IN THEIR OWN WORDS

HISTORY AND SOCIETY IN GILBERTESE ORAL TRADITION

KAMBATI K. URIAM

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FOREWORD

EXPERIENCE HAS convinced me that most Europeans can gain a truer picture of how the Gilbertese people think and act within their own environment, apart from a small acculturated minority, by studying their oral traditions than by any other means. Only in their traditions can we hear the Gilbertese talking to their fellow islanders about people who lived, and events that took place, either in their own time, or more often in the days of their ancestors. You will not get the same feeling of intimacy in works by anthropologists or travellers.

It was the superiority and apparent veracity of the Gilbertese oral traditions that excited the admiration of Horatio Hale, who in 1841 was the first scientist to visit the Gilbert Islands. And since then many of these traditions have been collected by missionaries, government officials, ethnohistorians, and latterly by the Gilbertese themselves. Many of them have been published in French, Gilbertese and English, including an anthology. What was now clearly required was an overall, comprehensive study of the traditions: their function in Gilbertese society, classification, methods of composition, memorisation, transmission and recital; and their value in the changing culture of today.

We are fortunate indeed that Kambati K. Uriam agreed to undertake this formidable task, since quite clearly no one else has had the ability and knowledge to do so. From infancy he was lulled to sleep by the nightly recital of traditional stories. By the time he became a teacher in a church school he was noted for his knowledge of the subject. For his Bachelor's degree Kambati chose Gilbertese oral tradition for his thesis and as a Lecturer in the Tangintebu Theological College he taught and supervised Honours students in local history.

Kambati Uriam has written an excellent book which will be read with delight by the growing number of educated Gilbertese literate in English, and discussed by them with the Elders in the village Council Houses. It will be a definitive work on the subject, as writing has made the

composition of new oral traditions unnecessary; but it is hoped it will prove to be the prototype for similar studies covering the traditions of other Pacific Island groups.

H.E. Maude
Canberra 1995

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PREFACE

THIS IS A STUDY of Gilbertese history through oral tradition. It originated from my desire to seek the true identity of the Gilbertese people. This study, then, is but one of the preliminary stages necessary to make such a search possible and successful because one cannot look for a people and their identity outside their own history. History is vital for the understanding of a people - who they were that makes them what they are today.

For any history or reconstruction of the past to be possible, one has to have sources that provide the best access to 'historic' significant incidents that determine the identity of the people. This is where the oral traditions of the elders are important. My argument in this book is that the oral traditions contain a close approximation of the past as lived, experienced and understood *in the people's own words* long before the coming of the Europeans to our shores.

Gilbertese oral tradition is a collection of stories about the ancestors as remembered and understood by the chroniclers and the people. These stories for generations have been transmitted by word of mouth. Although their verbal nature makes them intangible and conceivably therefore unreliable, many are authentic when tested and compared with written or other 'hard' facts.

The chroniclers of oral tradition were *unimane* and *unaine*. Usually they were members of ruling families or from leading *boti* of the district. On most islands they were members of the clan or *boti* Karongoa. The earliest Gilbertese stories contain accounts of the activities of the ancestors before they came to the Gilberts. Many are accounts of Gilbertese ancestors who sojourned in Samoa. Some contain stories of ancestors who were not related to that group. Most were preserved in the form of songs or chants.

The stories existed first as independent units belonging to various groups and it was only later that they were woven together to form long historical narratives. The first of the attempts to compile, edit, and put the stories together into organised historical prose began at the time of the entry and establishment of the Karongoa clan in the islands. The work lasted for several generations and was completed and sealed in the time of Teinai II. Because the compilers and editors of this history were selective, many of the local traditions of the islands never formed part of that history.

On Beru there emerged a canon of tradition which became known as *karakini Karongoa* or *karakin Tabontebike*, because of its intrinsic connection with Tabontebike *maneaba* and the various *boti* within that type of *maneaba*. From Beru this canon was carried to Nikunau and later to the rest of the southern Gilberts. Its dominant theme was the ascendancy of Karongoa and its god Auriaria. Tamoa (Samoa) and the breaking of the tree Kaintikuaba was the focal point of its primeval period: the clan and the *maneaba* were the focus for the latter part.

After the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia from Beru and Nikunau about A.D 1550 and the establishment of the Tabontebike-type *maneaba* on all the islands except Makin, Butaritari and Banaba, the Tabontebike-Karongoa tradition became the sole and official tradition of the islands. As the tradition gradually became accepted by communities throughout the Gilberts, its original theme shifted from Karongoa and Auriaria to the *maneaba* and the people in the islands. By the time ruling dynasties emerged, mainly in the central and northern islands, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the essence of the Karongoa tradition had already become accepted as *the tradition* of the islands, with local events grafted onto it to continue the story.

But however intelligible and consistent a number of these stories are, many do not agree with our modern understanding of historical stories. This is because in our understanding what is historical should be clear and have a genuine historical referent that actually existed and happened, a prerequisite not usually apparent in Gilbertese oral tradition. Nevertheless, though many Gilbertese oral traditions may not be clear, many do have genuine historical referents. As for the unclear and unintelligible, many were constructed to be just that, to confuse and conceal esoteric and important knowledge about the past from others.

And so the stories, from the time of the gods to the emergence of the first *aomata*, must always be read with caution and against the background of the Gilbertese world-view, history, and culture. To reach the real subjects and characters in most, one has to look beyond the literal meaning of their words and even behind the themes they tell. Whatever 'wie eigentlich gewesen' means, Ranke's famous phrase is far more complex than Ranke himself conceived and many historians claim to understand and employ in their historical quest. History, as an interpreting exercise, where the historian struggles to establish his facts, is but a reconstruction of the most reasonable possibilities of 'what actually happened'. Like a judge, confronted with the dilemma of deciding between the various possible interpretations, the historian has to make a choice.

The same decision was made by the Gilbertese greybeards, only for them 'what actually happened' is the story about the people and the islands from

the gods and creation to the settlement of the Gilberts by the ancestors; hence their narration from the very beginning of things, from creation, for that is where time began, where history started. History or knowledge of the past can never be known absolutely, as the past can never be repeated, and the chroniclers knew this quite well. Nevertheless, what they have reconstructed and transmitted is what they and the people believed to be possible, the most plausible within the context of their culture and environment.

A good command of the language, knowledge of the customs and manners of the people as people, as well as of the environment, is crucial to the understanding of these oral reconstructions. Because good and reliable reconstructions are not easily attainable, one should know where to go and be open-minded and receptive to all that may be imparted. One should not judge the traditions nor edit them.

Travelling and visiting the islands and talking with informants, I realised that one can grow up in one's own place and know many things, but a lot more can still be learnt. In collecting the stories, one is privileged to learn many new things or incidents of the past which are very much a part of one's family heritage and which contribute to its present state and position in one's island community. In many ways it gives one pride in being what one is because of one's forefathers. If there is a hope I wish to convey in the following pages, it is that the Gilbertese people will take pride in being I-Kiribati and treasure with all jealousy the wisdom and knowledge of their ancestors as found in the traditions.

MANY PEOPLE have assisted me one way or another in understanding Gilbertese oral tradition, and I wish to thank them all. For those whose time, energy, and wisdom I have exploited, I hope that I have not disappointed or failed them. If anything good comes out of this book, it is because of their untiring admonitions and advice. All the mistakes and the shortcomings rest with me.

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I owe a great deal to Dr Deryck Scarr of the Pacific and Asian History Division, in the Research School of Pacific and Asian History, The Australian National University, who supervised my research in the history of the Gilbertese people and their literature: his meticulous attention and care for minute detail gave me confidence and provided a model for scholarship. I cannot imagine completing the book without his admonitions and direction.

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To the Maudes, I will always be indebted - to Harry and Nei Honor for their generosity and support without which my work here in Canberra would have finished differently. I owe a great deal to Harry who has been very generous in allowing me to use his materials, and for his general interest in my research.

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Kambati Uriam
Bangantebure April/Canberra 1995

GLOSSARY

<i>ai-ni-kiroro</i>	the hearth oven of Kiroro
<i>Aiabu</i>	Milky Way
<i>aintoa</i>	person of great strength, powerful
<i>akawa</i>	to fish
<i>akoi</i>	kind treatments; hospitable; favour
<i>anti</i>	spirit; ghost; god
<i>antimaomata</i>	semi-spirit person or half-human spirit
<i>aomata</i>	real or true human beings; Gilbertese
<i>arin te amarake</i>	portion of food taken on behalf of or given to the gods
<i>atatai</i>	skilled; familiar knowledge
<i>atinro</i>	anchor
<i>atun te utu</i>	head of the <i>utu</i>
<i>aubunga</i>	empty shells of huge clam shells
<i>aumaiaki</i>	season of the south; warm and good weather
<i>Auriaria</i>	the great and fearful god of ancient Karongoa
<i>baba</i>	fool
<i>bai-ni-kuakua</i>	gift (usually land or skill) for the caring of the elders
<i>bakabu</i>	story accompanied by a chant and dance
<i>bakatibu</i>	great ancestors
<i>bangota</i>	shrine; burial plot; sacred enclosure for the gods or <i>anti</i>
<i>banuea</i>	royalty
<i>bareaka</i>	canoe shed
<i>baro</i>	burial tombs in the ground that has a huge stone capping
<i>bata</i>	clan; family; house
<i>baurua</i>	large ocean-going canoes
<i>bebeku</i>	excrete continually
<i>beroro</i>	sooty black
<i>bina</i>	youngest in a family
<i>binobino</i>	empty coconut container
<i>boiri</i>	a game where the ball is passed around by kicking it with the inside of the foot
<i>bonobono</i>	magical spells to blockade, frustrate, and repel the spells of the enemy that meant harm to you

<i>borau</i>	navigation; art of land-finding and determining the weather
<i>boti</i>	sitting space in the <i>maneaba</i> for a clan
<i>bou</i>	canoe tufts or crests; flags
<i>boua</i>	monoliths erected as representation of a god or <i>anti</i>
<i>bowi</i>	meeting of the <i>unimane</i> in the <i>maneaba</i>
<i>bu-ni-matang</i>	breed-of-Matang; person from Matang
<i>buakonikai</i>	estates belonging to a <i>utu</i>
<i>bubuti</i>	a reciprocal relationship; to request
<i>bunnanti</i>	breed or multitude of the <i>anti</i>
<i>buto</i>	navel; the centre; the most important
<i>bwere</i>	a shell or any instrument used to cut
<i>eiriki</i>	a man's sister-in-law; a woman's brother-in-law
<i>eitei</i>	frigate bird
<i>iang</i>	imagination; ideas; to reflect
<i>ibonga</i>	priest
<i>ibu</i>	container for toddy juice
<i>ikawai</i>	elders; ancestors.
<i>ikuku</i>	a small but heavy wooden batten to beat the pandanus leaves for braiding
<i>inaai</i>	sitting mat woven from coconut palms leaves
<i>inaki</i>	rows of thatch over a <i>boti</i> in the <i>maneaba</i> that indicates the area or boundary of a <i>boti</i>
<i>inaomata</i>	independent; free men in contrast to slaves
<i>iruwa</i>	strangers; visitors; guests
<i>kabubu</i>	food made from pandanus fruit in the form similar to saw-dust
<i>kaeke</i>	magical spell to make one important
<i>kaetani kawai rite</i>	performed over a dead person to straighten the path of its soul to the land of feasting and dancing
<i>kaiaba</i>	war or migrations for the purpose of obtaining more land
<i>kainga</i>	old site of the <i>mwenga</i> of the <i>utu</i> or the clan
<i>kainikamaen</i>	art of composing songs or chants
<i>kainikatiku</i>	resting place; home
<i>kainrou</i>	to be engaged; betrothed man or woman
<i>Kaintikuaba</i>	ancestral tree in Samoa
<i>kaiwa</i>	divination; prognostication by lot
<i>kakaraoi</i>	distribution of rights, privileges, properties, and skills in a <i>utu</i> to its members by the head
<i>kako</i>	seclusion of men and woman for a purpose
<i>kamaraia</i>	a place which when visited is said to occasion death; capable of producing death miraculously
<i>kamaroro</i>	to give company

<i>kamei</i>	standing dance
<i>kanangaraoi</i>	spell to make one considered favourably by others, especially where one is in a difficult position because of what one had done already or is about to do
<i>kantaki</i>	chewed
<i>kara</i>	elderly members of a <i>utu</i> , whose mobility is restricted because of old age and who rely on others for care and assistance
<i>karaki</i>	story; history of the past
<i>karaun</i>	seine; net
<i>karawa</i>	sky; heaven; land above the earth
<i>karea</i>	propitiatory offering
<i>karewe</i>	toddy juice
<i>kario</i>	collecting or composing words for a song
<i>katake</i>	chant
<i>katei</i>	ways of the ancestors; good manners
<i>kauaa</i>	fructification of the trees
<i>kaunga</i>	slave
<i>kauoman</i>	second
<i>kawai</i>	rituals that are not usually associated with <i>anti</i>
<i>kaweana</i>	an unskilled person
<i>keketi</i>	dragonfly
<i>kibana</i>	shiftless; making no provision against want
<i>kimoa</i>	rat
<i>kuau</i>	rock cod
<i>ma</i>	fish trap
<i>maeao</i>	west
<i>maiaki</i>	south
<i>maka</i>	power; magical powers
<i>maneaba</i>	open sided district gathering house with <i>boti</i> in it
<i>manewe</i>	proper or accepted words for a chant or song
<i>marae</i>	marked open space for religious ceremonies
<i>maraia</i>	suffer severe pain and die
<i>maroro</i>	conversation; telling stories; to lull
<i>matauninga</i>	offended
Maungatabu	type of <i>maneaba</i>
<i>mauri</i>	to be in health
<i>meang</i>	north
<i>moan tei-ao</i>	first menses
<i>moan-ua</i>	first fruit of the best trees
<i>mone</i>	in the death; land beneath the ground or beneath the sea
<i>mronron</i>	spherical; group
<i>mwenga</i>	home

<i>namakaina</i>	moon
<i>nao</i>	wave
<i>neinei</i>	shallow pool
<i>nga</i>	arm-spread
<i>o-naki</i>	walled enclosure
<i>o-kai</i>	a house for storing ripe coconuts
<i>rabakau</i>	skill; skilful; adept
<i>rabataia</i>	body; representation
<i>rakai</i>	reef; rock
<i>rang</i>	a landless person; servant; lascivious; insane
<i>raoi</i>	peace
<i>rau</i>	peaceful; thatch
<i>renga</i>	food of the departed soul; a substance chewed to make the mouth red
<i>riaria</i>	feared
<i>ribanaki</i>	tilled; cultivated
<i>rika</i>	wooden needle for braiding fishing nets
<i>riki</i>	ancestry; genealogical list
<i>roki ni kako</i>	a certain house built to seclude a man or woman
<i>roro</i>	age; period
<i>rorobuaka</i>	warrior; middle aged man
<i>rotongitong</i>	pitch-dark
<i>rua-ni-babai</i>	<i>babai</i> pits
<i>ruoia</i>	dancing
<i>taai</i>	sun
<i>taan tanginiwenei</i>	professional mourners who compile dirges
<i>taani karaki</i>	renowned or official chroniclers
<i>tabaa</i>	first bloom of pandanus tree
<i>tabetabe</i>	adoption
<i>Tabiang</i>	type of <i>maneaba</i>
<i>Tabuariki</i>	one of the gods of Karongoa
<i>taeibenao</i>	magical washing or spell to cleanse oneself
<i>taeka nikawai</i>	stories of the past
<i>Tamoa-te-ingoa</i>	Samoa the namesake
<i>Tamoa</i>	Samoa
<i>tangimate</i>	dirge
<i>tano</i>	sand, ground
<i>tanrake</i>	ocean-side of the island
<i>tataro</i>	invocation; prayer
<i>tauan roro</i>	spell performed by <i>unimane</i> and <i>unaine</i> to give them vitality and long life
<i>taumanintananga</i>	chanting of a disputed story
<i>te akea</i>	nothingness

*tia tabunea**tiki**tinaba*

sorcerer

affinity or extension of name

a wife who accepts publicly the seduction of the uncle-in-laws and sometimes the father-in-law and becomes their ceremonial wife in the functions of the *maneaba* in order to obtain favours, more land, and power for her husband and sons

*toka**tou**tuae**uea**ueea**unaine**unimane**utu**wanawana**wau**wawi*attendant of the *Uea*

pandanus fruit

dried pandanus paste

king; high chief

royalty; ruling families

a respected old woman

old man; speakers in the *maneaba*; head of a *utu*

family; relatives

intelligent; knowing; wise

cat's cradle

magic or incantation to cause death

CHAPTER 1

The Islands and the People

'IF ONE DRAWS a circle around the island world of the Pacific, at its centre will be found the perfect models of the South Sea Islands of Romance: a necklace of sixteen low coral atolls straddling the equator and almost touching the 180th meridian.'¹ These are the Gilbert islands. The islands, together with Banaba, number 17 in all, from Makin in the north to Arorae in the south - a distance of about 880 kilometres. Only five have no lagoon.

The Gilbert islands are predominantly low lying coral atolls except for Banaba (Ocean Island) which is a raised reef island. The average width of the islands is several hundred metres from one side to the other; the widest being about three kilometres. Tabiteuea, a 70 kilometre chain of some 45 islets, estimated at about 30 square kilometres, is the longest in the Gilberts. Tamana which is less than 10 kilometres from one end to the other is the smallest.²

The islands have only one season all year round - summer. The rainy days are usually between December and February, and August and October; but even then severe droughts can hit the islands, and in the past they made hunger and privation familiar. The Group is subdivided into three clusters, *te itera meang* (of the north), *nuka* (central) and *maiaki* (south), between which the inhabitants, though they form but one people speaking the same general language, differ slightly in customs, institutions, and dialect. The northern cluster is composed of Makin and Butaritari, divided only by a strait about five kilometres wide. Makin is the smaller of the two, but compact, with fertile soil, and is considered the metropolis. The seven islands, Marakei, Abaiang, Tarawa, Maiana, Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka, form the central cluster, of which Tarawa, in the tradition, is the head. Though Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka belong to this central cluster geographically and

¹ H.E. Maude, 'Foreword', in Ernest Sabatier, *Astride the Equator: An Account of the Gilbert Islands* (Melbourne 1977), v.

² For a detailed discussion of the flora and fauna of the island group see Rene Catala, 'Report on the Gilbert Islands: Some aspects of human ecology', *Atoll Research Bulletin*, 59 (1957).

politically, the three form a group of their own, with Abemama as the head. Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Beru, Nikunau, Onotoa, Tamana, and Arorae form the third division. Although islands in this cluster are independent of one another, Beru may be considered their head because of the influence of her warriors and *maneaba* (meeting house).³

Approached from the sea, the islands with their dense growth of coconut palms and other vegetation present a beautiful appearance. As one gets closer to the shore, the dense growth of vegetation is broken at intervals by a large pandanus-thatched building, resting on wooden or stone pillars, around which are seen the smaller houses of a village. This building is the *maneaba*. From a vessel at anchor in the lagoon, the most fascinating thing to watch is the view of all the islets with their white beaches from one end to the other, all joined together by reefs that rarely appear above the water.

THE character of the people varies from one cluster to another. The people of the north are more open, cheerful, noisy and adulatory, in strong contrast to the reserved, suspicious, irritable and somewhat wild and apparently ferocious people of the southern cluster. The central cluster shares the two extremes. But each island community still has its own distinctive characteristic: on Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka, for example, a strict subordination, the kind offered in respect to the *uea* (king), is practised and encouraged; while on Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Onotoa, Nikunau and Beru, one can see a saucy boldness and rude independence in the manners of the people, the kind one would find in a proud and self-sufficient chief. At the same time also, the people of the southern cluster are unpredictable and can be easily offended; but even then, they are also easily appeased, for as they always say, 'A coward is he, who, for the fear of his opponent, settles his animosity into a long continued rancour'.⁴

Cases of suicide are found, and more often in the southern islands than in the north. The suspicious and irritable temper characteristic of the people of

³ At one time, the islands of the Gilberts excluding Makin, Butaritari and Banaba were called Beru. This was after the establishment of the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia in the islands they subjugated and where they built their *maneaba*. Expressions such as *Kai ko a kumea te baenne ao bain Beru* ('Trouble not yourself with those things for they belong to Beru') and *Kai ko a un, ko kakamataku i mantan Beru?* ('Why show your anger, are you distinguished in the eyes of Beru?') were common in those days. E. Tibwere (comp.), 'Karakia I-Tungaru' (The history of the Gilbert Islands collected from Ten Teuea [Tarawa] Nariki [Tarawa] and Tabuia [Abaiang]) (1915), 4-5, manuscript, Pateman Papers.

⁴ There are exceptions to this rule, for many wars have been fought to settle insults committed one or two generations earlier. Added to this is the jealousy of married women, who, when aggrieved, would carry a weapon and look for the right moment to cause as much injury as possible to the woman of whom they were jealous.

the southern cluster often results in a disposition to sullenness and melancholic despondency which in turn can lead to suicide. Cases vary in their causes from island to island, but most arise out of a shameful act or out of offence taken at the conduct of some person whom fear or affection makes the victim unwilling to injure.

*Rorobuaka*⁵ and women from early adulthood are taught to be competitive. In their daily activities the quality of their labour is expected to exceed that of their peers in the village, and where they seem to fall behind their group they are rebuked and shamed by their parents. But while competition is encouraged young men and women are also expected to conform to the rules of the village and to be alert to the feelings of their rivals.

Bubuti, a reciprocal relationship, is practised throughout the islands. Those who enter into the relationship can *bubuti* (request) almost anything from their kindred: labour, for instance, to help them build a house; a canoe to go fishing; or even food and other immediate needs. In former times on some islands, through the custom of *eiriki* and *tinaba*, one could also *bubuti* a sexual favour. But the custom has its own rules and, strictly speaking, only those that have *buakonikai* (lands) can *bubuti* (request), that is, enter into such a relationship. Those that cannot *bubuti* are those who have no land. They are nothing for they cannot offer anything - they are the *kaunga* (slaves/serfs) who depend for their livelihood on the favour of the *utu* (family/clan) upon whose lands they labour.

