

Tabitenean Cosmogony (given by Kaikai of Tabitenean).

§1.

In the beginning was a black darkness and there was nothing save a cleaving together of the firmament: no being lived therein.

But the Darkness lay with the Cleaving Together; their child was the Land.

The Land lay with the Sky; their child was the Void.

The Void lay with the Sundering<sup>1</sup>; their child was Narean the First of All Spirits.

Narean lay with the Rock; their child was Night;

Night lay with Day~~am~~; their child was the Dawn.

Dawn lay with Dusk; their child was the Lightning.

Lightning lay with Thunder; their child was Narean the Younger.

§2.

It was Narean the Younger who made all things and men that are in the world; the Sun, the moon, the stars, and all lands, north, east, south, and west; for every creature

1. The Sundering; i.e., the separation of heaven and earth. In this ~~cosmogony~~ tradition it is notable that Narean the First of All Spirits,



obeyed his voice. But put away these matters, for we have nought to do with them?<sup>2</sup>

The first of all lands made by Nareau was Takoronga of Tabiteneva. He commanded the Spring Tide to lie with the Smooth Water<sup>3</sup>; they brought forth the sandbank Takoronga, and thereon lived the great white Ray, Bakananeku.

Bakananeku lay with the First Woman; their child was Darkness - under - the - Sea.

Darkness - under - the - sea lay with the Reef - Rock; their child was the small grey Stingray.

Bakewa.

Bakewa the Stingray lay with the Tige Shark, Nei Unikai; their child was Taburimai the Ancestor.<sup>4</sup>

[Here follows a genealogy of ~~the~~ generations leading down to the present chiefs of Abemama].

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born of the Void and the Sundering, was the grandchild of Land and Sky. In the Maori Creation Myth, the beings who sundered the universe were the sons of Rangi (Sky) and Papa (Earth).

2. "Put away these matters ... etc." This is a stock phrase in Gilbertese traditions, equivalent to "But that is another story," or "ovenous a nos montons."

3. Any observer may note at the bend of a current caused by the rising tide a broad streak of oily-calm water. Cause and effect are mixed in our story. It is a sandbank that causes the current to swerve and to form the oily band.

4. Taburimai the Ancestor; from whom many Gilbertese



§3. When Takoronga was ready the First Tree<sup>5</sup> grew upon it, for Nareau planted it there.

After that, Nareau went South to seek the Navel of the World; and as he walked southward over the sea his foot struck a reef of rock standing over the waves. There he stayed and raised the land of Samoa. And on the land of Samoa he planted the second Tree, whose name was Kaintikuaba.

[~~Here follows a genealogy which, by collation with one from the island of Bem, dealing with the same line, counts thirty two generations from the Tree of Samoa.~~]

§4. The fruit<sup>6</sup> of the Tree of Samoa was Kourabi and the tufted sprout<sup>7</sup> was Te Take, the Red Tailed Tropic Bird.

families trace descent. It is important to note that this context, with several others, bears witness to the Gilbertese origin of Taburuaia, long before Samoa comes into the story.

5. Here, ~~in a~~ <sup>again</sup> in a Tabitenean version, we have talk of a First Tree that <sup>grew before</sup> was antecedent to the Tree of Samoa; not ~~to~~ <sup>before</sup> a Tree called the Ancestor Sun growing on the unknown land of Abatoa, but certainly an ancestral Tree and growing on a Gilbert Island.

6+7. "Fruit... tufted sprout": the <sup>Gilbertese</sup> native words used are "ton" and "raibwebwe" respectively, which have special reference to the Pandanus Tree alone. In most versions the Tree of Samoa was certainly a Banyan.



And Koumali had a son Baretoka, for whom he had chosen a wife from among the daughters of the Samoan Tree; but Baretoka would have none of her. He fled from Samoa ere yet the Tree was broken and burned. He fled northward to Tarawa, which was a fragment of Heaven.

