

ORDER OF THE CROWN OF TONGA

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This particular order is as well known as the country of origin, which means that in most European and American literature Tonga, and the Order of the Crown of Tonga, are unknowns.

Tonga is an island kingdom to the east of Fiji, about a thousand miles north of New Zealand. This is a Polynesian society, and the language and culture are similar to those of the Samoans to the north. Although there was a small but important group of German planters in Tonga, the islands became a Protectorate of Great Britain in 1900 and are still a part of the British Commonwealth. During most of the nineteenth century Tonga was known as the "Friendly Islands."

The most detailed and accurate information on the Order of the Crown of Tonga comes to us via Theodor Frederic Goedicke, one of the many German nationals who became fascinated with the South Pacific at the end of the last century and settled there.

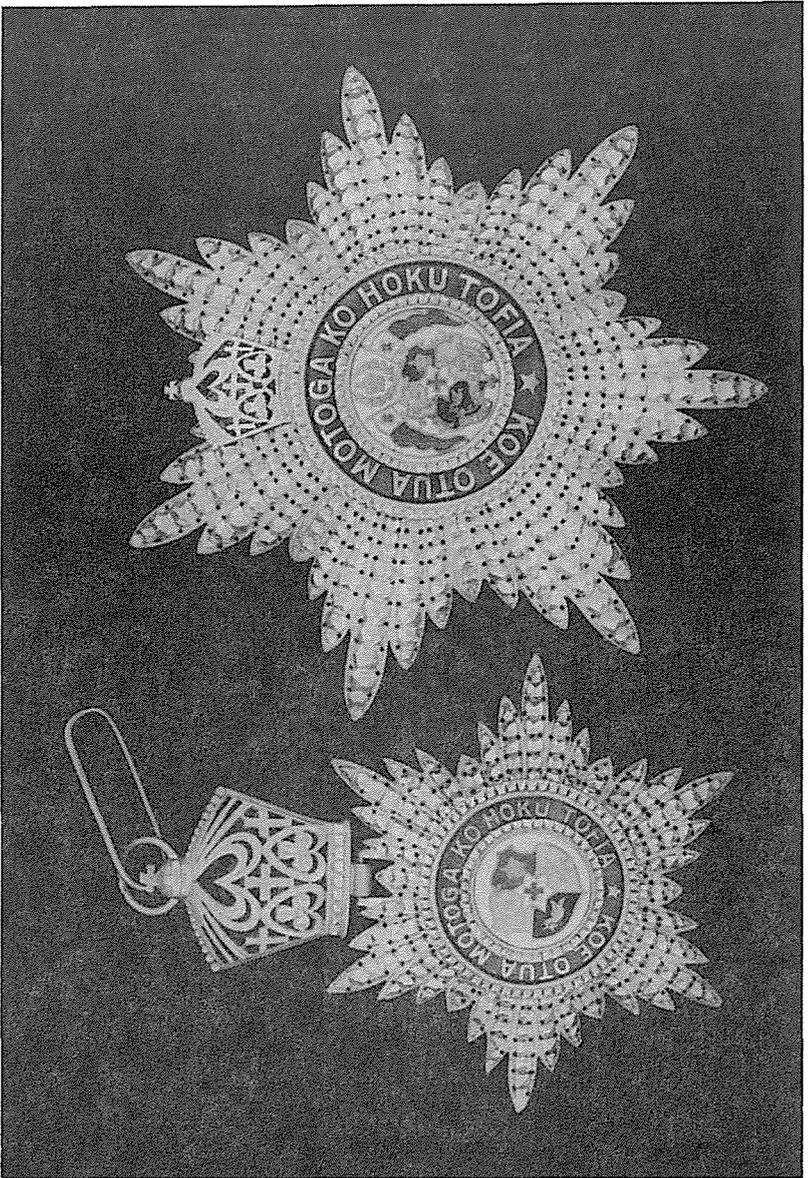
Goedicke was born in Mecklenberg in 1862 and was a close boyhood chum of the future Kaiser Wilhelm and his brother, Prince Henry. Goedicke remained in frequent contact with the Prussian royal family for the next half century. This association with a major European aristocratic family most likely was a factor later when Goedicke became interested in Tongan orders. By the early 1880s Goedicke was in the South Pacific, where he was to remain until his death in the 1950s. His 1884 diary of events in Port Moresby, New Guinea, is an important document of early planter life on that island.