Sport, dancing and story-telling in the *maneaba* are the favourite pastimes throughout the group. On islands where there were *uea* (high chiefs), games and dances were performed to entertain the *uea* and his guests. On other islands where power is vested in the *mronron* (circle) of *unimane*, games and dances were performed for elderly people, visitors in the village, or special functions of the *maneaba*. Dancing consumes time and involves practically the whole village. Rehearsals are usually held in the *maneaba* in the evenings. For several months a village will rehearse, and because rehearsals continue well into the night many people will do very little the next day. It is understandable therefore that 'dancing fever' is the most criticised among the pastimes of the people by the missionaries. The Protestant missionaries were more harsh in their condemnation of dancing.⁶

⁵ The word literally means 'warrior', though today it is used technically to mean men who are middle-aged and are not yet *unimane* because they still have a *unimane* with them who still sits with other *unimane* in the *maneaba* representing their *utu* (family or clan).

⁶ Sabatier, *Astride the Equator*, 92. A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 314, 333.

Respect, generosity, hospitality and attention to the aged and infirm, as well as to *iruwa* (stranger/visitor), are virtues highly esteemed and generally practised. There is no exact word for poor, and though there is for slave (*rang* or *kaunga*) the words literally mean 'fool' (*baba*) and are applied only to those whose lands have been lost through defeat in war or forfeited on the decision of the *maneaba* elders as compensation for murder, theft or adultery.

Among rules strictly observed, three were deemed the most important and crimes in respect of them carried a penalty of death: murder; theft; and assault on married women. On some islands incest was rated among these three, but because of complications in the definition of a close relative, which differs among the island clusters, 'incest' committed between ego and child or parent was the one that usually got the penalty of death. Sexual relations between the members of the same *boti* are generally considered incest. However, strictly speaking incest is committed only to the fourth generation. But incest is not confined only to sexual relationships: the killing and eating of one's totem is also considered as incest. How the rules were enforced in the island communities depended very much on their meaning as interpreted by the *unimane* and *unaine* who relied on their knowledge of tradition.

Generally speaking, Gilbertese society is democratic, divided into districts controlled by *unimane* (old men) - partly hereditary, partly chosen for their skill and knowledge of tradition. Exceptions to democracies are only three: Butaritari (with Makin), Abaiang, and Abemama (with Kuria and Aranuka); and at times Tarawa, though power on this island is disputed.

True democracy existed in the islands of the southern cluster. It was possible on these islands because of the *maneaba* where each clan was represented by a *boti* (sitting place) in which their *unimane* sat and discussed matters concerning the community with other clan elders. From the *maneaba* the decisions of the elders were implemented, and the *rorobuaka* were given the task of ensuring that they were carried out. Even matters concerning punishment or war were decided by the *unimane* in the *maneaba*.

Uea - high chiefs or kings - were found only in the northern and central clusters. The fortunes of most ruling families were made possible because of their great number and the power of their magic. Some ancestors of these families were men and women of huge proportions. Rairaeana *te tia buaka* (the warrior), for instance, the conquering warlord who took the islands of Makin and Butaritari by storm, was, according to tradition, a man of huge girth and great height, enshrouded with an awe of sacredness because of the magic and spells performed upon him when a young man by his parents Nei

Rakentai and Ten Teimaui.⁷ But although the *uea* and his family ruled, their rule depended very much on their ability to command respect and fear from the *unimane* and *rorobuaka* in their districts or islands of influence. This is true of Tetabo, a great leader and warrior who began the royal family of Tuangaona on the island of Abemama and its satellite islands of Kuria and Aranuka.⁸

Under a system ruled by an *uea* all power and land in theory belonged to him. On Makin and Butaritari in the early days of the *uea*ship all land was held by the *uea* and his warring party from Tarawa, Abaiang and Marakei. Because the high chief depended very much for his recognition as ruler on a good relationship with his *rorobuaka* (warriors), at will and by favour he distributed the land among them.⁹ In return, his *rorobuaka*, who are in actual fact the landed proprietors, paid him homage and gave, not only to him but to his reigning descendants as well, their absolute support and obedience. As part of their homage they were to supply the *uea* and his immediate family with food since he had 'no land' - as all land is 'owned' by *ana aomata te uea* (the people of the high chief). To prevent problems concerning rights over land with the descendants of the brothers and sisters of the reigning *uea*, who would have no land, *ana aomata te uea* - the *rorobuaka* (the landed proprietors), some of them *toka* (overseers) - agreed that one-third of their land was to be *te aba n uea* (land of the *uea*), and must be given up to the king's collaterals to manage and live on.

The high chiefship was usually decided by the *rorobuaka* who in theory would give it to the eldest son of the reigning *uea* at his death. The collaterals are called *ueea*, which simply means 'related to the high chief or members of the chiefly class', a title applied also to the high chief's children as well as his siblings and their children.

The *uea*, because he depended on his *rorobuaka* for food, appointed several among them as his *toka*, their primary role being the collecting of *kanan te uea* from the selected *bata* (houses) of the *rorobuaka* or from an entire village.

⁷ Some of my informants argued against the common tradition that Rairaeana alone took the islands of Butaritari and Makin. They claimed that Rairaeana's victories were the result of the help he *bubuti* (requested or rather begged) from the three great warriors on Makin and Butaritari. Cf. Bernd Lambert, 'Uean Abara: the high chiefs of Butaritari and Makin as kinsmen and office-holders', in Niel Gunson (ed.), *The Changing Pacific: Essays in honour of H.E. Maude* (Melbourne 1978), 85.

⁸ Airam Teeko, 'A History of Abemama', translated by Reid Cowell, in Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 296.

⁹ In this context on Makin and Butaritari, the *rorobuaka* refers to the class of people whose forefathers, together with those of the ruling *uea*, fought and took the land from its original inhabitants. Strictly speaking, then, there were only three classes of people on Makin and Butaritari in the early days of the high chiefship: the royalty, the *rorobuaka*, and *kaunga* or *toro*. Nabuakanimakin, pers. comm., December 1990.

Being always near to the *uea*, the *toka* assumed a new role which not only meant an extra duty but a sharing also of some power vested in the *uea* by the people: summoning of the people to the *uea* and overseeing the works dictated by the *uea* himself. Because being a *toka* meant extra prestige and privilege, many among the *rorobuaka* desired to become *toka*, and there was a time when the various *toka* and their families almost became a new class of people just below the *uea* and his collaterals and slightly above the *rorobuaka*.¹⁰

On Abemama, together with Kuria and Aranuka where the people were also ruled by the *uea*, society was divided into several classes: at the top, the *uea* and *banuea* (royalty); then the *inaomata*; the *aomata*; the *rang*; and finally the *toro* at the base of the ladder. The *inaomata* and the *aomata* were a class of freemen and, together with royalty (*uea* and *banuea*) were landowners. The *rang* were landless, and at will could work on the lands of any member of the three classes of landowners and so live on those lands. Sometimes, for good service, a *rang* could be rewarded with land. A *toro*, however, as a slave, was not only landless but theoretically was owned and considered the wealth of the landowners. Although a *toro* would be fortunate to obtain rights over land of his sister who married a freeman, unlike a *rang*, who could be a landowner and to some degree a 'freeman', he could not own land himself; his position as a slave was irremediable.¹¹

The *rang* and the *toro*, because they had limited or no rights at all to land, and were dependent on their masters, could not involve themselves in decision making or any other matter in the village. In many ways their lives were prescribed by their masters, who, as a matter of courtesy, would care for and treat them fairly well. Slaves were usually conquered people and, together with land, were regarded as spoils of war. But members of the community, on the decision of their *utu* (relatives or their own clan), could also be made slaves of others as penalty for crime, usually theft.

Changes of course happened to the way ruling families in the north ruled their islands and subjects. Significant among them was the acceptance of the rule of the *unimane*, with the reigning high chief only as a representative of the people and manifestation of power and authority. The development was

¹⁰ There are still people on Makin and Butaritari today who claim that a *toka* is a nobleman who is not the same as the *rorobuaka*, and that the title refers to a class who are between the *uea* (and his collaterals) and the *rorobuaka*. This causes problems with respect to land tenure, because in claiming to be 'nobles' the members demand that they too must be given a third of all land 'owned' by the *rorobuaka*, a claim quite incompatible with tradition. Anterea Betero, pers.comm., December 1982, on Butaritari; Nabuakanimakin, pers. comm., December 1990, on Makin.

¹¹ R.G. Roberts, 'The Dynasty of Abemama', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 62 (1953), 269. See also Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 154, 297-8.

already anticipated, since several generations of intermarriage between the former rulers and the conquered made almost everyone related to the initial ruling house. The change in many ways reduced the *uea* to merely a holder of the 'office' of *uea*. He with his collateral kinsmen was regarded less as a class above the people and more as *raon te aba*, fellow inhabitant of the land; the high chief alone, however, as the *uea*, was respected and supposed to be *kamaraia* (sacrosanct) because of the *unimane* who elected him to the 'office'. A similar development also happened in the royal families of Abemama, though there was a time when one of their *uea* decided to gather back and retain all power and decision making for himself.¹²

Monarchies are no longer found today, perhaps because of the disruption of their rule when the islands were declared a Protectorate and then a Colony, a situation where both the people and the high chiefs were confused about their places and roles; or perhaps as the result of the work of the missionaries who challenged the 'evils' of the high chiefs and in many ways stripped them of their power and influence.¹³ The fact that the islands were generally too poor in resources to sustain a mainly unproductive *uea*, his family and court retainers may have also contributed to the end of monarchies.

In the democratic islands of the south where one would expect the people to have equal rights, there were slaves also. Like their counterparts in the northern and central islands, they were prizes of war or convicted thieves. They were allowed to get a wife, which was not easy, provided they worked hard on the land and *rua* (*babai* pits) of their masters. As slaves, many found it hard to live a normal life, and many escaped to other islands, where they were *iruwa* and started a new life.

Not only were there slaves in the southern islands, but, evident in the traditions and quite obvious in the procedures of the *maneaba* gathering and functions of certain groups, chiefs as well. The greatest were from the

¹² The high chief was Binoka (d. 18 November 1892), who, because of the growing number of Europeans on his islands, felt that the only way to preserve the people and their islands from exploitation by European traders and all foreigners was to retain all power himself while the *unimane* acted as his advisers (though not always) in making his decisions. For a classic life of Binoka see R.L. Stevenson, *In the South Seas: an Island Nights Entertainment* (London n.d.), 185-230. See also H.E. Maude, 'Baiteke and Binoka of Abemama: Arbiters of Change in the Gilbert Islands', in J.W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra 1970), 201-24.

¹³ The high chieftainship of Makin and Butaritari was abolished in 1963 by the then Resident Commissioner, V.J. Anderson, with Na Uraura being the last *uea* of the two islands. Lambert, 'Uean Abara', 90. The raising of the Union Jack on Abemama in 1892 was the last time also that the *uea* of the island functioned as a true *uea* of not only Abemama but Kuria and Aranuka as well. On Abaiang, the acceptance of the Christian faith by the high chief Kaiea deprived him of his supposed sacrosanct status and robbed him of the awe that once surrounded a *uea*.

Karongoa clan who were permitted the *moan taeka* (the first word) and the last word in the meeting of the *maneaba*, and their sitting space was the *boti n uea* (the sitting place of the high chief).¹⁴ Though the members of this *boti* were not strictly regarded as rulers, they had privileges which tend to distinguish and place them on a higher level than their kinsmen.

Like the chiefs and the ruling families in the northern and central islands, the chiefs and the royalty in the southern islands must have enjoyed some generations of power and prestige, but unlike their northern counterparts, their power was never absolute for it was shared among the leaders of the *boti* who were represented by their *unimane* in the *maneaba*.

The situation in the islands today has changed, and more and more the *maneaba* with the old men as 'rulers' is being accepted. No one is interested in who is a slave or who is a *uea*; and where parents or grandparents in the seclusion of their homes coach their members in the stories of the past, they are uncomfortable and therefore when talking of *rang* or *toro* they are careful and exact, lest they be overheard by others.

Most people profess the Christian faith, the result of missions which came to the islands in the last century. The Hawaiian Mission under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions first came in 1852, though it was not till 1857 that they landed the Rev. Hiram Bingham Jr, their resident missionary, to begin proselytisation.¹⁵ Their work was eventually taken over by the London Missionary Society which began work in the southern islands in 1870. Roman Catholicism came in the early 1880s through Gilbertese converted as labourers in Tahiti. It was not until 1888, however, that the first Roman Catholic missionaries landed on the islands.¹⁶

¹⁴ The *boti*, also called Karongoa *n Uea* after the name of the clan, was founded by Tanentoa, the *uea* of the *maneaba*, and therefore to this day is considered a prestigious *boti*. Tione Baraka, 'The Story of the I-Kiribati according to the Traditions of Karongoa' (typescript), collected in 1934 from the old men of Nikunau, translated by the Rev. G.H. Eastman and edited and revised by H.E. Maude, Maude Papers. See also H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963), 11, 13.

¹⁵ Emlyn Jones, *Rongorongo te Baba n Amerika i Kiribati: A Short History of the Work of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the Gilbert Islands, 1857-1917* (Rongorongo 1957).

¹⁶ Sabatier, *Astride the Equator*, 169-76.

CHAPTER 2

Gilbertese Society in Pre-European Times

THE RECONSTRUCTION BELOW of Gilbertese society in pre-European times depends almost entirely on oral tradition as well as the interpretation of surviving cultural practices and customs, many of which are decaying.¹ Because little is known about Gilbertese society in pre-European times, I have confined my discussion to four most precious possessions of the Gilbertese: the *kainga*; the *buakonikai*; the *maneaba*; and the *boti*.

(a) *Kainga*

The *kainga* was a plot of land, the original dwelling site of the ancestors of an *utu* on an island.² Strictly speaking, the *kainga* was the ancestral

¹ Many oral traditions were collected or written down for the first time in the first half of this century. The major collections of oral reconstructions and individual stories are those of Tibwere, Pateman, Grimble, Baraka, Maude and Latouche, details of which can be found in the Bibliography.

² *Utu* is a term used of a relative as well as the word for 'family' itself. A Gilbertese family consists of a father, who is the head of the family, and his children. However, though *utu* can refer to an extended family, not all members of a *mwenga* or relatives of the family are members of the same *utu*; only those related by the bonds of consanguinity within the *mwenga* are members of the same *utu*. Here *utu* is used to mean a group who are related by blood to a common ancestor. The children belong to both *utu* of their parents, but not the father to the mother's, nor the mother to the father's. In order to avoid confusion then between an *utu* which refers to the members of a *mwenga* and an *utu* which refers to a group whose members are related by blood to a common ancestor, the members of the *utu of a mwenga* are usually referred to as *kain te mwenga*, and the members of the *utu of an ancestor* as *kain te utu*. When necessary a distinction is made between the real *utu* and classificatory relations by the use of prefixes *oin* (real) and *ai* (almost): thus *oin tamau* is my real father, and *ai tamau* my classificatory father (an uncle from the father's side or the mother's side). Nevertheless, for practical purposes all members of a *mwenga* are considered members of the *utu* of the head of the *mwenga* since they participate in the affairs of the *utu* of the head of the *mwenga*. Members of an *utu* were expected to assist each other. In social functions such as marriage feasts, or economic pursuits such as building a house or a canoe, fishing or any enterprise which a family alone cannot manage, they could always *bubuti* the assistance of their *utu*.

Concerning *kain te utu*, then, related by blood to a common ancestor, there is a distinction in the minds of the people between *te utu ae kaan* 'the blood kin which is near', and *te utu ae raroa* 'the blood kin which is distant'. The near kin includes the first three generations of descent from a common ancestor; its members may not intermarry. The fourth generation for purposes of marriage theoretically 'goes free' (*e ewe te kaaroro*). But not until collaterals stand in the fifth generation of removal from the common ancestor do they call one another distant kinsmen.

mwenga (home) of an *utu*. It might run the full width of the island, though it was usually on the lagoon side rather than the ocean side that a *mwenga* was built.

The *kainga* consisted of sleeping houses (*bata*) as well as several smaller houses in which the members of the *mwenga* cooked (*uma ni kanaiai*), ate (*uma n amarake*),³ kept their coconuts (*o-kai*)⁴, bathed (*roki n tebotebo*), and sheltered their canoe (*bareaka*). All members of the *utu* lived on the *kainga*, but where the *kainga* became too small because of the growth of the members, the members, except for *atun te utu* (the head of the *utu*), would leave the *kainga* and live on one of the *buakonikai* (lands) of the *kainga*. Daughters usually left the *mwenga* of their parents when married and dwelt in the *mwenga* of their spouses.

The concept of *kainga* - similar throughout the islands in terms of its function with respect to social obligations, rights, and privileges - was far more complex in the southern cluster where the *maneaba* machinery operated well than in the northern and central islands. Probably the *kainga* was a phenomenon peculiar to the *maneaba* system, because with the emergence of *uea* in the central and northern islands and the change in the structure of the communities there, the operation of many parts of the *maneaba* machinery was affected, and some including the *kainga* decayed and finally ceased to operate. And so, in the northern and central islands, where one could still find *kainga*, they were not functioning and many were merely names of ancestral *mwenga* of influential family groups.

On some *kainga* there would be a house especially built for a young girl who had recently had her first menses. In this house known as the *roki ni ka-ko* (lit. the curtains or walls to make secure) a young girl would remain until her hand was sought in marriage.⁵ All the time she was in the *roki ni ka-ko* she was taught the proper conduct and duties of a young woman. Every day her skin was rubbed with coconut oil and she rarely was sent out in the sun so that her skin would become fair. At the end of her time in the *roki ni ka-ko* she could be married immediately, though it was not uncommon for parents to keep their daughters until they thought her *kainrou* (the man she was

³ Meals could also be prepared outside the *uma ni kanaiai*, which was *nen te aia* (hut for firewood). Generally all meals were prepared by women, though during her period a woman was not allowed to prepare the meals. She was considered *tei-ao* (lit. stand outside). Meals could also be served in the *bata* (sleeping house), the place to receive guests, though it was more common for a family to eat their meal in the open on a *inai* (coconut sitting mat).

⁴ *O-kai* were common especially on Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Beru, Nikunau and Onotoa, as these islands were often hit by droughts. Self-denial or eating less coconuts in order to get a surplus to store in the *o-kai* for a drought was very much encouraged on these islands.

⁵ It should be emphasised that only some *kainga* had *te roki ni ka-ko*.

engaged to) would make a good husband. Women therefore married younger than men.

As there was a *roki ni ka-ko* for young women, so there was also for young men - an initiation house which could be either out *i-tanrake* (on the ocean side of the *buakonikai*) or on the *kainga* of the *utu*. The young men lived in these houses for several years where they were taught by the *utu* elders all they needed to know to become *rorobuaka*, after which they were allowed to marry. The training of Rairaeana te Tia Buaka to become a leader and a great warrior took about eight to 12 years in all, until his third and last *maneaba* was leaking, a sign that his training had been long enough.⁶

Most of the *kainga* in the Gilberts are quite old. They were either given to the ancestors by the original inhabitants of the island or won through war.⁷ A *utu* might have several *kainga*, but there was only one *kainga ni koaua*, and that is where the head of the *utu* had his *mwenga*: it is where the ancestors settled, made their home, and were buried.⁸ From the Karongoa traditions,⁹ for example, the ancestors arriving on Beru

came to the place called Taunnamo; and they wanted to set up their father and mother there, but they saw that they would not be seen from the sea (from the west). So they took them further north and came to the place called Umantaene, where again they wanted to set them up, but they saw that again they would not be seen from the sea. So they again went further north, and they came to the place called Teakiauma. There they set them up; and when they turned west they saw that the sea could be seen from there; so they set them up there, and they dwelt in that place.¹⁰

For this reason Taunnamo, Umantaene and Teakiauma became the *kainga* of Karongoa, though Teakiauma was the *kainga ni koaua* of Karongoa.

⁶ A good thatch over a *maneaba* would leak in about five years, but in the northern islands where rainfall is high it could leak in three years. Taking Rairaeana's training to begin when he was in his early 20s, by the time his last *maneaba* leaked he would have been in his late 20s or early 30s, which is normal in the training of young men to become leaders and warriors (*rorobuaka*). Anterea Betero, pers. comm., Butaritari, 1982. Tamuera, pers. comm., Butaritari, December 1990. See also A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 274-5.

⁷ In the Karongoa traditions, the *kainga* of their ancestors were probably given to them by the people of Tabuariki and Nainginouati, for when their ancestors, Tematawarebwe and his parents, landed on Beru they established themselves on the island without having to fight the inhabitants. In fact Tematawarebwe took Nei Teareinimatang, a descendant of Tabuariki, as his wife. Tione Baraka (comp.) Nov. 1934, 'Karakini Karongoa' (History according to the people of Karongoa), translated by G.H. Eastman, p.13, Maude Papers.

⁸ The head of the *utu* was usually the eldest son of the eldest son from the original head of the *utu*, though the eldest son of the eldest daughter could also live on the *kainga* when the head of the *utu* had no sons.

⁹ See below Chapter 11.

¹⁰ Baraka, 'Karakini Karongoa', 13.

In the southern islands where the *maneaba* functioned, a *kainga* could be formed where a *boti* (sitting place for each clan in the district) within that *maneaba* was created. A *boti* was created either by allocating a space amongst the already existing *boti* within the *maneaba* for a new *boti*, or by fission.¹¹ The new *kainga* were usually called by the name of the new *boti* if the site allotted had no previous place-name. With a *kainga* provided for the new *boti*, a share of the *buakonikai* (lands) was provided.

The *kainga* were usually considered as *bangotan te utu* (the shrine of a *utu*) - naturally, because most were burial grounds for the ancestors. The head of the *utu* functioned not only as spokesman for the *utu* in the *maneaba*, but as spokesman for the ancestors as well. Thus in *maneaba* gatherings a *unimane* in his *boti*, as a matter of respect and courtesy, would be addressed by the name of his ancestor, who obviously was the founder of his *boti* and *utu*. His right therefore to inherit the *kainga* was not only so that he could attend to the graves of the forefathers, but to *kamaroroia* (give them company) and actually 'talk' with them. The skulls of the ancestors therefore were not usually left with the body in the *baro* (tomb with cap where the corpses were laid) but cleaned and kept inside the house or placed somewhere high on a shelf where they could not be *matauninga* (insulted) but could be easily seen by the members of the house or *utu*. Every evening the skull or skulls would be taken down by the head of the *utu*, who anointed them with scented oil and conversed with them as he would when performing the same duties to his living *kara* (seniors). And while busying himself with his usual activities, he would try to find time to throw a remark at them as one would to a member of the household.

