

Banaban Creation-myths with appendices
(given by Nri Trania of Banaba).

§1. In the beginning all was black darkness; no man lived; and heaven clove to the face of Earth. But in the darkness Heaven began to move and Earth began to move; they rubbed one upon the other as the two hands of a man are rubbed together. And from the rubbing sprang Tabakea, the First of All; he dwelt on Banaba the Navel of the World. As Heaven and Earth continued to rub together the brothers of Tabakea were born¹: first after Tabakea² was Auriaria³ and after him Taburimai⁴, and after him Tabuariki⁵, and after him Riiki⁶; then also was born the woman Tituabine⁷, their sister.

And Tabakea begot children on his sister Tituabine. Their names were Korereke and Karabinobine⁸.

1. The birth of the First Beings from the union of Heaven + Earth, as shown in the above text, is the nearest approach we have in these islands to the Maori myth of Rangi + Papa.

2-7. All these divinities are now represented by various creatures on earth, which are the totems of the corresponding clans. In most cases the gods have both a sea and a land-creature, viz:

Tabakea: Turtle and Lady Bird; Auriaria: Giant Clam and Rat;

Taburimai: Urua-fish () and Kunei-bird (anous stolidus);

Tabuariki: Shark and Cockerel; Tituabine: Ray-fish and Weevil.

8. Korereke + Karabinobine: two varieties of Sting Ray.

Nakaa⁹ and The girl Te Wenei¹⁰. And all the children of Tituabine dwelt on the overside of heaven as it lay on the face of the Earth, together with Tabakea and his brothers.

§.2. And as yet it was dark; the darkness was called by a name; it was Te-Bongi-Ro (The Black Night). The Navel of Te-Bongi-Ro was Banaba, but it was not alone in the darkness, for a multitude of lands lay about it to North, West, and East. These had sprung with Banaba, when no man was, from the gloom of heaven and earth; therefore they are all together known to us under the single name of Te-Bongi-Ro. Yet each land had also its own name, and on each land was born an ancestor.

The land to North and East was Nangi-Ro; and the ancestors who lived there were Bai-matoa¹⁰ and the woman Te-neroa¹².

The land to South and West was Roro; and the ancestors there were the woman Beia, with Mātiriki, Mātinaba¹³ and the girl Nangitano.

9. Nakaa. The Guardian of the Land of Departed Spirits.

10. Te Wenei. The meteorite, who announces Nakaa's guests.

11, 12, 13 Bai-matoa, Mātiriki, Mātinaba. These are the names of stars and constellations, increasingly difficult to identify in these latter days, as the old navigators die one by one, and the new generations are ignorant or careless. The stars named were without doubt those by which travellers navigated to the lands named.

The land to East was *Aba-niringa*¹⁴; the ancestors there were *Tabakea* and *Aniaria*¹⁵, *Bakoa* and *Kaitetara*.

And to Westward lay many and great lands. There were *Matairango* and *Tanabai*, *Bā-n-Tongo* and *Waituru*, *Mākiaso* and *Kabi-n-Tongo*, and *Te-Bike-n-Onioniki*. And on those islands were the ancestors *Tetoroa* and *Nautonga*, *Nan-Taka-taka* and *Buatua*, *Nan Ruru*, *Rangaba*¹⁵ and *Buaba*¹⁷

Also to Westward lay the land of *Naba-naba*, whereon lived the ancestor *Tanaba*, with *Tanbareroa* and *Nakekea*, *Nei Rānikai*, and *Bairiano*¹⁸, and *Buariki*¹⁹

All those lands to North, West and East sprang together with *Banaba* from the darkness; they were the first of all lands, and the ancestors who lived on them were the first of all ancestors.

14. *Aba-niringa*; a name under which the Gilbert islands were collectively known, meaning "the land of burning sunlight," or referring to its blazing lagoons and beaches.