And at that time Tarawa was not yet anchored in the sea; it followed the moods of the wind as a canoe that drifts at random, and the woman Batianea held its mooring rope. But when Baretoka came to Tarawa he pierced it through the middle with a staff cut from the Tree of Samoa and fixed it fast to the bed of the sea. And the ends of the land swung round as the current bore them westward, so that it is bent to this day like a man's arm at the elbow.

Then the staff from the Tree of Samoa, that Baretoka had planted, sprouted and grew into a great Tree. And Baretoka died and was buried by its roots. Therefore some say that the Tree grew from Baretoka's head. And before he died he called the women Winibong and Nibongibong<sup>8</sup> to cultivate the Tree. So it grew

8. Nibongibong. This was the name of the wife of Nakaa, guardian of the land of Shades, as given in the Abemaman myth. (Chapman)  
A woman of the clan springing from that ancestress is clearly intended in <sup>the</sup> present context.



as high as heaven until Jan-Karawa, the Dweller  
in heaven saw it. He walked over its summit,  
so that it grew no higher but was flattened.

Then Ingi-ni-ngaina (Flicker-of-Dawn) and  
Uraura-ni-Maeso (Red-of-the-West) visited the  
summit and a child sprang from the crest,  
whose name was Terere. And Jan-Karawa,  
the Dweller in Heaven went down to Terere and  
begot a child on her, who was called Obai-  
the-Bird-Man.

Obai-the-Bird-Man flew to the land of  
Onouna <sup>in the West</sup> and married the woman Nei Ant; ;  
they had three children, whose names were  
Nei Kirimoi, Nei Kirirere and Nei Manrei.

Manrei came to the islands of Kuria  
and Abemama; ~~Kirimoi Kirirere~~ came to Tmanoku  
of Tabiteneva, and ~~Kirimoi Kirirere~~ stayed in Onouna.<sup>9</sup>  
And Kirirere married Beia-ma-Tekai on Tabiteneva. Her sons

[Genealogy follows which from Flicker-of-Dawn to  
present day counts <sup>20</sup> generations]  
was Teboi; he lay with Komao of Onotoa. Her son was  
~~Manrei~~ <sup>Mamanti</sup> he lay with Moeroa. Her son was Mange; he lay  
with Teten. Her son was Kekeia; he lay with Tongabiri  
sister of Tarentoa of Bens. She had a daughter Tabiria who  
was the greatest of the chieftainesses of Nonouti.

9. cp. This account of Obai's children with that given in §2  
of the Banaban story, Chapter.....



§5. Long after Baretoka fled from Samoa, the Tree that grew there was broken and burned by Nareau. And Tetake (Red Tailed Tropic Bird) lived on the crest of the Tree, but when it was broken she took her nest in her bill and flew away over the sea to Northward. The first land she reached was Bern (S. Gilberts). There she cast away some sticks from her nest and they grew to be the Lodge of Rurubao on Bern; and a second time she let fall some sticks, a little to the North of Rurubao, and they became the Lodge of the Ghost on Bern. Then Taburimai of Bern arose and stoned her with stones as she flew by his lodge; and some feathers of her tail were torn out and fell into the lagoon, where they became the sandbanks by the village of Iteirio; their name to this day is Bike-n-Take (The Banks of the Tropic Bird).

But Tetake flew on to northward, staying her wing nowhere until she came to the land of Beberiki.<sup>10</sup> She took with her to that place the Crest

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<sup>10.</sup> Beberiki; the old Gilbertese name of Butaritari, the most northerly island of <sup>the</sup> Group.



of Keaki." And when she was come there she stayed on the island and began to kill and eat all the people who lived near ~~by~~. So they consulted together how they might kill her, and by divination they sought the weapon that should be the death of her. They said to their folded pandanus leaves<sup>12</sup>, "Shall it be a sword or a dagger, a staff or a throwing stick?" But the folded leaves gave no sign. Then one of their number said, "Shall it be a fan of coconut leaves?" And the leaves gave a sign that the weapon should be a fan of coconut leaves.<sup>13</sup> So they all arose and took fans, and

<sup>11.</sup> <sup>10</sup> Keaki. The name of a certain <sup>manseba</sup>rafter in the public meeting ~~place~~ <sup>under which</sup> the clan of like name takes its customary place in feast and council. The Crest of Keaki is the heraldic sign worn by members of that clan on their canoes. For information on this subject vide Chapter.