Some skulls would be considered *maka* (more powerful) and *kamaraia* (to cause someone to be accursed or die instantly when *matauninga*) than others, and would be hung in a basket inside the house or the *maneaba* of the *kainga* and only taken down when the head of the *utu* thought necessary - to return good health to a sick or dying member of the *utu*, or to be bathed and anointed, which usually involved all members of the *utu*, culminating in a feast. Skulls that were considered to have no magical powers were sometimes reburied with the rest of the body in the *baro*, though many households kept them as *raoia* (company).¹²

¹¹ For a detailed discussion on the fission of a *boti* of the *maneaba*, see H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963). 22. *Boti* and *maneaba* are discussed further below.

¹² When tobacco was introduced by the traders it became the custom of the people to show their *akoi* (kindness/affection) for their ancestors by sharing the household pipe with the skull. Holding the skull between the palms, the smoker would blow the smoke at the skull and with affection would address the skull: '*E uara? E kangkang?*' (How is it? Is it tasty?) and so on.

The heads of the *utu*, therefore, were actually the *ibonga* (priests) of the *utu* and the *kainga* was the *utu*'s *bangota* (burial plot) where they gathered to hear their ancestors and to offer them *karea* (propitiatory offering) and *tataro* (prayer).¹³ For this reason most of the *kainga*, in particular the *kainga ni koaua* were *o-naki* (encircled with walls). The Rev. George Pierson who landed at Taboiaki on Beru in 1855 described what must have been a *kainga*:

I noticed a high stone wall which enclosed several houses. I saw only women and children in the yard or houses. I asked if I might go inside the enclosure, my guide said, no, from which I suppose the ground to belong to some high chief whose wives and children were in there and no man dared on the penalty of his life to enter. This wall was about six feet high and made of the recent formation of coral stone, so it was bleached out very white and looked beautiful as the bright sun shone upon it.¹⁴

Similar enclosures were noticed 12 years before at Utiroa on Tabiteuea by the Wilkes Expedition 'containing ten or twelve houses, and enclosed by fences. Each of these enclosures, it was supposed, belonged to a separate family.'¹⁵

On a *kainga* the dimensions of time were lost as the past was always there in the ancestors who watched, praised, and cursed their descendants where they failed or shamed the *utu* and themselves. A *kainga* therefore was a shrine, the identity and pride of a *utu*, a place where the *utu* coached their own members in the *katei* (proper manners and customs), took counsel amongst themselves and advised their head on what to say in the *bowi* (meeting) of the *maneaba*. Above all it was a place where they could be united with their ancestors to obtain their wisdom, strength and blessings. In war, a *utu* would rather lose their *buakonikai* than lose their *kainga*; hence, the

¹³ On behalf of the members, the *ibonga* would communicate to the ancestors by talking to the skulls. The following is a typical example of a prayer to an ancestor:

Toakai-o! tautau maurira; toutoua nako te aoraki, ba ti mauri iroum; ti aki bua ti aki taro; te mauri ao te raoi -te mauri!

Toakai-o! Protect our health; drive away the sickness, for you alone can save us; we are not lost; we are not deserted; health and peace - health!

Nearly always the formula *te mauri ao te raoi - te mauri* was used in prayer, though the words could be different depending on the nature of the request. The response of the ancestor would either be immediate through the priest or any member present at the shrine in a trance, or through a dream.

¹⁴ George Pierson, 'Journal of a Voyage from Sandwich Islands through the Kingsmill and Mulgrave Islands to Strong's Islands in the Caroline Group', American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereinafter ABCFM), MS.19.4, vol. 2., ABCFM archives, in Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese* Boti, 32.

¹⁵ Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, 5 Vols (Philadelphia 1845), V, 53.

kainga were the most heavily defended posts. To have no *kainga* or to lose a *kainga* meant having no roots and hence being a nobody.

(b) *Buakonikai*

The *buakonikai* as we have seen earlier were lands which were the property of the *utu*. All members of a *utu* had rights over them; to pick their fruits, dig their *rua* (usually *babai* pits) or plant new trees. No one lived on the *buakonikai*, except temporarily when a couple were digging a new *rua* or extending their portion of the *rua*, or harvesting the *tou* (pandanus).

The most notable trees in the islands in the pre-European period were pandanus and coconut. According to *unimane*, the pandanus was the more important, and a native tree of the islands before the coconut and others. Arthur Grimble considered it as the tree of Auriaria, one of the principal gods of the people.¹⁶ Many *unimane* and *unaine* today say that there were about a hundred or so species of pandanus in the islands until the middle of the last century when coconut oil as a trade commodity was introduced by traders: that was when the *buakonikai* were cleared of the pandanus in order to plant more coconuts.¹⁷

Fertile land was desired, and one of the main reasons for the wars was to obtain more land and particularly more fertile land. For those who could not get more or better land, there were always magic and spells to help the land become rich and fruitful, or to curse the lands of others. A spell to help the land become fertile would be conducted by the owner as he walked alone on his land from the east end northward:

*Tarai abau ba I a roko, ngai-e-e! Kimarimari ma kitaba [katab'ai], kimarimari-e-e!
A na baka marin abau aio, te ari, te maritaba. O kimarimari-e-e! Kimaumau -e-e!
Kimarimari-e-e!*

Behold me my land for I have come, I-e-e! Be fruitful in nuts and in pandanus, be fruitful in nuts-e-e! The fruitfulness of my land shall fall here, the blossoms and the drupes. O be fruitful-e-e! Be abundant-e-e! Be fruitful-e-e!.¹⁸

But for an abundant harvest, one has to know the right spells and rituals for the fructification of the trees, which, though numerous, were kept secret. Among the rituals none was more interesting than the ritual concerned with

¹⁶ A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Preliminary Study of the Food, Food-traditions and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir no. 12, Appendix 1.

¹⁷ For the coconut oil trade in the Gilbert islands in the last century see H.E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History* (Melbourne 1968), 233-83. Grimble claimed that he had collected many names of the lost species, though it is possible that the same ones had different names on different islands.

¹⁸ Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 10.

the fructification of the pandanus; it involved the sun and the moon as well.¹⁹ Because Karongoa members were associated with the fructification of the pandanus, it was common on most islands for the head of the clan to receive gifts of pandanus fruit during the harvest.²⁰ Thus, Karongoa was indebted to the community to ensure another good harvest the following year.²¹ From the pandanus, a variety of foods could be prepared. Some could be preserved for weeks or even months. The *kabubu* and *tuae* could be preserved for years if properly sealed.²²

After the pandanus in importance came the coconut and the *babai*, and these too were *ribanaki* (cultivated) in order to give plenty of nuts as well as large edible roots. In the drought stricken islands of the south, it was common for the people to eat less coconut and *babai* so they would not starve when a drought came. The fallen nuts would be collected and kept in the *o-kai* while the *babai* would be left to grow to enormous sizes in the *rua*.

In times of drought, when not only the fruits and vegetables were scarce but fish on the reef also, people would eat the *mtea*, the *wao* and the *boi* - all creeping plants. The ripe fruit of the *non* (a very bitter fruit) would sometimes be collected as food as well.

Because the *buakonikai* were important for livelihood, aspects of Gilbertese custom, such as *tabetabe* (adoption), *tinaba* (ceremonial spouse or

¹⁹ The ritual was a big ceremony, and it is said that the most expert were members of Karongoa, who were generally consulted by other *utu*. After all, Auriaria, who was consulted during the ritual, whose totem was the *kimoa* (rat), the inhabitant of the pandanus tree, was one of the deities of Karongoa. The *kauaa* was usually performed in the season of *aumaiaki* (June to November), though especially between July and September, when southeasterly winds were expected to give way to the westerly rains. It was upon the coming of these rains that a good harvest depended, which was gathered in October. See Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 10-14, for the details of a typical fructification of the pandanus ritual. On p.11 Grimble states that the members of the clan Ababou and Maerua were also experts in the fructification of the pandanus, though this would be quite unlikely as their ancestor deity was not Auriaria but Nakuaunmai, and their totem a *kuau* (rock-cod), an inhabitant of the sea. See the list of the ancestral deities in Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People*, 20a.

²⁰ Tabuariki, the god of rain, the much needed element for a good harvest, was also an ancestor deity of Karongoa (through inter-marriage). Grimble, *The Migrations*, 20a. For a similar list of clan deities, see Maude, *The Evolution*, 64-5.

²¹ On certain islands, traditions were created to explain why the *moan ua* (first fruits of pandanus) should be given to the people of Karongoa. On Tarawa, for example, the people gave their pandanus fruits to the senior male of the clan of Karongoa because the *kabubu* made from the pandanus was the favourite of their king Kirata. Whether Kirata actually loved *te kabubu* we can never know, though we do know that the descendants of Kirata were not only the rulers of Tarawa, but were by blood related to the clan Karongoa. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 17.

²² The *kabubu* was a sweet powder like sawdust. It could either be mixed with water as a food-drink or consumed directly. The *tuae* was the final product of the cream of a steam-cooked pandanus fruit which had been spread out and dried in the sun. Both were ideal food for long voyages. See Grimble, *The Migrations*, 36-42, for the preparation and uses of the *kabubu* and the *tuae* by the Gilbertese people.

concubine) and even marriage, and laws (concerned with murder and theft), that were likely to cause an *utu* to be overcrowded or lose portions or some of their estates and their *rua*, were all decided not by a single family alone but by the whole *utu* whose conditions of living would be affected. But there were always problems with these customs and laws, in particular with rights over land with respect to conveyance and inheritance. To accommodate the customs and to lessen the related complications many *utu* divided their estates among their individual families, with the head of a family (*mwenga*) being the 'landowner' with 'exclusive' rights over his share of the land. As a 'landowner' he could decide which of his share he would give to which of his children or to his *tinaba* or adopted child, without having to consult members of his *utu*. However, where a couple died without issue, the rights over their land were decided by the *utu* at large, and generally would be given to the closest kin of the couple.

Some large *utu*, not only in order to avoid complications, but also for the sake of convenience, divided themselves into smaller groups of families ('sub-*utu*' within the *utu*) with their own share of the land. The location of the land and its convenience to the *mwenga* of a family were considered in deciding which family belonged to which 'sub-*utu*' and their share of the lands. Some bigger *utu* did not divide their *buakonikai* but rather went on a *kaiaba* (search for land) on other islands; and where they managed to secure new *buakonikai*, their *unimane* would decide who would remain on the new islands and who would return home. Those that remained would give up their rights on the old *buakonikai* of the *utu* at home, though they would be received and cared for when visiting because of the blood-bond. With the division of the *utu* or the separation of its members because of the location of their *buakonikai* (on the same island or on another island), and especially when the elders rarely coached their members in the *riki* (genealogies) of their *utu*, many family groups lost connection with one another, except for their *boti*, which would be the same even on different islands.²³

(c) The *Maneaba*

The *maneaba*, a large gathering house for the people of a district or village on an island, was built mainly from pandanus and coconut timber. For the *rau* (thatch), pandanus leaves were used and the mat, the *inaai*, was woven from coconut leaves. The size of a *maneaba* depended very much on the

²³ See the test for a member of a *boti* in note 31 below. This explains also why marriage between members of a *boti* was not encouraged, in particular marriage between members on different islands since members were regarded as *utu* and as *utu* should assist and protect one another: marriage made members *ianena* (not *utu*) and was regarded as a severance of ancestral bonds and family obligation.

number of villagers using it. An average sized *maneaba* would be about 350 square metres.

It is quite explicit in the traditions that there were two kinds of *maneaba* in the islands. Though they were similar, the first of these was simply a big house, a centre for social gatherings. This was replaced by a second and much larger one which contained *boti*. This new *maneaba*, built under the direction and auspices of the people of Karongoa, was more than simply a social centre,

... it was the Law Court, where offenders against customary norms were tried, and disputes heard and arbitrated by the Old Men; and the centre for the many ceremonies and feasts of a formal character, as well as the more dignified community recreations and dances.

...the traditional club-house of the aged; a *pied à terre* for the stranger; and a sanctuary for those in flight...it was a tabernacle of ancestors in the male line; a sort of social map, where a man's group or clan could be recognised the moment he took his seat, his totem, and his ascendants known, and his ceremonial duties or privileges discovered'.²⁴

This new type of *maneaba* was called Tabontebike after the name of the place on which it was built, and it became the prototype of all *maneaba* in the southern islands.²⁵

From the southern islands the type of *maneaba* containing the *boti* was disseminated to other islands, mainly as the result of the great wars of Kaitu and Uakeia recorded in most traditions of the islands.²⁶ Because the warriors never went to the very northern islands of Makin and Butaritari or to Banaba, the traditional meeting houses on these islands remained as they were - centres for social gatherings without a *boti*.

Throughout the building, care was taken not only that the *maneaba* would be good and strong but that any curses of the *anti* (spirits) or the ancestors

²⁴ Maude, *The Evolution*, 11. It was Tematawarebwe (an ancestor of the people of Karongoa) who, after considering the size of the original *maneaba* of the inhabitants of Beru (the people of Tabuariki), thought that it was too crowded for all of them and that they should build a bigger one. The people of the *maneaba* responded to him, '*tera ara bai iai? ai bon are i roum naba*' (what is it to us? do whatever you wish with it), and so Tematawarebwe ordered the building of a new *maneaba*. E. Tibwere et al., *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, ed. May Pateman (Rongorongo 1942), 40-1.

²⁵ When a Tabontebike *maneaba* was built on an island, the *boti* Karongoa had the chief place. This was and is to some degree still true today in the case of Tekobukobu *maneaba* at Nikumanu on Nikunau; Tokamauea at Maeriu and Teraranimatang at Buariki on Onotoa. No *maneaba* apparently were built on Tamana and Arorae, and when a *irua* (visitor), in particular a Karongoa, came to the island they would go to the *kainga* of their ancestors. Tione Baraka, 'The Story of the I-Kiribati according to the Traditions of Karongoa', 13-15, 26-32, Maude Papers.

²⁶ This war can be dated to the 16th century. The usual date as suggested by Maude is about A.D. 1650. Maude, *The Evolution*, 10. I have pushed this date back almost 100 years to 1560. See Chapter 14 below.

upon the users of the *maneaba* were foiled. Related spells and magic were observed to the very last detail after which the *maneaba* was said to be clothed in sacredness which made it *kamaraia* (threatening death) to those that had no respect for its customs, ceremonies, and institutions, or to those who dared to challenge decisions of the *unimane*. So the *maneaba* was revered by Gilbertese, and 'all behaviour under its roof had to be seemly, decorous, and in strict conformity with custom, lest the *maneaba* be *matauninga* (offended) and the culprit *maraia* (accursed)'.²⁷

The inside of the *maneaba* was divided into three sections. There is a fourth section, the open square in the centre, but this did not belong to any *boti*. The *unimane* would be seated along the edge of the inner square, facing each other during meetings. Behind the *unimane* sat the *rorobuaka*, then the young men, and finally the women and children.

Beside Tabontebike two other types of *maneaba* emerged - the Maungatabu and Tabiang-type *maneaba*. Both are similar to Tabontebike except for the names of most of the *boti* within them and the duties of the members of those *boti*. The types of *maneaba* are identified by their size (ratio of breadth to length) and height and style of roof. Tabiang is the narrowest; Maungatabu has a breadth about three-quarters of its length; and Tabontebike is foursquare.²⁸ Maungatabu is said to be the *maneaba* of the sun given to Bue. It was first built on Tarawa by Bue as the *maneaba* of Kiratatererei (Kirata II), the king of Tarawa. From Tarawa this type was taken to Beru and Nikunau by Bue and Rirongo where Tanentoa gave them the *kainga* Bareaka and Bareaka Rirongo as their place to live.²⁹ The Tabiang-type *maneaba* was the *maneaba* of the ancestors of Tewatu ni Matang on Makin and Butaritari. Tewatu came from Matang to Beru where he was allowed to build his type of *maneaba* by Tanentoa n Nonouti according to his own custom. Tabiang, the site where Tewatu ni Matang built his *maneaba*, became the name of the new type of *maneaba*.³⁰

(d) *The Boti*³¹

The *boti*, as we have seen, was the traditional sitting place of a *utu* or clan in the *maneaba*. The name of the *boti* is also a general name for the families belonging to that sitting place. Families in a *boti* are usually related through a common ancestor (or ancestor-deity), the founder or the initial holder of

²⁷ Maude, *The Evolution*, 11.

²⁸ For the types and construction of the *maneaba* see H.E. Maude, *The Gilbertese Maneaba* (Suva 1980).

²⁹ Maude, *The Gilbertese Maneaba*, 4-5.

³⁰ Ibid., 6. See also Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, for the traditional origins of the *maneaba*.

³¹ For a comprehensive study of the *boti* of the *maneaba* see Maude, *The Evolution*; Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 197-251.

that *boti*. The area of a *boti* was determined by the rows of *inaki* (thatch) of the *maneaba*. A big *boti* would occupy about five *inaki*, each having the length of about a *nga* (arms-spread). Most *maneaba* have about 20 to 30 *boti*.

A *boti* was important for not only would one find oneself welcome among strangers on another island, but would actually be among distant relatives who would look after one. Elders, therefore, usually coached their members travelling to other islands in the traditions of their *boti* in case they arrived on an island where no close relative was known. It was because of this that many *utu* withheld their clan traditions and kept them secret, fearing that one day they would be exploited in entertaining a real stranger not entitled by birth to their hospitality and the privileges of their *boti*, who foisted himself upon them because of his knowledge of the lore of their clan. Where the *maneaba* and the members of a *boti* were still uncertain of the identity or the claims of a stranger he would be asked to identify himself by tracing his genealogy back to the founder of the *boti*.³² A traveller who had no *boti* in the *maneaba* of another island could always sit in the *boti* of the *iruwa* (visitors), or should there be no *boti* for *iruwa* specifically provided, then in the clan designated as available for the use of *iruwa*. Hospitality to visitors without a *boti* to which they could prove that they belonged would, of course, be minimal.

A person could sit in the *boti* of his father or his mother, or of his grandparents. It was usual however for a person to sit in the *boti* of his father. The wives sat in the *boti* of their husbands. Where a *boti* became crowded, it was usual for a person to sit in the *boti* of his mother. Ideally, members of a *boti* were considered members of the same *utu*, and, therefore, were not allowed to marry one another. This became complicated because

³² As observed by Maude, the form of a test for a visitor was as follows:

Questioner - Korebu, why are you sitting in that *boti*?

Korebu - I stay here because it is my *boti*.

Questioner - What is the name of the *boti* you are sitting in?

Korebu - It is Bue.

Questioner - Who is the head of the *boti*?

Korebu - The heads are truly Bue and Rirongo.

Questioner - Where did they come from?

Korebu - They came from Tarawa.

Questioner - Now we know. They came from Tarawa and so did you. (Turning to the *maneaba*) - How about this, you people of the *maneaba*? Do you know this man or not?

The *maneaba* - Yes, we know him.

Questioner - *Karikiko, ba ti na ongo* (Recite your descent, so that we may hear)

Korebu - Bue and Rirongo had as children ...(etc., working the genealogy down from Bue and Rirongo to himself).

Questioner - (after consultation) - *E eti* (It is correct)

Maude, *The Evolution*, 52; Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 203-5.

whereas a person could marry a relative who had a common ancestor five generations back, but sat in a different *boti*, he could not marry a member of his *boti* even if he had no clear knowledge of how they were related.³³

Most *boti* had certain privileges in the *maneaba*, though all had obligations to the whole people of the *maneaba*. It was in the fulfilment of their various obligations that the *maneaba* operated and served its purpose.

Because of the *boti* and the duties of their *kainga*, which were practically the same even on different islands, the structure of the communities in the islands by the time of contact with Europeans, except for the two northernmost islands and Banaba, were practically the same. Fewer wars were fought, and many more inter-island journeys were made mainly for pleasure. When a war was fought, especially on an island in the south, the *unimane* had more control over it than in the pre-*maneaba* days and where possible would arbitrate and settle the problems peacefully. In wars to compensate for a murder, for example, when the murderer would not give up his best land to the family of the murdered, the *maneaba* would decide the extent to which the feud should be settled. It was in the central islands, however, probably influenced by the habits of the warring leaders and rival chiefs of the northern islands, that bloody and extended wars by the *rorobuaka* were fought. In brief one can say that the islands were more peaceful and had more in common in their customs and manners because of the new phenomenon - the *boti* inside the *maneaba* with their various *kainga* and *buakonikai*.

³³ In modern Gilbertese society, however, no *boti* or *utu*, as far as I am aware, have ever observed the rule faithfully. It seems that the rule was concerned solely with economic and political interests rather than with the purity of the *utu*; that is, marrying outside a *boti*, an *utu* is forming an alliance with another *utu* of a different *boti*, much needed in *maneaba* politics as well as gaining rights or having access (for some members of the *utu*, anyway) to the *buakonikai* of another *boti*.

CHAPTER 3

Gods, Magic and Skills in Gilbertese Oral Tradition

EVERYDAY LIFE PLAYS a considerable role in an oral story, in particular those experiences vital for the survival of a group. From such experiences skills are perfected which are then taught from one generation to the next, preserved as stories concerning the origin of the skills, often in the form of a legend or myth. The origin of the navigating star *inan te karon* (scale of the *karon* fish) and how it come to be placed in the sky is preserved in the story of Nei Manganibuka.¹ Some of the learnt skills are made into chants, such as the knowledge of a certain art of canoe building on Butaritari which tells of the various stages and related spells and magic in the work, the best seasons for the construction, and the right materials to be used.²

But not all stories preserve experiences for posterity. Some are actually creations, invented by several *unimane* and *unaine* for the sole purpose of entertaining the *maneaba*. These are the *iango*. However, though they are creations of imagination some *iango* do include historical figures or incidents known by the people.³

Most myths and legends are about the gods and *anti*, and many come to us through *ibonga* (priests). Many in fact must have been invented or reconstructed by them from diverse materials from traditional stories, for the priests are said to be the true repositories and the only people who know

¹ Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, Miscellaneous items 17, Origin of the constellation 'Inan te karon'.

² Naborauea and several old men on Makin, pers. comm., November 1990.