15. *Tabakea* and *Aniaria* are thus shown to be the ancestors of the Gilberts in common with *Banaba*.

Names of stars.

§4. And Heaven lay on the face of Earth; and as yet there was no light. Banaba and all the lands of Tebongiro were on the over-side of heaven; they were part of the rock of heaven itself, for they sprang from heaven's body; and the ancestors who lived there were called the Dwellers-in-Heaven.

And Auriana, the first brother of Tabakea, walked through the Darkness of Tebongiro; he was lord of all lands, a mighty giant. And he saw that heaven clove to earth, so he asked Tabakea what he might do to separate them. Then Tabakea gave him a staff, with which to pierce the hard rock of heaven, so that he might make a door to enter beneath it; the name of the staff was Te Rākan. And Auriana cleft a doorway through the rock of heaven; he entered beneath, he pushed upon heaven from the underside and raised it a great height from Earth. Then he called Korereke the Stingray to slide sideways between heaven and earth, so that the places where they clove together might be separated, and he told Riiki the Eel to heave the skies yet higher on his snout.

So heaven moved on high, and the lands of Te-Bongi-Ro, which had stood upon it, broke from its body and fell into the sea below. And as yet

it was dark under heaven and over earth.

§ 5. Then again Tabakea begot children, for he lay with Nei Unikai, the Thresher Shark, and with his sister Tituabine, and his children were Auriaria, Taburimai, Tabuariki, Nawai and Aorao, with a multitude of others. But his youngest son was no woman's child; he was conceived in a swelling on Tabakea's forehead. His name was Nareau.

Tabakea stayed on Banaba with the children that he had begotten; but his son Nareau went to the island of Bem, where he begot a daughter, whose name was Angi-ni-Maeao (Wind-of-the-West).

And Auriaria the brother of Tabakea went south over the sea, for it was his work to make ready the lands of the South. As he trod the southern waters, behold, his foot struck a rock, and there he stayed, for it was the chosen place.

He raised in that place a great and mountainous island, and he called it Tasmoa-te-Ingoa (Samoa-the-Namesake), because it was named in memory of one of the clan-places on the eastern coast of Banaba.

When that was done he took a shell fish called Katati (Razor Clam) and plucked its body from the shell and flung it to the East. Behold, it clove to the Eastern sky and was the Sun! Then he

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took a *miniatanin* (mollusca: *nerita plicata*) and threw it West. Behold, the Moon! After that it was light under heaven and over earth. And he planted his staff *Ie Rakan* on Samoa; it became the Tree of Samoa.

§6. So the Tree stood for a long time, throwing out a host of great branches. But on a day *Auriana* came and began to lop off its branches one by one. He whittled down the lopped branches and threw them over the sea. The first branch peopled *Nonouti* (Central Gilberts); the second *Nikunan* (S. Gilberts); the third *Abemama* (C. Gilberts); the fourth *Tabituea* (C. Gilberts); and the fifth branch he threw away before he had whittled it down; it fell into the sea and, breaking in pieces, peopled all the Eight Islands. And the branch at the Tree's summit peopled the land of *Beberiki* (Butantari, N. Gilberts).

Then only the trunk and roots were left. The trunk fell slanting over the sea to North and West, towards *Ie-Bongi-Ro*; it peopled the line of islands that stretches to Westward of *Banaba* and the tip of the trunk lay by *Tabuena* and *Bu-Kiroro*.

The roots followed the trunk; they floated North from Samoa and stayed at the island of *Tarawa*. All useful things were hidden therein, and men and things grew from the roots.

§7 The Tree of *Tarawa* grew from the roots of the Samoan Tree, for after a time they put forth a stem and a new

*End of
nephews*
Tree grew on Tarawa, that had no branches until
it reached heaven. And the Tree of Tarawa was
an ancestor, for its summit bore a child to
Ngania-buaka (Stormy Dawn), and Obaia was the
name of the child. So he lived on the tree; and
he had wings like a bird.