At the end of 1884, while in Australia, Goedicke became a British citizen, and a few years later he moved to Tonga. In 1893, at Lotofoa, Haapi (an island of Tonga) Goedicke married a local girl, Ana Muunga Helu. They celebrated their golden wedding anniversary at the same site in 1943.

Although seemingly isolated from European culture on this small Polynesian island, Goedicke in reality was a wealthy planter with many business associates in New Zealand and Australia, and he retained his close European contacts. For example, in the 1940s, when a close relative died in Holland, Goedicke inherited the Dutch title and became known as Count van Asten-Goedicke.

The editor of the Pacific Islands Monthly, a Sydney publication begun in the early 1930s, was R. W. Robson. Over the years Robson became familiar with Goedicke and obtained much of his news of Tonga and Fiji from Goedicke.

Robson interviewed Goedicke on the origin of the Order of the Crown of Tonga and published the following account in the Pacific Islands Monthly of August 1942. Because Goedicke was the inspiration for the Order - in fact, he became its Registrar - his account is as authoritative as we are likely to obtain:



BREAST STAR AND BADGE OF THE ORDER OF THE CROWN OF TONGA. (FROM THE HONEYMAN COLLECTION, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES COUNTY).

Order of the Crown of Tonga
A Forgotten Incident of 1914

An old resident of Tonga, Mr. F. T. Goedicke, tells of the history and origin of a unique Royal Order -- the "Crown of Tonga" -- the existence of which must be practically unsuspected by even the most fervid experts on heraldry and such things.

Mr. Goedicke was an intimate friend of the late King George Tubou II, and a frequent visitor to the palace. In 1913 he took the liberty of suggesting to His Majesty that he institute a Tongan Order. The suggestion was received with great enthusiasm, and the Order, in four classes, was founded forthwith:--

Ribbon: Red and white.

Motto: "God and Tonga are my inspiration."

Patron: H.M. the King.

Royal Commissioner: Captain Charles Fein.

Chancellor and Registrar: F. T. Goedicke.

Classes: Knight Grand Commander; Knight Commander; Commander; and Companion.

The Orders, designed and manufactured in Germany, were of 14ct. gold, and really were examples of the goldsmith's art. The first consignment of 12 (three of each class) arrived on May 14, 1914; and that same day Mr. Goedicke was called to the Palace and there decorated by the King with the first Order of the Crown of Tonga, Class I. The next day Queen Takibou also received the Order, Class I, and Mr. Goedicke, as Chancellor, the Order, Class III.

Before the King noted further occasions for bestowing the Orders, Germany invaded Belgium and Britain declared war on Germany; and it was decided to postpone all other bestowals for the duration.

Unfortunately, King George died in October 1918, and with him passed the "Crown of Tonga"-- which was to have been given in recognition of special services rendered to Tonga's King and State.

The granting of this Order does seem to have ended as reported by Goedicke. In this century the most famous monarch of Tonga was Queen Salote, who was usually listed as "Honorary Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire." If the Order of the Crown of Tonga has been bestowed since 1914, such records have not yet come to light.

The Star and the Badge featured here are from the Honeyman Collection in the Natural History Museum, Los Angeles. These were shown at the 1985 annual convention of OMSA in Los Angeles, along with a Star of the Order belonging to R. T. McNamara of Cleveland; this may have been the largest collection of the Order gathered at one location since 1914.

These Tongan orders are indeed rare. Almost a decade ago (December 1977) a Seaby catalogue listed a Breast Star of the Order for £1350, with the notation "Very rare."