³ *Iango* are never confused with the real history of the *ikawai* (ancestors) because every story is introduced and defined, whether an *iango* or a *taeka nikawai* (history) or a *riki* (genealogical sequence). In this way the listeners are prepared: either to listen and enjoy the story, or to be attentive to points of controversy and argue their discontent with the teller. See Chapter 4 below, 'The Categories'. See Chapter 6 'Periods of History' for some of the checks on the traditions of the tellers employed by the *unimane* in the *maneaba*. See also Chapter 7, where only those traditions that had been tested by means of debate in the *maneaba* were considered authentic. These are the '*maneaba* traditions', the classic traditions about the ancestors. Kaririki, an *unimane* from Beru, believed that many collectors in the past have been given 'unpolished and false' traditions because they collected them in the homes of the tellers. A proper and only true tradition is one delivered under the *maneaba* - the *maneaba* tradition. Kaririki, pers. comm., December 1990.

about the gods. It is no wonder that the clan Karongoa from whom the priesthood is derived was 'considered to be the proper guardian of traditional lore antedating the coming from Samoa, including the creation myths and the stories of the voyages'.⁴

The religious cults, because of their connections with practically every aspect of the life of the people, came to control almost every activity: it seems impossible to say that anything is not cultic or related to a cult. From simple habits, such as *arin* or *tarikan te amara* (a bit of the food thrown away or tasted by a taster when in the *maneaba*) observed before eating, to the more complex rituals and ceremonies, such as those involved in the fructification of the pandanus, or in the functions of the *maneaba*, all are cultic or related to a religious belief. These religious habits and precautions are not only observed to enhance the success of an activity, but to assure the people that all potential curses from the *anti* or the ancestor deities are kept at bay.

Two types of gods are found in the traditions: the dark-skinned, and the fair-skinned. Where a god is not clearly defined, whether dark-skinned or fair-skinned, its character and association as well as its enemies determine its group. Nareau, who is usually associated and on good terms with Tabakea, Nakaa, and Riiki, is representative of the dark-skinned deities. He is short, bushy haired, with large ears and covered in scars. He is also cunning with a lot of magic and sometimes unscrupulous. Of the fair-skinned deities Auriaria is a typical example: huge, tall, hot tempered, terribly fierce, and a skilled fighter.

Knowledge of the dark-skinned gods has been lost from a very early period, for even though many of them are mentioned in the traditions - about 40 in one Banaban tradition - very little is said of their activities or even how they were worshipped in the islands. There is Naubwebwe, for example, who in the game of the *wau* (string figures) is mentioned only as the god who guards the entrance of *mone*, the underworld. His namesake, however, who appears in the Tarawa traditions and those of the southern islands, is only the chief slave steward of the Tarawa rulers Beia and Tekaa. If Naubwebwe is the guardian of the underworld, and his namesake is the slave of Beia and Tekaa, that can only mean that the cult of the god Naubwebwe

⁴ H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti* (Wellington 1963), 7. For the Karongoa traditions see Chapters 11, 12.

⁵ Tione Baraka, 'The Story of the I-Kiribati According to the Traditions of Karongoa' (1934), 12, Maude Papers. There is confusion here in the traditions whether Beia and Tekaa is one person Beiamatekaa or Beia *ma* (and) Tekaa. The Tarawa traditions are unanimous that the name refers to an individual, whilst the Beru, Nikunau and other traditions from the southern islands have two persons. Beia was the son of Nei Kabwebwe and Tekaa the son of Nei Beia. Their father was Kirata.

together with its followers were in the Gilberts but were destroyed at a very early period in the history of the people.⁶

Another of the dark-skinned gods is Te Bakatibu-Tai (Ancestor-the-Sun). Its cult must have existed also very early in the history of the people for no worship of the god is known in the islands. Tradition is not unanimous concerning this god, whether it was male or female; or whether it was *tai* (the sun), as its followers worshipped the sun as well, or a pandanus tree, for it is also called *Te Moa ni Kai* (the first tree) and is unique to the island of Tabiteuea in the southern Gilberts.⁷

The fair-skinned deities, who are about the same in number as the dark-skinned, are quite active and involved more often in the affairs of the people. In many spells and rituals they are invoked more frequently than the dark-skinned. Most are identified as tutelary deities and the gods of the forefathers. Unlike the dark-skinned deities many of these fair-skinned ones have a totem, and are referred to less as *anti* than *bakatibu* (ancestor), for most if not all of them are deified ancestors.

Most of these fair-skinned deities have a *marae* (cleared enclosure) on the *kainga* of the *utu* with a *boua* (monolith) erected in the middle.⁸ Many of the *marae* are small, and many are located near the *mwenga*. These *marae* are similar to those observed by the Rev. S.J. Whitmee of the London Missionary Society on Arorae in 1870:

⁶ The Gilbertese custom of using *tiki* (affinity or extension) of a name to hide or retain the original name must have been followed here with the name Naubwebwe, that is, Noubwebwe is one of the *tiki* of Naubwebwe, but a *tiki* that is returning to the original name after several generations of extensions. It is very unlikely that Nowbwebwe is the first *tiki* of the original name simply because not all island traditions are familiar with Naubwebwe. To illustrate this, let us take the name *Tieem* and its various *tiki*. The first *tiki* may be Temea, then Timea, Timera, Kimere, Kimaere, and finally Bamaere, which undoubtedly at this point is pronounced differently from the original name. However, in continuing the *tiki* there is always a possibility of returning to the original name. Using our example above Bamaere could become Tamaere, then Tameri, Teemari, Tiema and finally Tieem. Noubwebwe therefore, the name of the slave of the Tarawa rulers, must have been a *tiki* from a previous *tiki*, which after several generations is now in its final stage of becoming the original name Naubwebwe again. Interestingly enough, the name of the mother of Beia (the ruler of Tarawa) was Kabwebwe (lit. to make *bwebwe*, that is to sprout), and it could be that she too had connections in her family with the dead cult of the god Naubwebwe.

⁷ Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, Island series: 3. Tabiteuea (H.C. and H.E. Maude, *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Suva 1994), 102). In this version the Bakatibu Tai is the male, whereas in Appendix 2, of A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as Traced from a Study of Food, Food-traditions and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Memoir no. 12, supps to *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 42-43 (1933-34), 97, the deity is a female - Nei Bakatibu Tai.

⁸ A *marae* of a ceremonial *boua* is usually a circular or square enclosure covered in gravel. On the edges surrounding the enclosure bigger slabs, smaller than the *boua*, were erected. It was within the enclosure that the priests and the followers performed their rites.

Nearly every house had either a small circle or a small square, fenced off with large stones stuck in the earth. In the centre of this square or circle was a large stone placed on end and the floor of the enclosed space was neatly spread with broken coral and fine shells. Before the upright stone the remains of pandanus fruit, pieces of cocoanut, and cocoanut palm leaves were lying. These were evidently offerings which had been made to the gods. In many cases these shrines were in the centre of the houses, in other cases they were on the outside. When walking in the bush we came on similar squares and circles, but these seemed all to be of larger dimensions.⁹

Where a deity has many followers its *marae* is built out *i-tanrake* - much extended, and more decorated than those on the *kainga*. Prominent among the fair-skinned deities are Auriaria, Nei Tituabine, Taburimai, Tabuariki and Nei Tevenei. Auriaria is the chief among these gods and Nei Tituabine is his sister. She is also his wife.¹⁰ These ancestor deities are *kanga kanoan te roki* (lit. 'like inhabitants of the *roki*') because they are fair-skinned.¹¹

On Makin and Butaritari, fair-skinned deities are unknown. This is confirmed in the account by Robert Wood, alias Grey, a Scottish beachcomber on Makin, who related to Horatio Hale of the United States Exploring Expedition in 1840 that 'the names Tabueriki [Tabuariki], Itivini [Nei Tevenei], and other deities, are unknown, and the only spirits which the natives worship are those of their ancestors'.¹² This is not surprising as the fair-skinned deities are usually associated with a *marae* and an *ibonga*, and

⁹ 'Abstracts and Excerpts from the material relating to the Gilbert Islands', compiled by Professor J.D. Freeman, p.69, University of London, School of African and Oriental Studies, LMS Archives.

¹⁰ In one Banaban tradition which gives the list of the gods of the islands, Nei Tituabine is the wife of Tabakea and their children were Auriaria, Taburimai, Tabuariki, Riiki, Nei Tevenei, Nakaa etc. In reading this tradition, however, one should understand that this is an example of the attempt of the chroniclers to make sense of the multitude of deities that were known and revered by the people, especially on Banaba, as well as claiming for Banaba the right to be called *te buto* (the navel) of all the lands being the home of the great Auriaria and Tabakea. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, Island series: 1. Banaba. However, another Banaban tradition, much older than this, the details of which must have been 'erased' by the chroniclers, gives an account of Tabakea the inhabitant of Banaba, who, after being pinned down by Auriaria when he came to Banaba, was placed beneath the island as a buoy and anchor to hold the island afloat and keep it in its place. A.F. Grimble, *A Pattern Of Islands* (London 1952), 12-13. Nei Tituabine has a myriad of other identities, one of them being a famous whore in the islands. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133: 51, 72, 75, 86, 103, 104.

¹¹ See Chapter 2, *te roki ni kako*, where the inhabitants were kept from the sun and rubbed with scented oil daily to make their skin look fairer. It is possible that the custom was an attempt to regain the perceived beauty of the skin of a race that had become darkened because of the blazing sun and intermarriage with a darker people.

¹² Grey, who had been on Makin for five years before the arrival of the United States Exploring Expedition, was known to the islanders as Bob. Horatio Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, under the command of Charles Wilkes, U.S.N: Ethnography and Philology* (Philadelphia 1846), 97.

no *marae* or priest is known to have functioned on these two islands. This is confirmed also by Grey who stated that on 'Makin there are no priests, and the invocations are usually made by the head of the family or by each individual for himself, whereas in the southern and the central Gilberts, as on Tarawa and Abemama, for example, 'every family which has a tutelar divinity has also a priest, whose duty it is to perform the rites of worship'.¹³ However, the people on these two islands had a *boua*; but these monoliths are erected only to their dead chiefs as *rabataia* (body), set up and dressed with leaves in the same manner as the *boua* in the central and southern islands.

Where the dark-skinned and fair-skinned deities are found together in a story they are nearly always engaged in competition or conflict. Nareau seems to be the most mischievous of the dark-skinned deities and it is he who always entered into conflict with Auriaria and his group. The fair-skinned deities, because of their huge stature and great strength, should easily have overcome the dark-skinned, but that is not so in the traditions: surprisingly, it is the dark-skinned who are usually the victors.¹⁴ Whether the tensions and the conflicts of the gods reflect actual conditions in the islands - dark-skinned versus fair-skinned people - before they were totally mixed after generations of intermarriage, we can only speculate; nevertheless it is very likely, as many of the customs of the gods found in the traditions are identifiable today in existing customs. The custom of *te kaho* (to seclude) for instance, peculiar in the traditions to the fair-skinned deities, is actually practised by many *utu* as *kateia ara ikawai* (custom of our forefathers), while

¹³ Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition*, 98. If *ibonga* or *tibonga*, peculiar to the *marae* and found only in the southern and central clusters, is a contraction of *te ibonga* (*te* is the article), and if it is a corruption of the original Polynesian *tufunga* (artisan), then it seems that the priesthood is a Polynesian phenomenon mentioned in most island traditions as being brought to the Gilberts via the southern islands by the great warriors in huge canoes, such as the *Akabutoatoa* (Polynesian for 'canoe of the warriors'). After establishing themselves there, they then moved northwards. This Polynesian priesthood is identified in the traditions as that of the clan Karongoa (lit. to make Rongo or claim for Rongo). This priesthood was unknown only in the two northernmost islands of Makin and Butaritari, even in the early 1840s, because, as we know from the Karongoa tradition, these islands were the only two, including Banaba, that were spared by the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia which advanced from Beru about 13 to 15 generations ago. E. Tibwere (comp.), 1932, 'Te Katei ni Kiribati' (Notes on Gilbertese Customs and Traditions) Collected from Nei Teeta (Abemama) and Ten Taumoa (Abemama) and several other old men of Abemama, 9, 10, Pateman Papers.

¹⁴ In 'The War between the North and the South', 'The game of the Kabane', 'The Best Babai Pudding Contest', 'The Trick on the Wife of Na Utima and the New Fishing Art of Nareau', 'The Kun and the Toddy of Taburimai', 'The Trick Upon the Wife of Taranga' and many others, Nareau and the dark-skinned beings were always the victors or the adversaries. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, A. Island series: Tabiteuea 4b, c, d, B. Nui series: 6., C. Miscellaneous items: 12. Some of these have been reproduced in Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations, Myth and Magic from the Gilbert Islands: Early writings of Sir Arthur Grimble* (London 1972), 94-104. See also Maude, *Anthology*.

some *utu* regard it with curiosity as being *tiaki ara katei* (not our custom); or the making and chewing of the *renga* known and practised only by certain people on some islands.¹⁵ These and several others are cultural traits of a fair-skinned people.

The earliest of these gods in the islands are the dark-skinned, since not only are they less known in the island traditions, which means that they are so archaic that knowledge of them has been lost, except for Nareau and a few others, but also they tend to be aloof from the daily life of the people.¹⁶ Unlike the fair-skinned deities, who not only are 'in the midst' but also are actually represented by their *boua* and totems amongst the people, the dark-skinned gods are mentioned as 'out there' or 'up there'. Dark-skinned Nareau, for instance, after appearing and being quite active in the work of creation, withdraws from the people and remains in the sky. In rituals and spells, he and especially the other dark-skinned deities are rarely mentioned, and in prayers they are even less consulted. In real life, individual or communal, they seem to hold no real influence.

As well as the dark-skinned and the fair-skinned deities there are also the unclassified *anti*, many of which seem to be lesser gods than the above. However, they tend to be more involved in the activities of the people than the dark-skinned and fair-skinned gods, for not only are they mentioned quite extensively in the traditions but even today people call upon them and visit their *boua*. These *anti* are of contemporary origin and much closer to the time

¹⁵ One aspect of *te kako* was to make the skin fairer; hence the continual rubbing of the skin with coconut oil during seclusion. The identity of the *renga* is not known except that the old men know of a substance called the *renga* which was *kantaki* (chewed) with a leaf of a certain tree to make the mouth red. It could be the betelnut of the Melanesians or the turmeric of the Polynesians - both eaten and used as dyes. Niel Gunson, pers. comm., 1992. Cf. Grimbale, *The Migrations*, Part II, 55. In a certain *tangi-mate* (dirge), the *renga* is the food of the souls departing to the land of the ancestors. Grimbale Papers, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions', Mfm 133.120. I believe the intent was not only to make the mouth red but to smear the chewed substance on the body to make it look red. Auriaria, in one Banaban tradition, was *kanga e uraura* (looked red) from a distance when he approached his *tibu* (grandparents) on Banaba so that they thought he was not one of them and prepared themselves to eat him on his arrival. Grimbale Papers, Mfm 133.84, Karakin Auriaria of Banaba.

¹⁶ Nareau is a very special case, for though many of his companions are reduced from the majesty of the pantheon of the Gilbertese gods to slaves or guardians of the underworld, he remained important; even in the Karongoa traditions, the supposed genuine traditions of those that came from Samoa, he is the creator. A sound explanation is that Nareau's cult, unlike that of Naubwebwe, had many followers and was one of the original cults in the islands, for even though the *ibonga* of Karongoa managed to destroy it, already it was a popular belief that he was the creator. Although in reconstructing their creation story the *ibonga* of Karongoa had Nareau as the creator, and Riki, another of the dark-skinned deities, as a heavenly object, the Milky Way, it was Auriaria with Tabuariki and their companions who were the rulers and the more important deities in the islands. This Auriaria and his companions, the fair-skinned deities, were in fact not of the Gilberts, but of Matang in the west, before they settled in Samoa.

of *aomata* (real human beings) in the category of epochs in the Gilbertese chronology, according to one teller of tradition.¹⁷ They are *antimaomata* (semi-human deities), and are indeed the *ikawai* or *bakatibu ni koaua* (real ancestors) of many people. Rakunene, the most popular of this group, for instance, who is an *anti* as well as an *antimaomata*, is a *ikawai* of many families of the *kainga* Tebakabaka, at Koinawa, on Abaiang. Examples of these *anti* are Kaabunang, Nei Teweia, and Nei Karua.

Two kinds of magic are found in the traditions, some of which are still performed today: the *wawi* and the *kaiwa*. Both are called *tabunea*, though strictly speaking a *wawi* is a *tabunea*. The *wau* or *wawi* (sorcery) is associated with the dark-skinned deities while the *kaiwa* (divination/sorcery) is peculiar to the fair-skinned.¹⁸

Many of the magic rites and spells connected with the dark-skinned deities are related to killing and causing trouble. Chaos, disorder and death seem to be their dominant interests. Magic and spells connected with the fair-skinned gods are usually related to the fructification and fertility of the land, or the bringing of good fortune to members of the family, or to success in an activity such as fishing. But not all spells connected with Auriaria and the other fair-skinned deities are intercessions for good fortune and health; many are actually prayers for the death and destruction of others, as in this formula: *E bia boia Tabuariki ma Auriaria me a mate* (How I wish he were smitten and killed by Tabuariki and Auriaria), usually after a long prayer before a battle.

In the *wau* or *wawi*, a *tabunaaki* (spell), or in modern Gilbertese *tabunea*, is performed by the *tia tabunea* or the *tia wawi* (sorcerer) in the *mwenga* or in any secluded place.¹⁹ This is understandable since they have no *ibonga* to perform the magical ceremonies and rituals or a *marae* upon which they can gather. The *wau* (string figure), which is today a favourite game and pastime of children as well as old women, is probably a *bai n tabunea* (a magical object) originally used by the *tia tabunea* to tell the fortune of the seeker. But *te wau*, as the name signifies, must have been originally an important object in performing killing magic, *wau* or *wawi*, for which the people of the northern cluster are famous.²⁰

¹⁷ Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, Abemama series 80 a, b, c.

¹⁸ Naubwebwe, the dark-skinned god, for instance, though not mentioned in most island traditions as we have seen earlier, is mentioned in the game of *wau* (string figure).

¹⁹ See the Tarawan Vocabulary in Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition*, 467.

²⁰ One Maiana tradition that tells of the origin of *Kainikamaen* (the art of poetry and song composition), says that among the clusters in the islands, the northern cluster was the most feared, even by the *anti*, who would rather go to the south to obtain their *manewe* (words for the song), as the place was *kakamaku* (scary) because of death that seemed to loom about in the air (Ataniberu, pers. comm., Tekem on Maiana, December 1982). Even today the people of Makin and

Most of the *wawi* are extensions of the evil designs of the performer upon the enemy without necessarily invoking a particular *anti* to execute the intention. Places considered evil may also be invoked: the underworld, the place of the dead - any thing or place considered bad and where evil is manifest. Because *wawi* magic was usually performed without the knowledge of the would-be victim, as a precaution more than anything else, one finds that the *bonobono* (blocking spells) are more numerous than the *wawi*. Almost every occasion has its *bonobono*. In the *wawi* magic, to cause harm, actions and symbols are important. Insects and birds are the most common representation of the enemy. Taakeuta, for example, a renowned sorcerer in his day from the island of Marakei, once boasted that he had killed a man by the *keketi wawi* (dragonfly magic), with the dragonfly as a representation of his victim.²¹

The *kaiwa*, which is performed by the *ibonga*, and peculiar to the southern islanders, is both a divination and a powerful killing sorcery, a rival of the killing magic, the *wau* or *wawi*, of the northern islands. The fair-skinned gods and the *antimaomata* are the usual deities invoked. As divination, the *kaiwa* foretells a curse or death so that it can be prevented. As killing sorcery, it is to cause as much harm as possible, even death, to the enemy. Of these two types of *kaiwa*, divination seems to be the original function, because the *kaiwa* sorcery, to kill, and spells related to it, are called *tabunaaki* or *tabunea*, a term quite foreign to the office of the *ibonga* but peculiar to the *tia tabunea*. If that is the case, then the killing nature and sorcery spells of the *kaiwa* are later additions to its original foretelling aspect, initiated by the *ibonga* who found that they were no longer safe with the powerful killing magic *wau* or *wawi* of the *tia tabunea*. So, from merely fortune telling, the *kaiwa* became offensive sorcery, with the *ibonga* becoming also the *tia tabunea* (sorcerer), who no longer was interested only in the prevention of disaster, or simply in frustrating a curse already placed by the enemy, but in killing that enemy as well.

But the *kaiwa* is not only in the form of a divination or a powerful killing sorcery. There is another type known as the *kawai*. The *kawai* exist in several forms: the *tae-ibenao* (cleansing), the *bonobono* (block or frustrate), the *kananga-raoi* (good fortune), and several others. In the traditions, as well as according to many living *unimane* and *unaine*, the *kawai* are not associated with a particular god or *anti* but are merely rituals; however, some have spells or invocations to objects or ideas compatible and consistent with

Butaritari are called *taani wawi*, a designation that usually generates timidity and fear in the people of the southern islands when in their vicinity.

²¹ Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations, Myth and Magic*, 26-7.

the intended outcome of the spell. In this *kawai*, for example, the *tauan roro* (lit. 'holding the years', performed by *unimane* and *unaine* on the first night of the new moon) the moon represents beauty and youth.

O namakaina o, O namakaina o!
Ie mai noko mai, ie mai noko mai.
Nakea? Nakon natimi anne....(ara).
*Te tabo mo o. Te mauri mo!*²²

O moon o, O moon o!
 Sail here unto me, sail here unto me.
 To whom? To this thy child(name).
 Fame and love o. Good health o!

In this *kawai*, not only a long and fulfilled life is interceded for, but a cheat on life itself as well, so that even in old age the body will still be full of youthful vigour. No god or *anti* is involved in this spell.

For success in most activities, good or evil, the rituals and spells are equally important, one being considered powerless without the other. For the spell, the right words are important, that is, the actual secret formula or password - the code with which the spell will work. For a spell to be more effective, the words may be arranged so that they sound and look beautiful, that is, similar to the anticipated result. This can be seen in this spell involving the *anti* Nakuau, performed by women to procure a particular man:

Nakuau, Nakuau, bu-u. Nakuau, Nakuau, ba-a.
Ko na nako ngkoe anne(Naenne).
Ko na anaia [sic] kanam aei ae marenan rangana.
Marenan rangau(Naenne).
Matai-e, matau-o.
Ko ira n tangitangi, ko ira n tangitangi.
Ko ira ni keakea, ko ira ni keakea.
Ko tang ngkai, ko rang ngkai.
Ko a tang ao ko a rang.
Ko a kaka, ko a uamarawa-o.
Ko a kana tabun-io.
Ko a mate-o.