On a day Tankarawa the Dweller in heaven
broke the Tree of Tarawa, and Obaia fled; he flew
to the land of Onouna in the West, and there he
married the girl Nei Anti, who bore him two
daughters - Nei Kiriere and Nei Kirimoi. After
a long time he desired to return to Tarawa; so
he took his ~~the~~ younger daughter on his back and
flew eastward with her; but when he came to
Tarawa, the wind beat him back, so he returned
to Onouna to fetch a clam-shell as a weight
for his head and shoulders; but again the
wind beat him back to sea; and he turned
southward to Tabiteuea, where he landed. And
he set his daughter Kirimoi on Tabiteuea.

There came a day of public gathering on the
island, and that night Nei Kirimoi lay with
all the males in the public maneaba. Behold
she was great with child and bore a son, who

was called Kourabi and became a great chief on Tabitenea.

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§8. When Auriana had cut off all the branches of the Samoan Tree he left that place and went northward to the island of Bern. On the northern end of the island lived ^{Nareau's child} the girl Nei Angi-ⁿⁱ⁻maeas; he lay with her and had two children; the first-born was called Te-anti-ma-aomata (The god-man), the second Na Boboran (Sir Traveller). Then he said to his wife Angi-ⁿⁱ⁻maeas, "Woman, let us go to Banaba, my home." They got them a canoe and called it Taberan-ⁿⁱ⁻kai-ⁿⁱ⁻buti-ⁿⁱ⁻Bern (The summit of the Tree, the Swift One of Bern); and they all set sail to Banaba⁸.

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And when they arrived at Banaba, Auriana's son Te Anti-ma-aomata had ^{many} ^{ren} children named Te Bu-n-anti (The ghost-brood), who had mastery ^{some} over the rain and ^{some over} the sunshine. And they were ever at variance among themselves; therefore it happened that the seasons of drought and the seasons of rain on Banaba were from the beginning uncertain

82 The names of the ancestors who accompanied them are given as follows:- Nan Tebubu, Kouteba, Namakaina, Nang Kabutia, Nei Teborata, Na Mane-ni-mate.

and so it is until today. And from the Brood of Ghosts sprang the Brood of Men and the Brood of Birds who live in the branches of the Kanawa tree (bot. *Cordia subcordata*); and the descendants of these are the families who sit in the council-lodge under the rafter called *Awrakeia*.

[The tale closes with a genealogy, very imperfectly preserved (as are all Banaban genealogies), leading down from the Brood of Birds to the person of *Nei Ikania*, who is our authority for the whole suite of myths].

This account of the Creation with its appendices is of the very greatest interest and importance. Within a small space it categorically denies all the claims of priority made for the land Samoa and the being *Nareau* by the group of tales set forth in Chapter to..... Far from showing *Nareau* as the First Cause, it presents him to us in the unfamiliar rôle of a mere junior, who played no part whatever in the lifting of heaven, the ordering of the elements. And so far from the first place among lands has Samoa fallen in this version, that it is exhibited as an unknown rock in the Southern Ocean at an era when *Te-Bongi-Ro*, the Central Pacific, swarmed with a multitude of islands, of which Banaba was the

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Navel and Banaban Anriaria the Lord.

Evidently, if (as we must) we take this tradition to be an authentic heritage of the Banaban race, and if any value at all may be attached to race-tradition, there lived on this island a group of families who believed their early forbears to have originated in the Central Pacific, not in Nuclear Polynesia. Let us tabulate their creed as avowed in the tales of Nri Anriaria:

1. Tabakea and Anriaria were born out of chaotic darkness; Banaba was their home and the Navel of the world, which is to say, the central source of the world's life; their families were also established in Aba-iririga, the Gilbert Group, to eastward. To North-East, West and South-West of Banaba, in the primeval gloom, lay a host of other islands, peopled with ancestors, whose common link with the Navel was that they were all Brothers-in-Heaven, i.e. contemporaries and peers.
2. Anriaria the Banaban was the protagonist of the Creation-drama. He raised heaven over Te-Bongi-Ro, and all the islands of the Central archipelago fell from sky to sea.
3. Only after these things were done did Anriaria tread the southern seas to make ready the land of Samoa. The very name he gave to the ~~island~~ island was taken from a small clan-place on the eastern coast of Banaba²³, being conferred in

23. This tradition will find corroboration in a later story.

remembrance of his homeland. While Anriaria was busy about his work in the South, Tabakea with all his progeny remained on Banaba.

4. Anriaria the Banaban was the planter of the Samoan Tree; i.e., he was the ancestor of a large number of families, Banaban by origin, who colonised Samoa.

5. When the Tree (or group of Banaban colonists) had remained and thrown out a "root of great branches" in that Southern land, Anriaria again resolved it into its component parts. These he flung Northward oversea, up the Ellice and Gilbert Groups and along the islands to Westward of Banaba - in fact, back through the archipelago of Te-Bongi-Ro - as far as Tabuena and Bukiworo.

6. The root of the Samoan Tree floated to Tarawa (N. Gilberts) and a new Tree grew from it. This, in plain language, means that the root-stock of the Banaban colony on Samoa migrated back to Tarawa and there bred and multiplied. But "the roots followed the trunk" - they did not break away from the stem which had populated the "line of islands to Westward," but remembered the ancestral ties in spite of their separation.

7. Anriaria the Banaban migrated from Samoa to Bem (S. Gilberts), where he stayed awhile, married into the family of Nareau and thence returned to Banaba, his ancestral home.

Comparison of this tabulation with the actual text will show that no point has been unduly strained, and ^{that} nothing ^{has been} read into the story which is not palpably there. Yet in the result, it is a revelation of utmost importance, for it is distinctly evidential of a race-migration from the Central Pacific to Samoa. Taking the name of Avriana as the ancestral designation of a group of clans, we must believe on the showing of our tale (a) that there was, in very early days, on Banaba, a ~~group~~ race which had been long enough resident there to believe itself autochthonous; (b) that this race invaded and colonised Samoa for a very considerable time; and (c) that for some reason it was driven out of Samoa and retraced the island track that it had followed - i.e. the Gilbert & Ellice Groups - and populated ^{the whole of} Micronesia as far as "Tabenna" and "Bu-Kioro." Tabenna we know

not, but Bu-Kiroro - the Breed of Kiroro - gives us
a clue. Is not Kiroro but a slight variant of Gilolo?
And Gilolo is that island of Halmahera, which
guards the northern gates of Indonesia, whence, in
the opinion of ~~an~~ ^{many and others} ~~finist~~ scholars, the ancestors of
Polynesia were driven, two thousand years ago, to
seek a new Hawaiki in the islands of the
Southern Pacific. Certainly, in interpreting our
text, we may take "the line of islands to Westward"
to mean the Marshall + Caroline Groups, which, in
an almost unbroken chain along the Equator, link
the Northern Gilberts with the outlying archipelago
of Asia. Further, the name Bu-Kiroro must in
translation be made referable either to the land
of Gilolo or the breed of Gilolo. If "land" be
the right interpretation, then Auriana's race was
scattered back to the very sources of the Polynesian
folk: if "breed" be the more correct meaning, ^{then}
they possibly did not travel so far, but ^{certainly} they
came to a group of islands where the Gilolo
Breed lived, which is to say, the Carolines and
Marshalls. Therefore these groups had been at
some earlier date invaded by a race from Gilolo.
Possibly, it was the invasion of the Line Islands

by men of the Gilolo Breed that first gave the
Banabans their impulse to migrate to Samoa.
Braten thence, after many generations of increase,
they returned to their ancient homes and,
being in great force, were able to deal more
effectively than their ancestors ^{had dealt} with the Gilolo
men.