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World War I in Samoa as Reported by Frieda Zieschank in the German Colonial Magazine *Kolonie und Heimat*

Focussing on the Samoa Islands in the Pacific, the texts under discussion in the following analysis offer a rare perspective on the outbreak of World War I and its consequences. On 30 August 1914, New Zealand troops occupied the Samoan islands that were a German colony at this time. In contrast to the German colonies in Africa, historical research seldomly considers the so-called “South Sea Colonies” and the fact that German women lived in these South Pacific territories is typically overlooked. One of these women, Frieda Zieschank reported in detail her experience of the war from this peripheral spot of the world and published her impressions in books as well as in articles in the popular colonial magazine *Kolonie und Heimat* (Colony and homeland).¹ Apart from some brief comments by a few German nurses, Zieschank’s texts remain the only known published sources offering a German woman’s perspective on the effects of World War I in Samoa and the national feeling from the distant colony. Her texts serve as a unique historical source, and because they provide much more information than Zieschank probably intended, the following investigation offers a close reading of her publications that aims to inspire further analysis conducted in the context of Gender Studies, War Studies, Colonial Studies and other approaches.

Historical background and source base

“... like a miracle of creation – like a precious jewel – like a bright emerald – lifted to light from the deep sea by the good hand of God – it lies there, wreathed by a white shimmering reef: Samoa!” (Zieschank 1923, 49).² With these impassioned words Frieda Zieschank describes her temporary home in Samoa in the early 1900s in her novel *Ein verlorenes Paradies* (A lost paradise).

German interest in the Pacific Islands began in the 1850s, with German traders concentrating first on whaling, then on trading the most precious product of

1 The dates of Zieschank’s birth and death are unknown.

2 All quotations from Zieschank are my own translations.