Nakuau, Nakuau bu-u. Nakuau, Nakuau ba-a.
 Come forth you(name of man).
 Come forth you and take thy food here between my thighs.
 Indeed here between my thighs, you....(name of man).
 Lustful-e, hooked o.
 For more you will beg, for more you will beg.

²² Tibwere, 'Te Kato ni Kiribati', 49.

For more you will cry, for more you will cry.
 You cannot stop begging for you are mad now.
 You are screeching for you are in the depths-o.
 You have eaten what is most sacred.
 You are dead-o.

Already, before the spell is whispered, in the right hand of the woman is a *non* (fruit) picked at dawn, and worn against the body all day.

The right climax of the words is important as well, as shown in this *kanangaraoi* spell, performed by one who wants to be treated with favour and generosity by another. The spell is whispered while the performer anoints himself with scented oil:

Ai kabiran mataniwin(tabo).
E uoki, be e uoki.
Ai manimu, kan raoiroiu.
Ba n na tei i tabon umaia taai ma namakaina: ba a na nonorai, ba aia man
te kiakia-taba ngai, ao te ananga raoi, ao te bakatauraai.
Baiu baai.
Wau te wa.
Abau te aba e.
*I a bauminotia o o.*²³

The anointing of the head [chief] of....(place).
 It is ascending, it is ascending
 My fame and my good fortune.
 Let me stand (be) in the home (presence) of the sun and the moon, that they
 may see me, protect me, and keep me safe, as though I were their beloved
 pet; even the beautiful white noddly bird.
 My hands are real hands.
 My canoe, a real canoe.
 My land is a great land e.
 May all these remain with me always never to depart o o.

The end of this spell is the right and intended climax, that is, the fruits of his hands and his labour will always be considered in the land he is about to control.

The choice of the words and images are also important, and even where spells do not invoke a deity or *anti*, as in this *bonobono* spell, to frustrate other spells, the spell is still powerful enough to cause frustration:

Buki e buki o.
I aki raieie, ba tiaki te ba ngai.
I aki tabwenabwena ba tiaki te aubunga ngai.
Riaku ao riaba. E ria te aba, e toro te aba.

²³ Ibid., 48.

Te ra kanoani waia?

Ture te rara, ma te auau, ma te matanna n e.

E ibeai te aomata mai meangu!

E eke, e ing.

E eke, e ewa.

E eke, e maraki.

E eke, e tabwe buana ma arina.

Buana, e e

*Ewatia, e tabwe.*²⁴

It will fall; it is down.

I am not brittle for I am not a rock.

Nor am I fragile as a huge clam shell.

Behind me and before me a canoe is in sight.

What are they bringing?

So it is blood, and madness, and a thing to cause pain.

Let him strike me one from the north!

He will move; he will strike, but he will be in pain.

His throat and source of pain will be exposed.

His mouth will fall open.

He will be in pain. He will be broken [dead].

This is true also of the next spell, the *kaeke*, to make one important in the community. The words are whispered as one is preparing for a bath *i tanrake* and filling the *binobino* (coconut container) with water from the first waves of an incoming tide.

Itia kababa te bokau, kaekeau, rakeau, kamanimauau mairouia Nouerentari, ma Aurikirikiniba.

I taouna aon Abemama (ke te aba teuana)

Ngai aio ti boni ngai Teng (name)

I ringa tai, e babakoa namakaina.

I eke i eta, I aki bua ao I aki taro.

*Te mauri ao te raoi, te mauri.*²⁵

I am submerging my bath, my fame, my repute, my good fortune from Nouerentari and from Aurikirikiniba.

My greatness is felt on Abemama (or another island)

It is I and only I myself Teng (name) who is great.

I touch the sun, it embraces the moon.

My prestige will be high above all.

I will never be lost; nor will I ever cease to exist.

Blessing and peace, good health.

²⁴ Ibid., 47.

²⁵ Ibid., 47-8.

A number of skills are related to the gods, in particular the fair-skinned, like Auriaria or Nei Tituabine, and the *anti* or *antimaomata*, like Rakunene or Kaabunang, and communicated through dreams or visions. Because nearly all these skills are 'gifts' of deities and *anti*, many are incomplete without a spell. Not all are benevolent; a number are for evil purposes: to cause madness; to procure a woman without her consent; even to kill others.

But not all skills have spells that are associated with or in need of a deity or an *anti*. A spell can rely simply on the names of ancestors renowned in the art related to the skill. In some spells, ancestors come to be identified with insects mentioned in the spell.

Ai tiba a ti korean tabon aia karewe Bingita, Teratabu, Taeborua ae ei....
E tao te ra? E tao te ibu.
E tao te ra? E tao te aubunga.
*Ia namotao namatao.*²⁶

I am about to cut this, the bud of thy toddy tree Bingita, Teratabu, Taeborua ae ei....

What is filled? It is the coconut container.

What is filled? It is the enormous clam shell.

Alas all my cuttings have not ceased to overflow.

In this toddy cutting spell, for example, *Bingita* (insect)²⁷ could have been the name of an ancestor, who, with Teratabu and Taeborua, originated the skill of toddy cutting.

Spells are especially important in battles, not only to protect the warriors but, more importantly, to give them courage, for as the people believed, 'one who enters the battlefield in fear is of no use; he will make easy prey for the enemy.' In this spell to initiate a son to become a warrior, he is brainwashed to become fearless:

N nangi tiba aiti koroia atun (naewa) aio.
Te tia ra ee? Te tia un ee.
Te tia ra ee? Te tia tau ee.
Ba I routia, ba I kaunna, ba I kabiri rake karawa.
Ba I routia, ba I kaunna, ba I kabiri rio o mone o.
Ko na kana te ra natu? Ko na kana te tanga ni buaka ane imaim ao.
Ma a un e, te un, te tau.
Te mauri.

I am about to mark the scalp of you(name of son). What will you become ee? A warrior you will be ee.

²⁶This is not the complete spell as my informant did not want the whole spell to be known by others and wanted to remain anonymous.

²⁷ The *bingita* is an insect that inhabits the toddy trees and can ruin toddy juice.

What will you become ee? A fighter you will be ee.

I am raising you up to be a warrior, a warrior greater than those in the heavens.

I am raising you up to be a warrior, a warrior greater than those in the depths below.

What would you love to eat my son? A great army of warriors before thee you would love to eat.

Be not afraid, fight, it is enough.

You are blessed.

With this spell the warrior has to observe other prohibitions, such as not eating the *bukibuki* fish, for this is believed to cause the stomach to *bukibuki* (beat heavily), which in battle can cause the warrior to be scared and run.

As we will see later in Chapter 4 the *karaki aika rabakau* are concerned with the skills and arts of the people. The text of many are fixed, and considered sacred; therefore a lot are kept secret in the *utu*. Although skills are generally shared in a community, for each skill there is an expert. Nevertheless, every *utu* has its own way of doing things, and each considers its own knowledge best, and will not even coach any of its members who are likely to betray that knowledge to outsiders. Because every skill is usually enhanced by an incantation or spell, every Gilbertese is expected to know a spell or two, or he will struggle to succeed in whatever he does. Most of the time he will fail. Magic and magical presence, then, benign or evil, are a part of everyday life. Every aspect of daily existence, every object, wish, thought, condition, action and purpose, good or bad, is governed by its own set of charms and rituals. One must know a *kawai* or *tabunea*, for life in the islands is ruled by magic.²⁸

Although most rituals and spells are associated with a particular god, deified ancestor or an *anti*, a closer study shows that the majority of the rituals and spells are related to the more recent *anti* or *antimaomata*, like that of Rakunene; after these, to fair-skinned deities; and very few to dark-skinned deities. Because a lot of these rituals and spells are *tabunea*, many are intercessions to the *anti* for their assistance to overcome a rival or to slay them where they have become an enemy (as we have seen, most commonly represented as an insect or bird).

The *kaiwa*, in particular the *bonobono* (to frustrate), and similar spells like the *tae-ibennao* (cleansing), or the *kaeke* (spell to cause one to be considered generously), which are usually related to deified ancestors and *anti*, are among common spells found today in the islands. In comparing these types of *kaiwa* with the *wawi*, it is obvious that in the *wawi* spells no deified

²⁸ Tibwere, 'Te Katei ni Kiribati', 50.

ancestor, that is, no fair-skinned deity, is involved; and that most *wawi* involve dark-skinned deities. One can assume therefore that the *wawi* were spells of a people whom the *ibonga* have no desire to identify as their ancestors, for to them their ancestors were those they have deified, who in previous generations dominated the island scene. The *wawi* of the dark-skinned deities, then, must be earlier than most of the *kaiwa* rituals and spells.

Space and time do not allow us to look into the nature of the various ways of worship of the individual gods or *anti*, or into the rituals and spells concerned with each, but it is clear that the dark-skinned gods are not deified ancestors, and are concerned mainly with killing enemies. They have no *marae* and no *ibonga*. They are much older than the fair-skinned deified ancestors, for no one knows exactly where their homes are. Most are not in the pantheon of the Gilbertese gods, and some are either enslaved or made guardians of the world below.²⁹ Most are just names, who matter little or not at all for everyday affairs.

The fair-skinned deities, who are peculiar to the central and southern islands, have a *marae* and a *ibonga*. They are the deified ancestors, who, together with the *anti* or *antimaomata*, are worshipped almost daily at their *marae*, involved more often in daily activities, and take more interest in the affairs of the people. The origin of most of them is known, for many came from the south, inhabitants of the 'tree' that was burnt in 'Tamoa',³⁰ travelling northward on their great *baurua* (canoes).³¹ As deities and *anti* they are great helpers, but can be tyrants when offended. Skills and special knowledge, including rituals and spells, whether for good or evil, are communicated by them as 'gifts' to their descendants - tokens of their special favours and good will.

²⁹ Nakaa, one of the dark-skinned deities, in one Makin tradition, is the guardian of the gates of the underworld, a place to which all the souls after death travelled in order to enjoy dancing and much feasting. Cf Grimble, *A Pattern of Islands*, 148f.

³⁰ Matang was the original home of the ancestors (see Auriaria Tradition pp.121-123) before sojourning in Samoa. Although there is a clear attempt in the traditions to identify these fair-skinned deities strictly as gods, in a number of the traditions we are told that they are *aomata* (real people) who travelled from Tamoa. Nei Tituabine for instance was not a goddess but a wife who committed adultery on board the canoe that travelled northward when approaching the waters of the Gilberts after their long journey from Samoa. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133. 72, 'The Coming of Nei Tituabine and her Friends from Samoa'. For versions of the tradition of the tree of Samoa, Kainituaba, see Chapters 11, 12.

³¹ *Baurua*, a great ocean-going canoe, could have been a corruption of the original Polynesian 'foulua' (double-canoe).

CHAPTER 4

The Categories

STORIES IN GILBERTESE oral tradition are not usually categorised by *unimane* and *unaine* when telling a *karaki* (tradition); nevertheless, one cannot fail to note that where the text of the *karaki* enters a domain quite unfamiliar to the chroniclers, they make every effort to ensure that they do not confuse themselves and their listeners. Where necessary they excuse themselves by saying that they cannot go any further - others would do better and could carry on from where they stopped. This means that what the chronicler could not tell does not belong to that category of *karaki* to which his text belongs. Gilbertese oral tradition, then, can be classified as

1. *Karaki aika iango* (fiction),
2. *Karaki aika rabakau* (knowledge), or
3. *Karaki aika rongorongo* (history).

The nature of the story identifies it and its category.

These three categories exist each in two forms. There is the fixed form, which is sacred; and the free form, which is secular. The fixed sacred form is peculiar to the *karaki aika rongorongo* and the *karaki aika rabakau* and circulated only within certain groups. The *karaki aika Iango* have the free secular form and are usually popular and universally known. However, at times the contents or traditions in the last two categories escape the boundaries of the particular groups and become communal knowledge; '*é burinako te karaki*' - the *karaki* is 'spilled', and thus is no longer fixed but is in fragments. It is these 'spilled' texts that are the major problem for not only do they exist as fragments of an original whole, but they became widely known and fixed even to the extent of replacing the initial whole or strand of tradition: hence, they generate several conflicting versions.

The *rongorongo* and the *rabakau karaki* are supposed to be the least spoiled types of oral tradition. This is due to their being particular, confined as secrets within a given circle, such as the 'sacred college' of chroniclers, or the guardians of certain skills and knowledge. However, though their texts are sacred and fixed, even unspoiled, the traditions or strands of tradition in these two categories exist in several versions more often than the *karaki aika*

iangō. The reason is obvious: there has been an attempt to maintain the accuracy of the sacred text by producing versions of the strands of tradition to confuse those who are neither disciples of the chroniclers of the *rongorongo* nor guardians of a *rabakau* in their territory of influence. It is the text of the free secular form that actually and paradoxically tends to remain more rigid, even word for word. This is because they have no special significance for the community, and for that reason they remain pure and free of any deliberate intention to confuse.

Karaki aika iangō

Created specifically for entertainment, the *karaki aika iangō* are generally the product of imagination. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for tellers to include actual incidents or personalities from the past to make their *iangō* appear more realistic. Some will use the opportunity to explain aspects of customs or causes of certain phenomena.

Some *iangō* are so woven around an historical event or personality that it is hard to say whether they are *karaki aika Rongorongo* or fiction. Like historical fiction in modern literature, the use of a historical milieu was simply a relish for enjoyment. With the taste of reality, the tale is all the more spellbinding. The fact that life is not so much lived as imagined makes the telling of the *iangō* a favourite pastime. In the *iangō* emotions are let loose while at the same time controlled by the inclusion of historical elements in the background, specific locations, and landmarks.

Because *iangō* stories lack continuity, that is, their content begins and ends with no chronological specification and with no genealogical parallels as pointers, they were excluded from the text of sacred traditions, in particular those of the *rongorongo* type. Where they permeated a sacred tradition, that tradition would no longer be considered unique and thus lost its value as sacred property to be jealously guarded. Its authenticity is also lost, and it eventually becomes another *iangō* for entertainment. In many ways the permeated sacred traditions become tests of the authenticity of the chronicler himself - for if those are the traditions he believes to be part of the *karaki aika rongorongo*, then naturally he himself is not a member of the chronicle college.

Karaki aika iangō, then, were the imaginative masterpieces of the chroniclers. Usually, they were reflections of the chroniclers' own community, of what they believed and hoped for. A number of these traditions were undoubtedly creations by the chroniclers of the 'chronicle college' to entertain, confuse or divert the curiosity of the people from the sacred texts. As a distinct group in the community, with privileges they did not wish to share with others, they kept their own stories from them, to prevent the intrusion of others into their circle. The traditions which are *iangō* become useful as

expendable stories to chroniclers of *rongorongo* and guardians of a particular *rabakau* when the telling of the *rongorongo* and *rabakau* cannot continue because of the presence of an uninvited listener.¹

But not all *iango* were creations of the master chroniclers, for any *unimane* or *unaine* could tell a story which was his/her own *iango* (idea/imagining); hence the emergence of a new *karaki*. Usually, several *unimane* and *unaine* would be involved in the creation of a *iango*, such as '*Taekan Rokonnanti*' (the story of Rokonnanti), for example, from *unimane* of Nikunau.

A *iango*, before it is told for the first time in the *maneaba*, is usually introduced as a *iango* - an imagining - and the *unimane* and *unaine* responsible for the creation of that *iango*. Most occupy the period of *anti*, an era before the time of true humans.² They are not confined strictly to that era, but since their contents are mythical and legendary with superhuman characters, the chroniclers usually speak of them as being *kain te roro n anti* (of the age of the spirits).

Because they were secular traditions, *iango* were transmitted freely without ritual or ceremony. Anyone could hear a *iango*, for where it was told was not a matter of significance. Variations were rare, and where they happened the locality and the extent of the separation of groups from one another were partly responsible. As entertainment, *iango* were told at home by grandparents, at feasts, or at gatherings of the village or island. The story teller would tell his *karaki*, not because he wanted to, nor because people asked him boldly, but because a stimulus was provided - jokes were the common stimuli to get the story teller talking.

Dating the origin of the *iango* solely from their content is not easy. Nevertheless, given the manner in which they were used - as tales to pass the time, for the grandchildren to show that they were properly nurtured as required by the *katei* (custom), as entertainment in the *maneaba* during inter-district or inter-island gatherings, satires to convey a message, allegories with didactic purposes - they could be placed at a time when the people were flourishing with a distinctive way of life coming into being, a time, perhaps, when Gilbertese culture and society were becoming so complex that a review of long held principles and ideas was necessary, a time when the techniques of the chroniclers (recording, selection and transmission) were fully developed. This time could conceivably have been in the Samoan Peace,

¹ As custom requires, all who visit you under your roof, invited or not, are *iruwa* (guests) and must be entertained; hence, they may join in the *maroro* (talk) and listen to the *karaki*. *Karaki aika iango* then provides a common subject to pass the time until the uninvited *iruwa* decides to leave.

² See Chapter 2 for the three distinct periods or eras of Gilbertese history in oral tradition.

when the influential clans from Samoa had settled and dominated the island scene both politically and culturally, establishing themselves and their *karaki* in the islands. This was in about the latter half of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th when Tanentoa n Nonouti ruled most of the southern islands of the Gilberts and other members of Karongoa ruled the northern and central islands.³ As reflections of communities *karaki aika Iango* are more important than simply controls and tales for entertainment: they provide avenues to key ideas and concepts of the people; the inner complexities of the period; and the culture peculiar to the generations after the coming of the people of Karongoa and their allies from Samoa which began from about 1260 and finished about 1360.⁴

Karaki aika Rabakau

Karaki aika rabakau are sacred texts with a fixed form. The stories belonging to this category are those concerned with *atatai* (know-how/instruction) and *wanawana* (wisdom). *Atatai* and *wanawana* are gifts of the *anti*. It seems that the *anti* of the islands played a considerable part in the daily activities of the people.⁵ *Karaki aika rabakau* are usually either magical incantations or verbal 'texts' about a particular art or skill. According to the people, to be truly human is to be *aomata*, that is, truly Gilbertese, by knowing a certain skill which is usually accompanied by a magical spell.⁶ *E kawa te aomata ae akea ana tabunea* - 'it is unfortunate for him who possesses no magical spell', for life in the islands is ruled by magic.

³ See the model chronology of Gilbertese history in Chapter 14 and Chapter 6 for the time of Tanentoa n Nonouti.

⁴ One of the 'Samoans' known in the traditions to return to the Gilberts is Baretoka when he left to look for a wife on Tarawa. He married Nei Batiauea 'who held the *atinro* (anchor) of Tarawa to keep Tarawa in its place', meaning that she was an important woman on the island. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions. Collected by (Sir) Arthur Grimble Between ca. 1916 and 1930', C:15, 'The Tale of Baretoka and the Tree of Tarawa'. The last group to return to the Gilberts from Samoa was in the time of Tanentoa n Nonouti, such as the descendants of Nei Temaiti who came via Arorae, Tarawa and Onotoa, and finally Beru. They were given KATANNAKI as their *boti* in the *maneaba* by Tanentoa n Nonouti. There was also a certain Namai from Samoa who was given a *boti* by Tewaroi called TABUKAOKAO in the Taribo *maneaba* after the land which became his *kainga*. H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963), 22, 24.

⁵ Expertise in a particular type of fishing, catching eel for example, was a gift of the *anti*. For advice in decisions concerning war or peace, or any other concerns of the community, the *anti* of the families or those *bu-n-anti* (multitude of spirits) that hovered unseen in their midst were consulted. When one planted a new tree, or composed a love song, it was the *anti* with their goodwill who enhanced the success of the activity. See Chapter 3 for the involvement of *anti* or gods in rituals, magic, and spells of the people.

⁶ Like land or a canoe, magical spells and skill are considered as property; therefore, he who has no skill is a *rang* (fool) as well, for he is a hopeless being, *kibana* (shiftless) and a *kaveana* (a scavenger who is good for nothing).

Where the *karaki aika Rabakau* is concerned mainly with the knowledge of the various arts, its content is methodological, how to go about using certain skills or arts. Some of the earliest, even archaic, *karaki aika Rabakau* known today are concerned with such skills or arts as:

akawa (fishing - *te u*, *kibe*, etc)

borau and *kaba wa* (land-finding/knowning the weather, and canoe building)

Ribana and *ununiki* (agriculture)

kario / *kainikamaen* (composing chants or songs/poetry).

katei b'ai (architecture and building).

Ruoia (dancing - *mino*, *kamei* etc).

Takakaro (games and sports).

The arts and skills were significant for them, along with magical incantations, were the means by which the people survived in the hostile environment of the Gilberts. Today these skills and arts continue to exist in certain families, and they cannot be shared, though at times they could be given away as *b'ai-n-tangira* (gifts) on occasions when gratitude is shown.⁷ Like property, the *rabakau* (skills and magic) were and still are guarded as secrets, for they add to the already acquired rights and privileges, whether inherited or achieved.

One can *bubuti* a *rabakau* to be taught. Since *bubuti* is a reciprocal relationship, the person who *bubuti* would provide the wants of the master of the art. In teaching, the master decides when and where to end the lessons. In most cases this is decided by the nature of the gifts the disciple gives. Where the master feels that he is not receiving due attention or favours from his disciple, or that he has taught his disciple enough, lessons become short, repetitions are made or complaints of failing memory, and finally the lessons end. The common and polite excuse would be that all has been imparted, nothing more could be learnt.

Of course not all, not even half, would have been given. Even among his children, the master would have his favourite, usually the youngest, who would have the least land when rights are distributed, as decreed by custom. The *rabakau* is an addition to these few pieces of land. It is not uncommon for others from outside the immediate family to sell their rights over a piece of land to a master of a certain *rabakau*. The buying and selling of a *rabakau* is not always a fair transaction, and he who *bubuti* or bought the *rabakau* is usually the exploited partner, receiving only fragments of the art as a reward.

⁷ The *b'ai-ni-kuakua*, for example, is the gift to a person caring for an *unimane* or *unaine* not a member of the person's *utu*.

Much content of *karaki aika rabakau* is a combination of methods of going about doing a job and stories of the origins of the art. This explains why *rabakau* stories are not usually good poetry. As vehicles for transporting and preserving accurately knowledge of skills, the stories help the skill to be remembered quicker and better. The stories and the details of the methods of the skill are not easily accessible, as, family secrets and property, they are guarded jealously. Gerd Koch reveals only common knowledge concerning the various arts and techniques.⁸ When a foreigner is viewed with suspicion, even if he gains nothing from the art, how much more would the masters be suspicious of a Gilbertese researcher! Knowledge is power, and this the people know very well.

