and-future domain is a tiny, all but unknown atoll just north of Samoa? Polynesians don't forget he is an heir of the royal families of the Tokelau, Manua and Samoan islands.

His landed birthright was secured in 1856 by his great-great-great-grandfather, a Yankee seaman who saw Swain's Island from the deck of a whaling vessel, called it "Eden" and bought it for himself and his Samoan princess bride, Malia.

The price: One bottle of gin per square mile, paid to a British copra producer who had formerly laid claim to the atoll.

Since then, the Polynesian descendants of the American sailor, Eli Jennings, have owned Swain's Island whose present population is 60 persons.

Because of their chiefly blood, the owners are recognized as the alii (rulers) of the island though, since 1925, it has been included in the formal jurisdiction of American Samoa and is visited occasionally by the "government supply boat."

BABY ELI stands fourth in line to assume the royal title on Swain's Island after his father, Tihati; Tihati's mother, Mrs. Jack Thompson, and the present incumbent, Tihati's uncle Wallace Jennings. The child was born in Honolulu last year on Nov. 14, the 160th birthday anniversary of his American progenitor, Eli Jennings.

As guests arrived at the fete, their names were announced by a high chief chosen by Tihati's mother. Young boys then escorted them to sitting mats set before low tables on the ground.

During the feast, baby Eli received the salute of a "kapasinu," a Tokelau dance which accompanies the presentation of gifts and is performed only for persons of distinction. Dancers and chanters were members of a community of about

150 Tokelauans who live at Poamoho Village in Wahiawa.

GUESTS AND entertainers included natives of Samoa, Manua, Tokelau, Tonga, New Zealand, Fiji, Tahiti and Hawaii. Extempore, they vied with one another, performing the songs and dances of all Polynesia while the feast went on and on and on.

Whole roasted suckling pigs, chickens and fish were placed before the guests. Dextrously, Polynesian girls stripped the carcasses with their fingers to serve individual guest portions. Not to be missed was a whole cow roasted on a spit by Tahitian friends of the hosts.

Special foods of all the island groups were served . . . delicacies rarely tasted in Hawaii such as puli-gi (Tokelau pudding) made of coconut cream, flour, yeast and brown sugar; papaya poe and pumpkin poe made with coconut cream and flavored with Tahitian vanilla beans marinated in rum, and a hearty meal in itself called lupulu (corned beef, luau leaves and coconut cream).

More: Raw fish, baked taro, breadfruit, palusami (luau leaves and coconut cream), squid luau, bananas, pineapple.

"THE FOOD was prepared all over the island," Tihati said. "The woven coconut-leaf basket placed be-

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Advertiser photo by T. Urmeda

*Surrounded by gifts from Tokelau, baby alii Eli Thompson, center, with his parents, Tihati and Cha; grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Thompson; sisters Ruana and Misty.*

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*Surrounded by gifts from Tokelau, baby alii Eli Thompson, center, with his parents, Tihati and Cha; grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Thompson; sisters Ruana and Misty.*

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Advertiser photo by T. Umada

The first performance in Hawaii of the Tokelau gift-presentation "kapsinu," danced by natives of Swain's Island to honor baby Eli Thompson.

# A party for the prince

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hind each guest is to fill with whatever food you can't eat here, and take it home. That's an old custom with us."

Another old Tokelau custom decrees that only hand-delivered invitations may be offered to royal or high-ranking guests. Conforming to protocol, Tihati last month took a swing through the South Pacific carrying his invitations which were

printed on parchment and sealed in bamboo tubes.

They were addressed to his royal relatives of Samoa, Manua and Tokelau islands, the king and queen of Tonga, Gov. Earl B. Ruth of American Samoa and Salanoa S. P. Aumeoualogo, president of the American Samoan Senate.

Tihati delivered some himself; others were entrusted to messengers who would take the first available transportation to outlying islands.

Despite his best efforts, there was no way one of his invited guests could have made it to the party.

"The chief of Fakaofu (in the Tokelau Islands) won't get his invitation till two or three months from now because the boat only goes to his island four times a year," Tihati said.

Two who did make it to the fete were the Tokelau Chief Aleki Pa and Chief Paepae Tele "who is representing our family from Manua," Tihati said.

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