

Samoans today still practice a traditional ritual drinking ceremony as part of every important occasion, called the 'ava ceremony. (In Samoa, it is pronounced with a glottal stop, sounding like a "K" before the first "a." On other islands of Oceania, it is called Kava with the hard "K" sound.) 'Ava is a drink made from the ground roots of the *Piper methisticum* plant. It may only be handled, poured, and consumed by certain persons of high status (Tuvala 2014).

On the occasion that a new *matai* (family chief) is named, an 'ava ceremony will be held in the village. The host chief and members of his 'ava party will prepare the drink and serve it to the new chief. During the ceremony, the 'ava is prepared by a specially chosen individual, in a role called the 'aumaga. When the drink is ready, one of the members of the host chief's party will call the names of those present, who will approach one at a time. A few drops of 'ava are spilled on the mat as an offering before drinking, and none should be left in the cup, as a sign of respect. Serving order is of the utmost importance to mark the status of the individuals present. In the case of a matai naming ceremony, the new matai will be served first, then the host chief, followed by orator ("talking") chiefs of both sides, and so on in order of diminishing rank.



Figure 12.4 'AVA CEREMONY, SAMOA

These Samoan men in Va`a-o-Fonoti are ready to participate in an 'ava ceremony.

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'Ava preparation is most often performed by a daughter of the host matai. All daughters of chiefs are expected to learn the 'ava ceremony for the many occasions on which her family will host visitors or celebrate an important event. It requires training to learn each step in order and to prepare the drink correctly. In addition, all participants in the 'ava ceremony must possess an outward mark of their worthiness to serve the community in the form of a ta-tau (tattoo): *pe'a* or full waist and leg design for men, and *malu* or leg designs for women (von Hoerschelmann 1995).