Looking closely at these *karaki aika rabakau* one cannot fail to note that their language is usually archaic. Some texts, perhaps, may have been brought by the very first inhabitants to the Gilberts. *Te ai ni kiroro* (the cooking hearth oven of Kiroro) and *te ruanuna*, for example, could have been styles of cooking hearths from Gilolo and Ruaniwa (Lieuenieua), homelands of the ancestors in the west as suggested by Arthur Grimble, brought to the Gilberts about 22-25 generations ago.⁹ However, the fact that Auriaria and Tabuariki are exalted in many of the *rabakau* stories and rituals connected with certain skills suggests that many *karaki aika rabakau* had undergone changes and assumed their final and fixed forms when the 'Samoans' were influential in the Gilberts. The texts of many *karaki aika rabakau*, then, as one can find them today, may have come down to us in their present form from the time of the 'Samoans' after A.D 1350.

Karaki aika Rongorongo (Historical narratives)

Karaki aika rongorongo, like *rabakau*, are sacred texts with fixed form. *Rongorongo* are tales of the past - beginning with the creation stories and ending with the people. Today there exist versions of the *karaki aika rongorongo* concerning the whole island group, some similar, others totally different. The following general conclusions about such *karaki* can be drawn:

1. *Karaki aika Rongorongo* contain both myth and memories of what happened and was passed down through generations both intentionally and unintentionally.
2. The manner or form in which they come to us is the one fixed after the arrival of the 'Samoans'.

⁸ Gerd Koch, *The Material Culture of Kiribati: Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Onotoa*, translated by Guy Slatyer (Suva 1986), from the German, *Materielle Kultur de Gilbert Inseln* (Berlin 1965).

⁹ A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Preliminary Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), 8-11, Polynesian Society Memoir no.12.

3. They contain strands of tradition from as early as the time of the dark-skinned inhabitants as well as strands of traditions of the fair-skinned later arrivals.
4. The warrior-priests of the god Auriaria, of the clan Karongoa, are responsible for the compilation and editing of the traditions into a complex whole; hence, the emergence of a canon of Gilbertese *karaki aika Rongorongo*, together with the circulation of the 'confused texts'.
5. The Wars of Kaitu and Uakeia made it possible for this canon of tradition to be dominant and official in the islands because of the introduction of the *maneaba* following the Beru Tabontebike prototype.
6. Clans that were influential along with the warrior priests of Auriaria tend to have their clan traditions amalgamated with the dominating official text. The official text is that known as *Karakini Karongoa*.
7. The growing interest in oral tradition in the 20th century saw the beginning of the end of the authenticity of Gilbertese oral tradition as proper and amateur tellers of the *karaki* gave collectors and interested listeners what they wanted them to believe about their group.¹⁰

Karaki aika Rongorongo exist in two types - *Taian Riki* (genealogical lists), and *Taeka Nikawai* (words or tales of the past). The distinction between the two lies especially in their content. One would contain a list of families from a common ancestor or *anti*, while the other would have tales of 'what actually happened' as handed down through generations.

(a) *Taian Riki*

Genealogical lists contain the names of the members of a clan to a common *ikawai* (ancestor) from whom the clan descends. Genealogical information was important when settling issues relating to privileges or rights over land or property. The only means of justifying one's claim was to trace one's roots through the male ancestry, though some women ancestors could also be noted.

Not many lists that exist today go back to generations before the coming of the 'Samoans'. However, one Tarawa list goes back about 12 generations more from the coming from Samoa, to the *moa n aomata* (the first true human) Ten Tebau after the *riki n anti* (the generation of the gods/

¹⁰ Other influences should also be taken into consideration as one reads oral tradition, such as Christianity, school of thought of the collector (e.g diffusionism, in the case of Grimbale), literacy etc. See Chapter 16 for the influence of the Christian missions and literacy on oral tradition.

spirits).¹¹ The Tarawa list introduces us to the ancestry of Beia and Tekai, the rulers of Tarawa, by whose time the 'Samoans' were already established in the islands. As it was a royal line, the need to remember forefathers was for the purpose of legitimising who should and who should not rule. The first ruler of Tarawa was Teng Kewe, seven generations after Ten Tebau. Beia and Tekai were the fifth generation after Teng Kewe. Other clans or families probably had their own separate lists but no record has been found of them. Such lists may have disappeared following the invasion from Samoa. The fact that this Tarawa list did not suffer the fate of most other lists could be attributed to the alliance formed later with the 'Samoans' of Beru when Beia and Tekai took as their wife Nei Teweia, the daughter of Ten Tanentoa of the ruling house of Beru.¹²

After the invasion from Samoa, the lists that developed were concerned with the dominating clans and the accuracy of the priesthood of Auriaria that they brought with them. The dominating clans and the priesthood were one and the same people; thus the lists that began after this invasion contain the names of the rulers who were also priests. On islands where the 'Samoans' landed - Beru, Nikunau, Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Arorae, Tamana, Makin, and Butaritari - where they exerted their influence and changed the existing sociopolitical order, the lists of these islands, the subjugated ancestral kin, if they ever existed, became void.¹³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the Tarawa list is among the very few in existence to go back 12 generations before the influence of the 'Samoans'.

Most of the lists, however, contain only about 11 to 13 generations. There would be about 12 generations from the informants, in their late 60s or 70s at the time their *riki* were collected, to the first person in the list, who would be a warrior of Kaitu and Uakeia. The list from Abemama, for example, collected about 1932, places the informant in the 10th generation from the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia:

1. On Abemama Koura III had as wife Nei Terakum, Takaio was born.
2. Takaio had as wife Nei Kaetata, Nei Ngeenge was born.
3. Nei Ngeenge had as husband Ten Teangimaeao, Nei Rarabu was born.
4. Nei Rarabu had as husband Ten Tebanouia, Ten Teruru was born.

¹¹ 'Ten Tebau ma ana kariki' ('The descendants of Ten Tebau') in E. Tibwere (comp.), 1915, 'Karakia I-Tungaru' (The history of the Gilbert Islands collected from Ten Teuea [Tarawa]) Nariki [Tarawa] and Tabuia [Abaiang]), 58f, Pateman Papers.

¹² Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru', 106. Tione Baraka (comp.), 'The Story of the I-Kiribati according to the Traditions of Karongoa', translated by G.H. Eastman and revised by H.E Maude, 23, Maude Papers.

¹³ The song of Moiuva recorded that the people of Samoa also reached Abemama. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, F.59.

5. He [Ten Teruru] was an *aintoa* (great man) and a warrior who joined the men of Ten Tabwia in their battle on Abemama which was a war from Marakei. Ten Teruru had as wife Nei Tekaeti, Ten Tekabu was born.
6. Ten Tekabu had as wife Nei Kanongnga, Ten Teruru II was born.
7. Ten Teruru II had as wife Nei Itiniman, Ten Tiribo was born.
8. Ten Tiribo had as wife Nei Ngeenge, Te Uabong was born.
9. He [Te Uabong] joined the campaign of Tem Binoka against Karakaua on Nonouti.¹⁴ Te Uabong had as wife Nei Teewa, Ten Tekabu II was born.¹⁵

Ten Tekabu II was about 70 in 1932 when his *riki* was collected. The fact that the list begins with the time of Koura III, a warrior of Kaitu and Uakeia, means that the names that existed before that time, even to the coming from Samoa, were no longer valid after Kaitu and Uakeia.¹⁶

Those clans who did not give in to the rule and reforms of the Beru warriors are supposed today to have a full 21 or 23 generations from themselves, going beyond the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, to the time of the coming of the 'Samoans'. Because there were few such families, the lists that go back to the 'Samoans' are few. Intermarriage between the clans and the final acceptance of the sociopolitical structure introduced by the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia is also partly the reason why the longer lists have been neglected or shortened: they no longer are of any real value to anyone. Certainly on Beru, and those islands where these warriors did not land, *riki* from the coming of the 'Samoans' remained almost as they were.

¹⁴ This war of Tem Binoka on Nonouti took place towards the end of 1883. See Deryck Scarr, *Fragments of Empire: A History of the Western Pacific High Commission 1877-1914* (Canberra 1967), 165f.

¹⁵ E. Tibwere (comp.), 1932, 'Te Katei ni Kiribati' (Notes on Gilbertese Customs and Traditions) Collected from Nei Teeta (Abemama) and Ten Taumoa (Abemama), and several other old men of Abemama, 12-13, Pateman Papers.

¹⁶ The influence of the warriors on the islands they visited affected the system of land tenure along with other aspects of life, and the sociopolitical order restructured by the introduction of the *maneaba* following the Beru Tabontebike type. However, some clans on islands these warriors subjugated managed to make peace with the warriors. This was the case of Nei Tabiria on Nonouti, who welcomed and entertained the warriors; her properties were not touched by them. Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru', 120; PP4 (June 1927), 'Rongorongon Nonouti ao tabeua riki' (Nonouti tradition and other stories), 3, Pateman Papers. Tabiria according to many traditions was a *inaomata* on Nonouti, presumably a woman of some influence. She was a descendant of the great Karongoa clan from Beru. On Tabiteuea there were families descended from Beru people; their lands and homes were not disturbed or taken. The families were descended from Obaia whose daughter Nei Kirirere married the warriors Beia and Tekai. It is these rulers (identified in some traditions as a single personality - Beiamatekai) who formed the alliance later with the full-blooded Beru Karongoa clan by marrying the daughter of Ten Tanentoa-ni-Beru, Nei Teweia, the former wife of the sons of Noubwebwe. Other clans who would not accept defeat resisted the rule and reforms of the warriors left on their islands when the warring party continued northwards.

After the Kaitu and Uakeia wars, the use of *taian riki* as checks upon the priesthood that had developed in Samoa was no longer important. All it was necessary to remember was who descends from whom, to check the accuracy of the claims to certain rights and privileges in the community.

Because of the changes to sociopolitical structures on many islands, the result of the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, only the generations after these wars were important and can be trusted as being reliable and accurate. Although some lists became more politically important than others and so more open to manipulation, the practice of having 'royal chroniclers' for the *uea* in the northern and central islands and official tellers of *maneaba* tradition in the southern islands helped considerably in preserving the veracity of the lists.

(b) *Taeka Nikawai* (Narratives of the past)

The *taeka nikawai* usually record stories of the ruling families, though the defeated party is also presupposed. In the northern and central islands the chroniclers of the *taeka nikawai* were usually members of or connected to the ruling families. The members of the *bata* of Kabubuarangana, a *bata* connected to that of the *uea*, were, through the decision of the *ikawai*, given the task of being *taani karaki* (official chroniclers) of the royal and island tradition.¹⁷ Like the *rabakau*, the *taeka nikawai* was given to the youngest to compensate for his lesser inheritance.¹⁸ In certain cases the *taeka nikawai* were also communicated to a daughter, but she was not allowed to teach her own children, since by their father they belonged to another *boti* or clan.¹⁹

In the southern islands the *taeka nikawai* is the property of the leading *boti* of the *maneaba* - Karongoa.²⁰ The members, because of their influence and the *maneaba* which they built, came to be considered as the proper guardians of the island tradition, which was the *maneaba* tradition predating the coming from Samoa. This included creation myths and stories of the voyages. But a member of this Karongoa clan,

while pretending to absolute knowledge of the names of the ancestors who arrived from Samoa, and of the social groups to which they belonged, does not claim to be an authority upon the generations locally descended from them. Thus the members

¹⁷On Tarawa and Abaiang the chroniclers are also related by blood to the one-time powerful leaders or families on the island; on the island of Abemama also they are related to the ruling dynasty that controlled the island as well as Kuria and Aranuka.

¹⁸Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti*, 7.

¹⁹A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 91.

²⁰This clan with their allies came to the Gilberts from Samoa. In the Gilberts, the clan divided into several groups. One of the leading groups of Karongoa landed at Tekiauma on Beru and became important not only on Beru but the neighbouring islands as well. Tione Baraka, 'The Story of the I-Kiribati', 16.

of the clan will decide for themselves upon the validity of any man's claim to belong to their group, and will only go to Karongoa n Uea for information concerning their legendary ancestor who took part in the Samoan immigration.²¹

Today, however, though an *unimane* from Karongoa would strictly still be the proper chronicler of the *maneaba* tradition, other *unimane* from different clans may challenge him with the version of their clan.

This ability of *unimane* from other clans or *boti* to *kauki wiia* (lit. open their mouths) to tell their version of the *taeka nikawai* only began following the destruction of the aura of sanctity that once surrounded the Karongoa and the *taeka nikawai* of the *ikawai*, which were supposed to be *kamaraia* (accursed). This process, the removal of the mystique surrounding the *taeka nikawai* and Karongoa clan, was the result of the secularisation of the cult of the Karongoa when deities and ancestors of other clans were allotted sitting spaces in the *maneaba* - the *marae* of their deity Auriaria. This process was further extended after the return of the war parties of Kaitu and Uakeia as almost every clan, because of their participation in the wars, now had a story to add onto the *taeka nikawai* of the ancestors.²²

The *taeka nikawai* normally begins from the time of the *anti* - with the creation stories; and this is fitting, for it helps prevent any 'confusion of heart'.²³ From creation, the story continues into the era of *antimaomata*, without commentary or signal that the story has now entered into a new era. However, some tellers, when approaching the time of the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, would say, '*Aio te riki n aomata*' (this is the story or the generations of true humans). It seems that many chroniclers accept the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia as the beginning of the proper history of the people. The stories before these wars are considered by them as *karaki n anti*, belonging to the realm of myths and legends rather than history.

Yet there are a number of stories in the era of *anti* and *antimaomata*, before the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, that are still considered by many chroniclers as historical as well. These stories are mainly the activities of the 'Samoans', the members of the Karongoa clan in particular, who came and established themselves in the islands. These stories also contain brief

²¹ Maude, *The Evolution*, 7-8.

²² The form of the *taeka nikawai* of many islands in the south, many of which became accepted *maneaba* traditions of districts or islands, is the final product of the work of the Karongoa reductionists from a vast collection of stories that had come to their attention. These traditions include the strands that antedate the invasion from Samoa; even the stories the 'Samoans' took with them to Samoa. Thus the *taeka nikawai* is a composite of the multitude of stories put together by Karongoa chroniclers into a history: a historical mosaic of the people of the Gilberts. See Chapter 11.

²³ A.F. Grimble, 'Myths from the Gilbert Islands', *Folklore*, 33 (Mar. 1922), 91.

mention of the 'Samoans' in Samoa before they returned to the Gilberts or, more accurately, before they were driven out of Samoa.

A comparison of the *taeka nikawai* collected from different islands, mainly the southern islands but to an extent the northern islands too, shows that their contents differ only in details. They all begin with the creation stories, then move to the activities of the gods and the lesser gods and the multitude of spirits in the island, the sojourn in Samoa, the return from Samoa and the rule of the 'Samoans' and their descendants, various other activities in the islands, and finally the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia. After these wars, districts or islands have their own traditions concerning what happened down to the time of the British Protectorate, known as *tain te man* (the era of the Flag - Union Jack), from 1892 to the present. The story ends with the genealogy of the teller or writer of the tradition himself. On islands where the Beru warriors did not land, the *taeka nikawai* have the stories of the descendants of the influential clans of Samoa, with these 'Samoan stories' forming the prologues to the history of their ruling houses.²⁴

How old, then, are the *taeka nikawai*? The occasional references to places referred to as homes in the west - Matang for instance, the home of the Nei Tituabine and the fair-skinned ancestors; or Bouru, the land of the *renga* (red food); or the cooking oven of Kiroro - indicate that they certainly contain very archaic material, as also do the strands of tradition that tell about a black race subjugated by fair-skinned intruders: they take us back long before the coming of the 'Samoans' into the Gilberts. As for the work of the Karongoa redactors, who collected, edited and put them into their present form as historical narratives of the islands, we can perhaps date this to somewhere in the generations after the 'Samoan' invasion, in particular the time after Tanentoa n Nonouti, for that was the time when there were strong motives to ensure the accuracy of the generations and feats of the ruling and sacred clan of Karongoa - the warrior-priests of Auriaria.²⁵

²⁴ This is true of the traditions from the islands of Makin and Butaritari. 'Series of Traditions from Little Makin, forming the prelude to the Genealogy of the High Chiefs of the Northern Gilberts', in Grimble, *The Migrations*, Supp.43, 85ff. Nevertheless, even the subjugated islands, such as Abemama and the neighbouring islands, have the 'Samoan traditions', and this can be attributed to the influential leaders from Beru left after the wars who established themselves there later.

²⁵ See the chronology of Gilbertese history in Chapter 14 for the time of Tanentoa n Nonouti, and Chapter 11 for the emergence of the Gilbertese canon of oral tradition.

CHAPTER 5

Modes of Transmission

ORAL TRANSMISSION OCCURS in two modes: as song, and as narrative. As a song it could be chanted accompanied by bodily actions as in a dance, or as dirges or chants that commemorate incidents, sung at gatherings or at home. As a narrative, it is either a public talk in the *maneaba* that informs as well as entertains the people, or a private lesson taught in the seclusion of the home or as bedtime stories.

Methods of Oral Transmission

(a) *The Bakabu*

The *bakabu*, a story accompanied by chants and dance, was one way of remembering as well as transmitting a *karaki*. The chanted portions were usually those parts which in an unsung transmission would not convey the feeling of the characters or the context, such as laments, high points, or the desires and hopes of the characters in the *karaki*. The way they were sung conveyed feelings as well as the context. At points where the chants could not portray the feelings, the *ruoia* (dances accompanied by singing) were performed. But the chants and the *ruoia*, as I learnt later from Tataua, a renowned teller of the *karaki* from Tekabwibwi on Tabiteuea North, were not merely to express the contexts or the feelings in the *karaki*: they were checks upon the authenticity of the teller and thus his story, since only those familiar with the *bakabu* would know which parts of the story should be narrated, chanted, and danced.

Most *bakabu* were *karaki aika iango* in their original form, composed for entertainment in the *maneaba*; one could almost say that the *bakabu* was the folk opera. On Tabiteuea North, where a number of old men remembered the last performances of the *bakabu*, they told stories of how the whole village was involved in composing and rehearsing the *bakabu* until the day it was performed. *Tangin-aine* and *tinaba bakabu* were the most loved and common.¹

¹ Tataua, Tekabwibwi on Tabiteuea North, pers. comm., December 1984. Toakai and *unimane* of Tabiteuea North, Utiroa, pers. comm., December 1990.

A *bakabu* of a story could exist in several versions. All versions are known by the 'master chroniclers', and all versions would be told if that story or *bakabu* of that tradition was performed. Like the synoptic gospels, the versions of the *bakabu* recorded the same event from different perspectives or were constructed with a particular audience in mind. Which of the *bakabu* was correct? According to Tataua, the *ikawai* knew the *bakabu* in their different versions and accepted all to be true.

(b) *The Katake and Taumanintananga*

The *katake* and *taumanintananga* are two methods of transmitting a *karaki* where the whole texts are chanted. Their difference from the *bakabu* is that the latter has the *karaki* in formal speech with only selected portions chanted to get the feeling of the characters and the context, whereas in the *katake* and *taumanintananga* the whole *karaki* is chanted.

The *katake* could be a lament sung as a dirge, or simply a narrative recording a war, a courtship, a disaster or plague. A *katake* is a tale chanted by the singer to those informed. In fact, the term *katake* is a shortened form of *kataketakeia*, meaning to pronounce something or to raise one's voice. The singer will sit up, introduce his or her *katake* or part of the *karaki*, and then sing. Between each verse, the singer takes a break, catches his or her breath by introducing the next verse and then continues.

The difference between the *katake* and the *taumanintananga* is that the singer of the latter tells the tale to himself 'aloud' so that the listeners can hear his version. In performing the *taumanintananga*, the singer puts his hand about his ear and holds his ear-lobe while at the same time blocking his ear, so that what the singer, in fact, is hearing is his own chant or the version he is singing. Unlike the singer of the *katake* who sings the lines of the accepted and common story, the singer in the *taumanintananga* sings to himself 'aloud' what he and the members of his *utu* believe so that others might also hear.

The *karaki* in the *taumanintananga* is usually controversial, but because it is a *taumanintananga* - where one is hearing oneself 'aloud' - no one can challenge the singer. This way of telling the *karaki* was, and still is, a polite way of telling people one's own particular version of an event publicly; it may be different from the accepted tradition, but the people will still listen to it.

As with the *katake*, the scenes in the *taumanintananga* are also introduced. This acts as breaks to let the singer think and breathe. The singing in both the *katake* and *taumanintananga* is quite long, the *taumanintananga* especially for it is up to the singer where he stops. The aim is to show the different version and the main points in which it differs from the 'orthodox' version.

The tunes for the *taumanintanina* are not usually fixed, for they just come through as the singer closes his eyes and sings. However, because a *taumanintanina* could be sung several times at gatherings or for pleasure when the *unimane* or *unaine* are alone or lulling their grandchildren, the notes become fixed. For that reason, it is rare to find two old men or women singing the words and tune of a chant which is a *taumanintanina*. But for the *katake*, the words as well as the notes correspond, so it is possible for more than one person to chant a *katake* at the same time.

The *katake* and *taumanintanina* are significant means of transmitting traditional stories. In the case of the *katake*, the verses are quite reliable as the notes to which they are sung prevent omissions or inclusions, and to that extent prohibit changing the words. They have a fixed text. Because they are chants, people hear them more often and can memorise them better than in their verbal narrated form in the *maneaba* or as lessons taught at home.² As for the *taumanintanina*, we cannot be totally suspicious of it. After all, it records the memory of the few that tend to hold on to what they believe to have been the exact version of what actually happened. It is their own point of view or interpretation of the traditions as they were handed down to them. For the point of view they represent, the words of the *taumanintanina* are important and authentic elements of the *karaki* alongside the *katake* or the narrated *karaki* by 'master chroniclers'.

c) *Maroro* (storytelling)

Maroro is a verbal narration of the traditions told either in the *maneaba* where all the people are gathered or in the seclusion of the home. In the case of *maroro* in the *maneaba*, where the *karaki* of the elders is being recounted, the chronicler is usually an *unimane* from the important *boti* or *utu* on the island, though nowadays it is not uncommon to find *unimane* from other *boti* or *utu* telling a *karaki* in the *maneaba*.