<sup>12.</sup> <sup>11</sup> Folded pandanus leaves. The most usual material in divination consisted of three folded pandanus leaves, which, by the manner in which they straightened themselves out again when allowed to lie on the floor, were supposed to give favourable or unfavourable answers.

<sup>13.</sup> <sup>12</sup> A fan of coconut leaves; i.e. an instrument used for the lighting of a fire; hence, a ~~parabolic~~ method of expressing fire as the means of killing the man-eating invader.



In the foregoing Cosmogony from Tabitenea, <sup>D 20</sup> ~~we have~~ a narrative that is more plainly stratified than most of our island traditions. As the arrangement of our material shows, the local Creation-myths fall with reasonable distinctness into two sharply defined categories: those which, (in spite of small, recurrent contradictions) confess Nareau the First Cause and Samoa the First Land, and those which confess neither the one nor the other. But our Tabitenean context under reference cannot logically be grouped with either of these classes. It appears to be a compromise between the two schools of thought; for while it admits Nareau to have been the guiding force in Creation and Samoa to have been in effect the Navel of the World, it shows with great clearness that <sup>the</sup> Takoronga of Tabitenea was the first of all lands made; that the clan of Taburumai the Ancestor grew, as it were, from the very soil of the place; and that on Takoronga sprang the First Tree, planted by Nareau we ever the rock that was to be Samoa was discovered in the ocean to southward. The first three sections of the tale are given over almost wholly to an account of how Takoronga, the first land came into being, with its people and its Tree.



Only in the latter part of the third section, when Nareau has finished his work in the North, does Samoa come into the story.

In the fourth section, the tale of Baretoka's flight from a repugnant marriage in Samoa, long before the Children of the Samon Tree were dispersed, gives us an interesting side-light on the traffic that evidently went on between his homeland and Tarawa.... "He fled from Samoa ere yet the Tree was broken and burned. He fled northward to Tarawa, which was a fragment of heaven." It is clear that he knew the way to Tarawa, because he chose that island deliberately, as being a "fragment of heaven", which is to say, "a small piece of land on which lived his ancestral-gods." It is clear also that Tarawa was inhabited before he invaded it from the south, because the woman Batianea was there, "holding the mooring rope," which is to say, "ruling the land." Last of all, it is clear that Batianea had a turbulent population to deal with for although she "held the mooring rope", "Tarawa was not yet anchored in the sea; it followed the moods of the wind as a canoe"



drove her away from her resting place. She soared into the air when they fanned her, and fell dead on the lagoon side of Beberiki; her body became the rock that is known as Na-Kateke. Then the people took part of her body and buried it together with a shrivelled coconut that she had brought with her from the South. Behold, the nut sprouted; a Tree grew, and it was an Ancestor.

[ Here follows a much mutilated genealogy of only 15 generations, showing the descent of the present family from the Ancestral Tree of Beberiki ].



that drifts at random, which is to say, "the  
clans fought among themselves for the mastery,  
and the issue was never certain."

Thus we have a clear picture of Baretoka's  
arrival in a populated and troublous Tarawa,  
where lived a folk descended, not from Samoa,  
but yet from the same ancestral beings as  
himself. The clan of Batianea, a female  
divinity, held the ascendancy, though insecurely;  
he added the weight of his party to its ranks,  
established it securely, married into the family,  
and thus set up the new Iri of Tarawa,  
which was a hybrid between the autochthons  
of that island and himself, a pure Samoan.

Notes by A. F. Grumble

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