

Stonemonuments. Banaba.

Terraces.

On the eastern coasts of Banaba, where the land goes down to the beaches, are to be seen long terraces or platforms perched upon the bedrock. From the beaches which they overhang, the fronts of these terraces, which always face east, look like sea-walls.

The method of building employed seems to have been first to build walls of uncemented stones along the edge of the bedrock, and then to fill in the space behind them with stones and earth. When the filling was brought flush with the tops of the walls, it was levelled and covered with a few inches of white shingle.

The platforms were made by the unmarried men of the various villages. They do not seem to have been the property of any single family or any particular village.

Here the boys of the island gathered, played and slept, from the age of about eight or nine until they married. No woman was allowed

in or near the neighbourhood.

The semi-banishment of the unmarried boys to the terraces, seems to be the Banaban equivalent of the Gilbertese practice of isolating the young men on the eastern side of the island. But whereas, in the Gilberts, the boy's only companion and instructor was his grandfather or adoptive grandfather, a Banaban youth had plenty of friends — in fact, a whole colony of them — around him. However, it was on the eastern side of the island, in a condition of ordered seclusion, that the Banaban boy, like his Gilbertese brother, learned the arts of life. His senior male relatives would visit him periodically, and instruct him in the use of weapons, the science of itan, and the various forms of magic.

Boys were not confined to the terraces for the whole period of their adolescence. They might return from time to time to their villages and sleep in their parents' houses. Then at the command of their father they would be sent off

again for a definite period, ranging from one to six months, rather as an English boy is sent to boarding school.

During their residence on the terrace, the boys had no domestic cares. Their food was brought by male relations, from the villages.

The sleeping houses were built on the terraces, back from the sea, leaving a clear space some twenty paces wide to the edge of the containing wall.

One of the terraces is now overgrown with weeds, scrub, and even large pemphis trees. The other one is in much better condition, and (as I have found out) has been kept in repair by the fast dying generation of old Banaban men, who still remember past days. It is by far the larger of the two I have examined.

Some ten feet back from the edge of the sea-wall is a line of stone monuments, which at once excites attention. The middle monument (there are seven in all) is composed of large blocks of stone (slabs) which

seem to have become disarranged in the passage of years. Their arrangement however still suggests that formerly they ~~were arranged to~~ formed a table-like group. As they lie at present, there are two slabs much longer and wider than the rest, lying upon a group of smaller and more irregular stones, some five or six in number. Several stones of a containing wall are still to be seen). Flanking this "table", three on either side, are monuments of uniform design. Each consists of a central stone (a small monolith), some two feet high, set on end in the earth, and surrounded by four flat stones lying about its base. The flat stones are of irregular size, some much smaller than others: but the number (four) is always uniform. The central monolith is in every case larger at the top than at the base. The shape recalls vaguely that of a human head and neck, or at least it suggests the possibility that it might have been a head and neck when the race was more skilled in stone work.

The ruins of a small hut still stand on the terrace. They stand well back towards the landward edge, immediately in line with the central table-like structure of flat stones. A few feet in front of its northern corner post, lies a large flat slab of stone which was probably a seat.

Perched among the rocky pinnacles by the sea, in the neighbourhood of the terrace are numerous small platforms, counterparts in miniature of the terrace itself, but big enough only to hold one sitting man. These were the places where the young men perched to do the magic called Kanti.

This was performed at sunrise every morning, facing east. It consisted of a ritual washing with salt water contained in a coconut shell. The main part of the ceremony was that the rising sun must be faced, just as the main object in sending a boy to the terrace was to make him face the sun in his sleep. From the sun came the essential principles of health and strength, which made him a good warrior. (Sometimes these private magic platforms were made of a single flat stone).

Stone monuments. Banaba.

Beside many Banaban houses, are to be seen stones, which are pointed out by the natives as Bakatiwa - ancestors. They all have personal names, being both male and female. They often have a very rough resemblance of human form, and whatever their shape may be, they always have one end called definitely by the "head" and another the "feet." The stones do not generally exceed a couple of feet in length. Some of them simply lie on the ground: others only show their upper parts above the soil. Many of them seem to be merely the tops of pinnacles of the solid bed-rock of the island.

Although these stones are called "Ancestors", direct genealogical inquiry always meets a blank wall. One may easily trace a line back to the ancestor who carried (or is reputed to have carried) a stone with him when his canoe first came to Banaba. One may also find out that a particular stone was once an actual person, who landed with a certain canoe's crew, and who was related to one of the crew who became a true ancestor. But I have never yet

succeeded in proving genealogically that one of these ancestral stones was supposed to be an ancestor from whom a particular local line sprang. If one asks a native if he (or she) is directly descended from such a stone, the answer will always be in the negative.

In the village of Tabiang, on the South coast of Binaba are two stones named respectively Ketoa (a man) and Karamakema (a woman; Ketoa's wife). These landed from a canoe near Tabiang with another man, whose name was Bakananeku. They both became stones on landing. Bakananeku underwent a like change, and can be seen on the reef at low tide.