A central characteristic of the traditions told as *maroro* in a gathering is that they are usually universal. That is, the traditions are common and are shared by all the groups in the *maneaba*. The chronicler in his telling is careful to leave out aspects of the *karaki* that are likely to cause uneasiness and insult to groups. Nor was he allowed by custom to exalt the stories of his own group and immediate ancestors. And so he recounted what each group in the *maneaba* wanted and would like to hear. That is to say, the traditions told in gatherings are not usually as detailed, nor particular to or concerned with any group, as those one would hear in the seclusion of the home are. The

² Nei Kaingaata knew most, if not all, of the *katake* of her grandfather for he often sang them many times over at night before going to sleep. Kaingaata, pers. comm., Makin, 1990.

common themes upon which the traditions chosen by the chronicler to tell are strung, and which bind them together as one 'whole' story for the occasion, are shared motifs, common participating ancestors, unity, and peace.

The casual talk or the serious lessons taught at home are usually about particular stories and of two types. On the one hand they are detailed accounts of one's own genealogy and clan history in which one may find reason to boast and have pride; the most common are stories of wars where one's ancestors are the champions. On the other they are detailed accounts of other clans that will make those clans vulnerable. Most clans, if not all, have such stories, but they do not communicate them to children and grandchildren; and by whatever means possible each clan is determined to make sure that such stories are erased from the memory of the larger community. However, through casual talk such stories are preserved and communicated.

The tellers of the 'bedtime stories' are usually the grandparents. Somehow it has become one of the main preoccupations of the grandparents and to an extent an obligation on their part to teach their grandchildren not only the practicalities of everyday life but the niceties of Gilbertese custom and manners found in the oral traditions. Though these bedtimes stories are usually in the category of *karaki aika Iango*, coupled with exaggerations and imagination, at times they can be serious lessons concerned with magic and spells or secrets about the skills and arts known only in the *utu*. In this transmission, though many are communicated, in particular those considered and chosen by the grandparents as of great importance to their grandchildren are told; those considered unimportant were very rarely told and, hence, have become lost for ever. The story of Naubwebwe, for instance, which is told only partly in the game of *wau* (string figures), is one such story that has become lost.

CHAPTER 6

Periods of History

The Extent of Gilbertese Oral Tradition

The extent to which the scope of narratives in oral traditions (*karaki aika rongorongo*) are extended into the accepted and written history of the Gilbertese people after contact with the outside world is not the same for every island in the group. On some islands what is considered as a *karaki nikawai* (narrative of the past) may have as its last narrative events that took place prior to the coming of the Europeans, while on some islands the concluding narratives are more recent events after European contact. On Makin and Butaritari the *karaki nikawai* ended with the abolition of the royal house in 1963.¹ On the central islands of Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka, their traditions became canonised after the death of their *Uea Binoka* in 1892, the year the British Protectorate was declared. Although stories after the time of Binoka can still be found today on Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka, they are not revered as sacred stories of the past, nor are they preserved necessarily as stories for posterity. They are circulated and transmitted rather as stories in response to curiosity about the one-time great royal house of Tuangaona.

But though there are differences in the extent or length of island traditions, with some having genealogical lists that extend to the present, for most chroniclers of the *maneaba* tradition, the accepted extreme end of the content of the *karaki nikawai* are the great wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, about 13 generations ago from 1900.

The most important factors that tend to affect the extent of the *karaki* are the control of the people over their way of life and the future; that is, where the chroniclers feel that their way of life is changed and determined or controlled by others (Europeans for example) or where they feel that their

¹ The compilers of the Makin and Butaritari royal traditions put their work into writing about 1952. Because Na Kaiea (king of Makin and Butaritari 1912-54) commissioned the work, the book was known as 'Ana Boki ni Karaki Na Kaiea' (Na Kaiea's Book of Stories). Bernd Lambert, 'Uean Abara: The high chiefs of Butaritari and Makin as kinsmen and office-holders', in Niel Gunson (ed.), *The Changing Pacific: Essays in Honour of H.E. Maude* (Melbourne 1978), 90f.

future is controlled by others, that is where the proper *karaki nikawai* should end. Hence, the contact with Europeans has always been seen by many as the proper end of the *karaki nikawai*, for the *karaki* should always be nothing but the story of the ancestors and their descendants in the Gilberts.

The first serious interest in the preservation and communication of the traditions for posterity began with the time of the establishment of the first *maneaba*. This is obvious because stories of earlier times before the *maneaba* tend to show no real interest in the proper sequence and chronology of events and in the individual groups of the community. After the first *maneaba*, the contents of many *karaki nikawai* become detailed and concerned mainly with the intricate politics of the *maneaba* and districts. In the Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition, for example, the important events are the partitioning of the *maneaba*, the elimination of *boti* or groups from the *maneaba* and by whom, the allocation of new sitting places to new clans, and the redistribution of prerogatives and duties of *boti* in the district or island.

However, even before the establishment of the *maneaba* there were probably groups interested in their clan stories and genealogies, influential people such as those of Naubwebwe and their allies. But since little is known about them, apart from the fact that their major group was reduced to slavery by the house of Kirata on Tarawa, one can only conclude that if they ever had traditions of their *ikawai*, their masters successfully obliterated them from the memory of the people.

The group responsible for the first serious collection and editing of the island stories to form a common tradition or a history of the people and the islands is the Karongoa clan.² They were a great people, in stature and in numbers. As recorded in the traditions, they spread their influence either by subjugating weaker islands or converting the resisting clans to their religious cult. This clan became accepted as guardians of the traditional stories from times of old to the settlement in the islands.³ Thus, they became the '*maneaba* chroniclers' - recognised authorities whose stories were the official tradition of the people, providing not only the content of Gilbertese *karaki nikawai* but also the basis or framework of all Gilbertese historical narratives or reconstructions.

² For the Gilbertese canon of oral tradition, see Chapter 11.

³ For more discussion on the Karongoa clan, see Chapter 12.

Grouping by the Actors

Gilbertese history, then, following the *karaki nikawai* or the *maneaba* traditions as re-constructed by the tellers of the *maneaba* traditions, can be divided into three quite distinct periods:

- a) *Te roro n anti* (age of the spirits/gods);
- b) *Te roro n anti-ma-aomata* (age of spirit-men or half human gods); and
- c) *Te roro n aomata* (age of true humans).

Though there is no real problem as to unanimity of the *maneaba* traditions in the recognition of these three periods, a problem is caused by the extent of penetration of the second period, the *roro n anti-ma-aomata*, into the *roro n aomata*. There is also disagreement concerning the penetration of the *karaki nikawai* of the *maneaba* into modern Gilbertese history, because for some *maneaba* or islands their *karaki nikawai* ended at the time before contact with Europeans, while for others it continued after contact.

(a) *Te Roro n Anti-ma-aomata* (Age of Spirit-men)

The material on this age, as in the the age of *anti* and of *aomata*, is largely the work of the Karongoa historian.⁴ The distinctive character of this age is that it is dominated by superhuman beings and by spirits or gods who had no fixed abode but moved from place to place until they finally settled in the Gilberts. Whether they originated from *moone* (land below the ground) or from *karawa* (land above), or from distant lands in the west, according to the Karongoa historians, these beings are to be interpreted as the ancestors of the Gilbertese people.

Much of the material concerning this age is arranged to provide not only the contexts for the coming or emergence of the Karongoa clan but also the supernatural pretexts and justification for the privileges of the clan and the obligations of other clans. Of course, chroniclers of other islands or districts reworked the traditions later, with the result that they do not readily betray their Karongoa origin and interest.

As suggested by the Karongoa historian, then, the ancestors of the people of the Gilberts are to be sought amongst the successive waves of migrants that settled the islands of the Pacific region who are both *beroro* (sooty black) and *i-matang* (fair-skinned). According to the ancestry as preserved in the Karongoa creed recorded in the first creation myth, it is these groups, in

⁴ For the best sources of Karongoa traditions, see Tione Baraka's manuscript from a *unimane* of Karongoa on Nikunau, 'Karakini Karongoa' transcribed in 1934, Maude Papers (published as *The Story of Karongoa*, Suva 1991); and Jean-Paul Latouche, *Mythistoire Tungaru: Cosmologies et Genealogies aux Iles Gilberts* (Paris 1984), recorded mainly from the *unimane* of Aonuuka on Nikunau.

particular the progeny of the intermarriage of the *beroro* and the *i-matang* groups, that are the ancestors.⁵ The myth states that:

The *Bo* (darkness) was called the male, and the *Maki* was called the female. Between them was their child *Te Kai* (The tree), whose trunk was hollow. And there was another child of theirs which grew from *Te Neinei* (Water) and *Te Tano* (Earth), named *Rikin-te-atibu* (Stone-created); and he married *Nei Teakea*⁶ (Nothingness), whose parents were not known, for there was neither Heaven nor Earth at that time, since they were not yet separated: and they had male children, *Ten Te I-Matang* (a man from/of Matang), *Ten Nareau* (the Spider), *Ten Nakika* and *Ten Nao* (the Wave).

In this Karongoa reconstruction, *Ten Te I-Matang* and *Ten Nareau* are the original inhabitants of the islands for they are the children of the Earth (the land) and Nothingness. *Ten Nareau*, who is always personified as a 'little fellow', cunning, and 'unscrupulous', is representative of the *beroro* people who for some time were in conflict with the fair-skinned *i-Matang*.⁷

The Karongoa creed went on to claim that *Ten Nareau* married *Nei Te Bu-ni-Matang* (the daughter/breed of Matang) and later *Nei Te Bu-n-Tamoa* (the daughter/breed of Tamoa). What can be deduced from this is that the *beroro* people intermarried with their fair-skinned rivals and managed to live in the islands, though not without friction. After several generations some groups of the progeny of the *i-Matang* and the *Nareau* dark-skinned people decided to leave the Gilberts in search of more propitious homes. They travelled southward as far as Samoa.

In Samoa they met 'Samoans' who worshipped the same gods and whose ancestors, like theirs, came from Matang: they were their distant relatives from the 'west'. They lived among them on Tavaii (Savaii) for several generations, and intermarried with them as well as with the autochthones. In Samoa, they coached their children on the origins of their fathers in Matang in the 'west' as well as about those in the Gilberts; hence, some were able to make journeys back and forth to the Gilberts, knowing precisely where to land and whom to visit, until their group was finally driven out of Samoa several generations later.⁸ The progeny of this last intermarriage, the

⁵ The original Karongoa tradition, as in Tione Baraka's manuscript, preserves two stories of creation which have been put one after another by the Karongoa historians.

⁶ *Nei* is the prefix for females and *Ten* or its euphonic variations *Tem* or *Teng* (*Na*, *Nan*, *Nam*, *Nang* on Makin and Butaritari) is the prefix for males.

⁷ Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations, Myth and Magic from the Gilbert Islands: Early Writings of Sir Arthur Grimble* (London 1972), 94-104.

⁸ See p.38 fn 4 for the traffic between the Gilberts and Savaii.

i-Tamoa ('Samoans'), on their return to the Gilberts, established themselves as rulers there.

(b) *The Roro n Aomata* (Age of Humans)

This is perhaps the most difficult age to identify in the traditions. Although the age is at the end of the *roro n antimaomata* traditions, chroniclers are in disagreement as to where the *roro n antimaomata* ends. Nonetheless, several points are obvious concerning the stories that are accepted generally as belonging to the age of true humans.

1. The characters are not superhuman beings.
2. The stories are chronologically organised and can be tested for authenticity as many tell of events that happened immediately before European contact or even after.
3. The narratives tend to follow mainly the exploits and activities of the dominating or ruling clans.
4. Attempts have been made to suggest that the record or narrative is communal.
5. Where the narratives continue into the time after European contact, care has been taken to tell only the stories of the islanders, and no real interest is shown in stories concerning exploits and activities of Europeans.
6. Where Europeans are mentioned in the narratives, they are accidents in the history of the islands, a history in which islanders' ancestors as well as they themselves are in control.

Grouping by Events

The content of the Gilbertese *karaki nikawai* came into being in the course of history, and most of it has to do with history and society. The form in which this history is presented through the generations is a testimony of belief, as well as propaganda. Though an attempt is made to preserve the stories in their original historically pure form, the fact that a number of stories have to be interpreted and applied to the present generation alters their meaning and hence their content to a certain degree.

(a) *Imain te riki: Anti ao Mamananga Ngkoa* (Prehistory: Gods and the Migratory Antiquity)

The story of the islands and the people of the Gilberts is part of the long story of land formation and the climatic changes in the region that took thousands of years. It is a long story and does not concern us very much. What is of interest to us is the history of the islands after the arrival of the first settlers until the contacts with Europeans in the late 18th but mainly in the early 19th century, for this is the context in which many of the oral traditions belong.

Of course, much of our knowledge of this 'prehistory' of the islands is highly conjectural, being based mainly on very little evidence available from archaeological diggings, linguistics, and ecological studies.⁹ Nonetheless, the following conjecture can be made about the islands of Micronesia, the Gilbert archipelago in particular.

The peopling of Micronesia and indeed Oceania as a whole was mainly from Southeast Asia via Melanesia, so most physical anthropologists, linguists, and archaeologists agree.¹⁰ Anthropologically, the people of Oceania are classified as Australoids and Mongoloids. Australoids are characterised by dark skins, dark woolly hair, and varied though normally short stature. They, 'the true indigenes of Indonesia and the Western Pacific', settled New Guinea, Australia and possibly some areas of island Melanesia more than 40,000 years ago.¹¹ From about 5,000 years ago Mongoloids expanded into Melanesia. They were much fairer and more medium in height than the Australoid indigenes whom they met and intermarried with before they expanded east, possibly far beyond New Caledonia and Vanuatu.¹²

About 1500 B.C., another group of Mongoloids entered Melanesia and contacted the progeny of that intermarriage between the Australoids and

⁹ The first archaeological diggings were by the Japanese in 1983 on Makin atoll and then in 1988 on Tamana. Jun Takayama, 'A pandanus fruit scraper from Makin Island, Kiribati, Central Pacific', *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association*, 8 (1988), 162f. See Rene Catala, 'Report on the Gilbert Islands: some aspects of human ecology', *Atoll Research Bulletin*, 1957, for flora and fauna of the islands. One of the trees that must have existed in the islands at the time of the first inhabitants is the pandanus, which can stand the brackish water better than any other tree with edible fruit (see p.59 on the pandanus), and thus, long before the coconut, was the main source of food for the early inhabitants. Its disappearance today and the changing vegetation of the islands are the result of the 19th century clearing of the bushes for the planting of coconut trees for the coconut oil trade and later the copra trade. H.E. Maude, 'The coconut oil trade of the Gilbert Islands', in *Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History* (Melbourne 1968). In the oral traditions as well as in ceremonies and rituals the pandanus tree has a prominent place in the life of the people. It is, perhaps, because of this that Grimble believed it to be the tree of the god Auriaria, the 'Kaintikuaba' (the tree/home of the people) planted in Samoa in the Makin-Butaritari tradition. Of course, we know that in the original vernacular and Grimble's original translation of the tradition, the tree was never identified as the pandanus. Grimble altered the text of the tradition by making the tree a pandanus. The new and manufactured version is the one published as Appendix I in A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Preliminary Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir No.12, 85-96.

¹⁰ Peter Bellwood, 'The Oceanic Context', in J.D. Jennings (ed.), *The Prehistory of Polynesia* (Canberra 1979), 6.

¹¹ Peter Bellwood, *The Polynesians: Prehistory of an Island People* (London 1978), 23. Bellwood, 'Oceanic Context', 10-13. The Australoids also expanded into parts of Melanesia as far as the Santa Cruz group, but the date of this extended movement remains unknown.

¹² Cf Andrew Pawley, 'On the Internal relationship of Eastern Oceanic Languages', in R.C. Green and M. Kelly (eds), *Studies in Oceanic Culture History* (Hawaii 1972), III, 133-5.

earlier Mongoloids.¹³ These newcomers were skilled in canoe building and seafaring as well as the art of cultivating crops (even animal farming). With such skills they managed to populate the rest of the islands of the Pacific.¹⁴

The first settlers of the Gilbert islands could, then, have been any Melanesian migrants from northern Vanuatu from about 2000 to 1600 B.C. The first groups were followed by more powerful Mongoloids who could have expanded from the islands of Southeast Asia using the Santa Cruz islands of the Solomons as stepping stones.¹⁵ This also tends to be the case allowed by oral traditions which seem to identify these islands in Southeast Asia with those in the Banda Sea, east of the islands of present day Indonesia.¹⁶ This latter group were different from those who had earlier settled in Tonga and Samoa. Their migration, therefore, from the islands of Southeast Asia would have occurred from about the close of the first millennium A.D to the beginning of the second millennium.

From oral traditions, the following conjectures can be made: that the original inhabitants of the islands were dark skinned, woolly haired, with large ears, and covered in scars which were probably healed wounds or tattoos. These were the dark-skinned people who came from the east and settled mainly on Banaba. They were probably few in number, considering the fact that many of the southern islands were unknown in the traditions that are distinctively strands of 'dark-skinned tradition'.

From Banaba some of these dark-skinned folk migrated to the rest of the Gilberts, settling first on Tarawa and in the northern and central islands of the group. But this migration from Banaba did not take place until after the arrival of another group of people from the northwest, for when the Nareau and Naubwebwe group left Banaba, they had already been influenced by stories and customs of this new group.¹⁷ The new arrivals were the Auriaria people and their allies, whose original home was somewhere 'in the west'.

And so from Tarawa the dark-skinned inhabitants of the traditions dispersed and settled Abaiang, Maiana, Butaritari, Makin, Abemama, Kuria, and Aranuka. Some traditions claim that these nearby islands were identified

¹³ Bellwood, 'Oceanic Context', 24.

¹⁴ B.R Finney, 'Voyaging', in Jennings, *The Prehistory*, 323-32; P.V Kirch, 'Subsistence and Ecology', *ibid.*, 296-305.

¹⁵ See the relationship of the Gilbertese language with those in the New Hebrides, in Pawley, 'On the Internal Relationship of Eastern Oceanic Languages' in Green and Kelly, *Studies in Oceanic Culture History*, III, 13.

¹⁶ See below for some of the islands visited by Obaia-te-buraerae in the traditions and also Chapter 7, fn 25, for the identity of some of the islands. Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations, Myth and Magic*, 87-91.

¹⁷ See Chapter 11 for aspects of Auriaria stories in the myth of the Nareau folk who went to Tarawa.

with references to Tarawa.¹⁸ This is told quite beautifully in one tradition from Abaiang that:

when Nareau had completed the work of creating the lands from pieces of Tarawa, he called unto Ngkoangkoa to mount upon the Uekera tree to look beyond into the vast ocean When Ngkoangkoa mounted upon the first branch, and looking northwards he could see a land. 'I sight an island due north!', he shouted. Nareau replied, 'Being an *aba* (land) *i meang* (north) it shall be called Aba-iang! (Land-to-the north)'. Thus, Abaiang was named.

Upon the second branch Ngkoangkoa could look further afar, and further north a land was in sight. Ngkoangkoa shouted, 'I sight a land which is *mronron* (round) for it is encircled by its *rakai* (reef), and appears as though it were a *ma* (fishtrap)!', cried Ngkoangkoa to Nareau. Nareau called back and said, 'It shall be called Marakei'.... And thus all the neighbouring islands, even Maiana, Abemama, Kuria, Aranuka (and Tamoa in the south) were sighted by Ngkoangkoa from Tarawa from upon the *Uekera* tree and names given by Nareau and his people on Tarawa.¹⁹

In other myths of the north and central islands, Tarawa is described as the *atun te Bongiroro* (the head of the Bongiroro).²⁰

These dark-skinned settlers had a culture quite distinct from those that came later. Indications survive that they were masters of black magic and sorcery, and were cunning in warfare. Their gods were Nareau, Nakaa, and Tabakea, who were *beroro* (dark skinned), woolly haired, with flapping ears, and very cunning - clear representations of this stock.²¹ In a myth from Nauru, an island near the Gilbert group, Nareau is the son of Tabakea. His brothers are Auriaria, Taburimai, and Teukeukenanti. However, since these brothers were *kanga kanoan te roki* (lit. as if inhabitants of the bleaching house), that is, were fair skinned, they cannot be identified with the inhabitants of the islands and therefore were the 'new arrivals'. In this Nauruan myth we are dealing with a tradition after the two races had intermarried and were living together, though there is still a clear indication of tension in this strand of tradition.²²

¹⁸ In one Banaban myth Nareau went as far as Beru where he begot a daughter, Nei Anginimaeao, who married Auriaria when he returned from his adventures in the south (Samoa). See Grimbale Papers, Mfm 133 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions', D 22, Banaban Creation-myth with appendices (given by Nei Tearia of Banaba) #5 and #8 (H.C. and H.E. Maude, *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Suva 1994), 21-5).

¹⁹ E. Tibwere (comp.), 1915, 'Karakia I-Tungaru' (The history of the Gilbert Islands collected from Ten Teuea [Tarawa], Nariki [Tarawa] and Tabuia [Abaiang], 31-5, Pateman Papers. Much of this work of Tibwere was published in E. Tibwere et al., *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, ed. May Pateman (Rongorongo 1942).

²⁰ Grimbale Papers, Mfm 133, A:Banaban series. See also Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru', 29ff, where all the lands were created from the pieces thrown off from Tarawa.

²¹ Rosemary Grimbale, *Migrations*, 94-104.

²² For a version of the myth see *ibid.*, 94ff.

Banaban myths suggest that the first inhabitants practised cannibalism, for when Auriaria, a god of the fair-skinned later arrivals, landed on Banaba, Nei Aromangati and Nei Noumangati were thinking of eating him and his companion. Such a habit was abolished when 'Auriaria *raira* (lit. overturned) Banaba burying Tabakea (former god) underneath it', that is, reformed the islanders old practices and established himself. With his sister-wife Nei Tituabine, he replaced Tabakea as the *anti* and protector of the people of Banaba.²³ As to the sporadic indications of cannibalism also found in the traditions, especially in the southern islands, these were religious in nature or expressions of jealousy and great anger during battle.²⁴

In this era of the dark-skinned people, a dynasty arose. This was the house of Naubwebwe. It is unclear from the traditions when this house established its rule, but the fact (according to tradition) that the namesake Noubwebwe was an *inaomata*, a landowner or respected individual, and had subjects on other islands, suggests that the rule of this house was established long before the coming of the 'later arrivals' - the fair-skinned intruders from Samoa.²⁵ To this house of Naubwebwe may be credited the first serious consolidation of the people into a whole - a particular people.

Unfortunately for the house of Naubwebwe, they were overthrown in the early years of contact with fair-skinned intruders who came from Samoa, who reduced them to slavery to prevent any further attempt to rouse their loyal subjects on other islands. The new ruling house was known as the house of Kirata or Ten Tebau (an ancestor of Kirata).²⁶ This happened some

²³ Ibid., 46.

²⁴ The choice of food, the first born children, indicates a religious motive rather than to satisfy the appetite. See Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People*, 91. The canoe crests of certain Karongoa families are *kanga atun te aomata*, *kanuringan kanan Teuribaba* - look like human skulls from a distance, a one-time food of Teuribaba. Iotamo, 'Rongorongon Beru ae Karakin Nikunau', 26, Pateman Papers.

²⁵ In the Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, Tarawa Series, as well as in Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru', Noubwebwe, the namesake of the Naubwebwe individual or house in the Melanesian era, was the *kaunga* of Beia and Tekaa'i when the 'Samoans' were taking over the islands. In the stories associated with the game of *wau*, string figures or cats-cradle, which probably belong to some forgotten myths which tell of the various stages of creation, Noubwebwe is the name of the god of the underworld who tends to have no significance apart from being the keeper of the gates to the ancestral land of Matang, a place assigned to him by the editors of the traditions after the two distinct groups of people had mixed together.

²⁶ Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru', 57ff. In this Abaiang and Tarawa tradition the tellers of the *karaki* take their story back to the origins of the ruling house to Ten Tebau *te moa n aomata nikoaua* (the first real human being) after the gods and the spirits. Before Ten Tebau was the era of *tiaki aomata nikoaua* (not truly human), which in the Gilbertese sense means *rang* (fool) or *kaunga* (slave), and so affirms the authenticity and validity of the ruling line. Since there was a Kirata who was dark skinned (Kirata te Batara) among the rulers of this house the colour of his skin was elevated into a respectable title, which could mean Sir Kirata the Black. Such a ruler reflects a ruling house in which intermarriage had already taken place between the conquered and the conqueror.

generations before the main bulk of the 'Samoans' migrated into the Gilberts. In the Tarawa traditions, during the time the 'Samoans' were establishing themselves in the islands, the subjugated Naubwebwe clan formed an alliance with some of them through intermarriage and managed for a time to put the troubles at bay until finally they decided to leave Tarawa.²⁷ But as Beia and Tekaa, the rulers of Tarawa, were uncertain about this Naubwebwe house, which might stir up their former subjects and those loyal to them to overthrow their rule, Beia and Tekaa took to their canoe and caught up with them on Nonouti and slew them there.²⁸

That fair-skinned people followed these dark-skinned inhabitants from their homelands in the west and intermarried with them after the racial friction had been eased; and that they stayed for some time on Banaba and some other islands before continuing south; that they came to Samoa where they came across distant relatives; that they intermarried with them and settled amongst them for several generations before they were expelled and returned as 'Samoans' along their invasion route to the Gilberts where a number of their group had established themselves - all this is supported by the traditions.

They brought many skills, even land-finding at sea, and certain arts of fishing. They brought the betel-chewing habit, known then in the Gilberts as *te renga* from *Bukiroro*, a line of islands in the west.²⁹ They brought various styles of cooking - *te ai ni Kiroro* (the oven of Kiroro) for instance; there was also the Ruanuna oven, suggesting a connection with Lieuenieua (Ontong

²⁷ Noubwebwe married Nei Nimanoa who came with her brothers Uamumuri, Nanikain and Tabutoa on board their canoe *Te Akabutoatoa* which originally was from Samoa. The name of the canoe *Akabutoatoa* in Polynesian would mean *aka*, *waka* or *vaka* (canoe) of the *toatoa* (warriors). In Gilbertese it would mean the canoe of the *bu* (breed) of *toatoa* (giant/great warriors). Kaure, n.d., 'Te Karaki Nikawai. Traditions from Abaiang and Tarawa traditions', 33-6, Pateman Papers. Another version concerning Nei Nimanoa is in Latouche, *Mythistoire Tungaru*, 241-7 and 259-65.

²⁸ Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru', 68-72, 95-102. The children of Noubwebwe and Nei Nimanoa left Tarawa with their parents for other islands and finally settled on Nonouti and married a Beru woman, Nei Teweia. When the party of Beia and Tekaa caught up with them on Nonouti Nei Teweia was already pregnant. The child was in fact the son of Uamumuri and Nanikain and Tabutoa; but by Gilbertese custom he was the *nati-ni-kauatabo* or *nati-ni-buoka* (lit. assisted child) of all three, as well as Beia and Tekai. It was considered that after conception frequent intercourse was necessary to *kaomata* (lit. make human) a foetus. Consequently when Uamumuri and his brothers died, Beia and Tekai assumed that duty. See Latouche, *Mythistoire*, 274 and fn 6, 276.

²⁹ Arthur Grimble identified Bukiroro as the islands of Gilolo in the Banda Sea. Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations*, 90.

Java), one of the Polynesian outliers of Melanesia.³⁰ They also brought edible fruit-bearing trees as well as kinds of pandanus different from those already in the islands: the powder from the pandanus was such ideal food for voyagers that its consumption was 'prohibited except on sea voyages, when it was consumed as the traveller wished'.³¹

Their gods were their deified ancestors, Auriaria and Tabuariki being their two great hero-gods, as well as Nei Tituabine and Nei Teiti.³² Tabuariki was associated with agriculture as he was the god of thunder. Auriaria, Au the *riaria* (feared, great or terrible), was god of war. Being two great hero-gods, their associations were easily confused, such that both could be consulted in times of war as well as for a successful harvest.³³ In the Karongoa traditions, both gods are the ancestors of the clan.³⁴

However, though the two gods were usually confused, Auriaria soon superseded Tabuariki: in rituals and ceremonies, he was more often invoked. One can only assume that, as god of war, he was particularly significant because the daily activity was warfare, either to protect one's own land or take other people's, especially when those that sojourned in Samoa returned to live in the islands again. For in Samoa the Auriaria folk had become great warriors: their occupation was to collect human skulls, the food of the Samoan king at that time.³⁵ They also adopted the cannibalistic rituals of the cult of Rongo, hence their name *Ka-rongo-a* (lit. to make [it] Rongo), upon whose altar were crushed many human skulls.³⁶ Auriaria had adopted the identity of Rongo or had become Rongo himself. The *marae*, which plays a

³⁰ In the traditions, Ontong Java was visited by Obaia-te-buraerae and evidently known to the Gilbertese, presumably as a place for refreshment on the way from Matang and other islands in the west to the Gilberts. Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations*, 123. Cf. A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations*, 89.

³¹ A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations*, 39.

³² The expression of anger, '*E bia boia Tabuariki ma Auriaria me a mate*' (How that I wish he were smitten and killed by Tabuariki and Auriaria!), had its origin at the time when the two ancestor gods were both controlling the islands of the group. E. Tibwere, 'Te Katei ni Kiribati' (Notes on Gilbertese Customs and Traditions), 19-23, Pateman Papers.

³³ Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations*, 23, 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

³⁵ In Karongoa traditions the king was known as Batiku te Tabanou (Batiku the Skull). See chapter 12 for the identity of Batiku and the places from where his food was fetched. The canoe tufts of Karongoa were 'to look like the appearance of skulls from a distance, the favourite food of Teuribaba, one of their ancestors'. Iotamo, 'Rongorongon Beru ae Karakin Nikunau', 26, Pateman Papers.

³⁶ See William W. Gill, *Myths and Song from the South Pacific* (London 1977, first pub. 1876), 283-315, for the parallel cult of Rongo and Auriaria on Mangaia in the Cook Islands. Of course, Rongo is widespread throughout Polynesia. Rongo was also a god of thunder, thus it is not surprising that Auriaria and Tabuariki were easily confused, and Tabuariki became the god of the Karongoa clan as well.

significant role in the worship of Rongo, these sojourners adopted and made their own in the Gilberts; hence, in fact, the emergence of the *maneaba* - itself a thatched *marae* where each clan ancestor or god, through the living, had a *boti* (sitting place) in the courts of Auriaria.³⁷

It is from this cult of Auriaria in its Polynesian aspect through the influence of its priests and warriors that a dominating culture emerged. A great horde when they entered the islands, these people quickly asserted their primacy; but not without tension on some islands, while on others more diplomatic means were used as when Tematawarebwe formed an alliance with the people of Beru.³⁸ On other islands there was not much struggle, as on Tamana and Arorae - 'for when the members of this party from Samoa landed they planted their *Kanawa* tree'; that is, they established themselves without much resistance. In all, it is quite clear from the traditions that whatever actually happened, it was after subjugation or through peaceful means that the 'Samoans' settled among and intermarried with the descendants of those who had not migrated to Samoa, and together they became ancestors of the present people of the Gilberts, with the 'Samoans' slightly dominating because of their powerful religion and warlike nature and way of life.

(b) *Settlement and Early History*

The islands affected directly by these 'Samoans' were Tarawa, Beru, Nikunau, Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Arorae and Tamana, Makin and Butaritari.³⁹ From them the rest of the islands in the group were influenced. Where Tabuariki was revered, there was not much struggle against the cult or its sociopolitical repercussions, nor on islands where clans were ready to form an alliance with the people of Karongoa. Judging from the status of the clan deities - which were reduced to having no significance to the community at large - it is quite conclusive that the Auriaria people and cult had controlled the islands in the first few generations after the re-entry into the Gilberts. The *maneaba* was the very centre of transformation in the way of life, the focus of the community, the place from which the community was both blessed and

³⁷ This *maneaba* was first built in the Gilberts by Tematawarebwe in the time of his grandson Ten Teweia on Beru. Tione Baraka, *The Story of Karongoa*, ed. H.E. Maude (Suva 1991), 25. For the relationship of the *maneaba* and the *marae*, see H.E. Maude, *The Gilbertese Maneaba* (Suva 1980), 8. Cf. E.S.C. Handy, *Polynesian Religion*, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Bulletin 34 (Hawaii 1927), 170, where *marae* in Polynesia have similar characteristics to those in the Gilberts, 'an area of earth or rubble slightly elevated and surrounded or encased with stone or coral blocks'. The *marae* (*malae*) in western Polynesia is closer to the Gilbertese *marae* than that of eastern Polynesia.

³⁸ H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963), 10, where Tematawarebwe married a female descendant of Tabuariki.

³⁹ Latouche, *Mythistoire Tungaru*, 133-271.

cursed; where clans took their seats to discuss war or peace; where 'all behaviour under its roof had to be seemly, decorous, and in strict conformity with custom'.⁴⁰

The rituals and spells concerning the fixing of the ridge-capping of the *maneaba* reveal that it was a shrine where human skulls were crushed. After the ceremony,

the capper again mounted to the ridge carrying with him four unhusked coconuts. The 'face' of one of these he struck off at the northern end of the ridge, and sprinkling the water over the ridge capping there he muttered the following words:

Bubun ai aba, bubun ai aba

Bubun ai irou, bubun ai irou, bubun ai irou

*Ko [ka kang] kanam rara....*⁴¹

The coconut represents the head of a man, and the water his blood which is sprinkled upon the capping as in a sacrificial offering to a god to bring good fortune.

The name of the island group which came to be accepted and to an extent universal in the time of the 'Samoans' was Tungaru. This was the name popular in the time of the Kiratas when they were ruling in the islands as distinct from other peoples who were occasional visitors - the I-Tamoa (Samoans), the I-Waruwaru (?) and the I-Tabaora (?)⁴² According to tradition, the reign of Kirata, grandfather of Beia and Tekaa, was one of the greatest, when the people of Tarawa were flourishing, and Tungaru was the common name for all the islands. This was a generation or two before those in Samoa returned to the Gilberts.

The sojourn in Samoa can be put, from genealogical lists now available, as somewhere about 1200 to 1300 A.D.⁴³ The period after the re-entry of the 'Samoans' is usually identified in the traditions as one of peace and revival; a time when a distinctive Gilbertese culture was taking shape because of the *maneaba* - though it was a peace occasionally disturbed by warring leaders who wanted more land or privileges in the *maneaba*. Contacts were possible

⁴⁰ Maude, *The Evolution*, 11.

⁴¹ Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations*, 212, gives a translation of another version of a spell with slight differences from this one from Maude, *The Gilbertese Maneaba*, 30.

⁴² In Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru', 97, the I-Waruwaru and I-Tabaora are mentioned but not actually defined. It was the kinsfolk of the I-Tamoa who sojourned in Samoa, who occasionally were present in the islands, as in the case of Baretoka who travelled to the Gilberts to get a wife. The majority of these 'Samoans' returned following the revolt and wars in Samoa known in the traditions as 'Uruakin Kaintikuaba' (The breaking of the resting place/home in Samoa).

⁴³ See the chronology in Chapter 14. Cf. H.E. Maude, 'On the Writing of Island History', paper given at the Pacific History Association Conference, Suva, Fiji, 1985.

between the islands, and thus the people had a common knowledge of one another as well as a common way of life.

The wars of Kaitu and Uakeia in the 16th century were an important milestone. Not only did they make possible the establishment of the *maneaba* in the manner of the Beru prototype, but they affected considerably the content of the traditions of many clans. For the traditions after these wars were much edited to fit new dimensions and opportunities that were the result of the changes in the various communities brought about by the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia. In many ways this editorial work was the most serious attempt by the various clans in the islands after that of the 'Samoan' editorship by the dominating Karongoa clan. Whereas many if not all clan traditions were affected by the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, the traditions of the Karongoa clan remained unaffected, recording the war as merely another incident in the history of the islands.⁴⁴

(c) *Contact and Modern History*

Wider contacts with the outside world in the 19th century, when the Europeans were common visitors as well as residents in the islands, affected and in many ways brought an end to the 'olden days', especially when the activities of the people were conditioned by European trade and religion. For if there were any significant activities of the Europeans that were taken seriously by the people and in which they fully participated and engaged, they were trade, first simple barter and later the complexities of the coconut oil trade; and the new religion - Christianity. The impact varied from island to island, determined considerably by geographical location, so that, in general, trade was a feature of contact with northern and central islands because of their high rainfall and plentiful supply of provisions and materials, while religion was better received in the southern islands because of the religiosity of the people, and the much impoverished environment compared with the northern islands. Changes brought about by new commodities and religious challenges affected many of the traditional ways of doing things, as well as religious and social life. Gradually the traditional ways of doing things came to be referred to as ways of the past - as things people used to do before the coming of Europeans.

The final phase in this metamorphosis from the 'olden days' to the 'new age' occurred after the establishment of the British Protectorate, when

⁴⁴ In the Karongoa traditions very little space is given to the story of the wars and that only because of some close relations - Teinai III married the daughter of Kaitu. See Tione Baraka (comp.), *The Story of Karongoa: Narrated by an Unimane of the Boti Karongoa n Uea on Nikunau in 1934*, trans. G.H. Eastman, ed. H.E. Maude (Suva 1991), 60. The Karongoa tradition remains the canon of Gilbertese tradition.

colonial administrators demanded conduct and a way of life befitting that of their régime. One could almost say that during the early days of the colonial era, the age of the ancestors, the 'olden days', was already a thing of the past. For many Gilbertese who were *unimane* and *unaine* in the early days of British rule in the islands, time was already divided into two - the days of their forefathers, which they would refer to as *imain te man* (days before the Flag), or *n aia tai ake ngkoa* (days of the ancestors); and *tain te man* (days of the Flag), or *taai aikai* (these days). In conversation, and especially in the telling of stories concerning events before the Flag, a *unimane* or *unaine* would refer to those events as belonging to the 'olden days', and accounts of those days as *karaki nikawai*.

There are still those who feel that any events, other than those in the present century, that are important to an island or community, and are concerned with who the people are in relation to those from outside, must be regarded as *karaki nikawai*. Nevertheless, many *unimane* feel that the proper end of the *karaki nikawai*, the history of the ancestors and the people, should be the establishment of British rule in the islands when the people in many ways lost control of themselves and their future.

CHAPTER 7

Myth

CONTEMPORARY GILBERTESE MYTHS are composites formed or reconstructed from diverse sources inherited from previous generations, and mainly from the religious systems known to the inhabitants of the archipelago.¹ These myths, in particular the creation stories and those concerned with the beginnings of the land and the people, formed the early parts of most island traditions.

Many studies of myth tend to conclude that myths are functional. One cannot argue with this statement, for a lot of stories considered as myth are just that: important and of value only in their contemporary contexts, that is, they continue to be transmitted because of the important function they play in society. This is summed up by Malinowski:

Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilisation; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.²

The result is that myths are considered in no way valuable for historical reconstruction.

The purpose of this chapter is not to look for the function of myth in Gilbertese society, however, but rather to look at how it functions as story in Gilbertese oral tradition.³ That is, our interest is in myth as a literary whole

¹ See Chapter 11 for a fuller discussion of the various strands of traditions from a variety of systems and groups in the islands.

² Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926; New York 1971), 19.

³ Although the context of a tradition is important in the studying of its text - that is, the whole nature of the performance, the voice of the teller and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience, the hour of the day, and the season, with the background of the various anticipated events, the sociological context and the cultural role of the amusing story - it is sometimes exaggerated and unnecessary. This is the methodology Malinowski used in his study of the myths of the Trobriand Islands, a coral archipelago lying northeast of Papua New Guinea. (Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, 24, 27.) Not only do different cultures and peoples

or a type of story in a whole tradition, and what relation it has to other aspects of the same tradition, such as legend, or history. We will look at myth or mythical tales merely as *stories* and nothing more. In doing so, not only do we keep control over our interest concerning the 'function' of myth but we identify our main area of investigation: the importance and role of myth as a story in the work of story-telling by the greybeards of the Gilbert Islands.

However, since the work of the chroniclers, which involves the compilation and selection of the materials to form their story, is too vast a subject for a single chapter, and will be dealt with to some extent in the subsequent chapters, we will look specifically at the finished product: the various types of myth one can find in Gilbertese oral tradition.

Three types of myth can be found: the aetiological myth, consisting of the various cosmological myths, the etymological, and the aesthetic; the didactic myth, consisting of catechisms, law and custom, and the historical; and the ritual myth, consisting of the religious rites and rite texts (spells and incantations). The motives in the individual stories (in the various 'types') are clearly defined in the mind of the chronicler as he expands, controls and weaves together his myth-story to become a unit within the whole tradition.

It is necessary at this point to distinguish clearly those stories in Gilbertese oral tradition which we call myth.

1. They are stories concerned with gods and *anti*. Most are stories of creation, of the origin of islands and people.
2. They are supernatural stories, that is, they tell of events that are impossible for *aomata* to perform, and which can neither be repeated nor tested for authenticity.
3. They are stories that cannot be fitted into any chronological sequence of events in any island tradition, even if they could be tested for authenticity. They are just particular and independent stories.

There are other stories which, though close enough to the above to be called myths, I have identified as folk-tales or folk-traditions, many containing stories of animals, landmarks and plants. As an independent story, a folk-tale forms no part of any chronological sequence of events in any 'tradition', and, therefore, is better understood as an activity of

have their own peculiar understanding or definition of the activity of story telling, but they can have totally different uses of the office and the work of the story teller in their community as well. For the Trobriand Islanders, for example, their traditions, as Malinowski sees them, are more of seasonal rites with respect to their daily activities than 'stories of the past', whereas for the Gilbertese the traditions, though they may be used to achieve a desire or intention in the community, are in essence stories and nothing more: accounts of the activities of the gods, the *anti* and the *antimaomata*, as well as the *aomata*, performed for amusement as much as for informing the people of the past of the ancestors.

interrelationship between the chronicler and his contemporary audience, since it is an integral part of that sociocultural interaction. Hence, where I analyse folk-traditions it will be strictly in terms of their sociological and cultural function in Gilbertese society.⁴

Aetiological Myths

Aetiological myths are concerned with the nature and origin of the universe (cosmological stories) and to some extent the origin and place of man within that universe; the explanation of place names or the origin of certain customs (etymological stories); and the idea of beauty and satisfaction (aesthetic stories) even though the ugliness of life caused by the poverty of the environment is experienced daily.

(a) *Cosmological Stories*

Most stories begin with the nature and origin of the universe: 'it is fitting', according to one of Grimble's informants, that oral tradition 'should begin with the Beginning of Things. Then there shall be no going back and no confusion of heart.'⁵ In all the stories the beginning of the universe is the work of a single creator, whether Tabakea or Nareau. Most island traditions agree that Nareau is the creator of the Gilbertese universe - in some stories as sole creator, in others only as one who began the work but left it to be completed by another Nareau identified as the *kauoman* (second) or the *ataei* (younger), aided by a multitude of other beings.⁶

The period of the beginnings of the heavens and the earth and the lands below is known as *Te Bomatemaki*. The beings in this primeval period including the creator are called *kain te bomatemaki*, and the events referred to as *kanoan te bomatemaki*. However, tellers of tradition referring to this same period sometimes call it the *roro n anti* (age of *anti*, meaning the gods).⁷

⁴ See the discussion of folk-tales in the next chapter, where it is noted that some of them, though they are close enough and can be integrated into tradition as part of the whole discourse, still retain particularity, to the extent that they disturb the flow of the whole discourse from the beginning (myth) to the end (the chronicler himself, as a true story must end with the teller of the tradition).

⁵ H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963), 5.

⁶ Even though most Gilbertese traditions are agreed that Nareau (whether the elder or the younger) is the creator, I am inclined to believe that the original story of creation in the islands is that of the Tabakea creation myth. See below for the arguments against the Nareau creation stories.

⁷ The 'age of the *anti*' is very important for the chroniclers, for not only does it make their story *true* since all true stories must begin with the gods, but more than that, it acts as a safety valve that releases the pressure from critics, especially where the chronicler finds it hard to explain unintelligible units where he has mistakenly or even deliberately included them in his tradition. An event in the 'age of the *anti*', therefore, can sometimes be an issue for a debate

Te Bomatemaki is a word that can mean either the cleaving-and-the-tightening-together, or the darkness-and-the-cleaving-together. Both are derived from the various meanings of the composite word *bomatemaki*. Both meanings depict an object composed of two tightly cleaved together parts as one '*kanga boran te on*' ('like that of a turtle and its shell'), the common picture of the Gilbertese universe.⁸

Two cosmological stories are found in the traditions: one features Tabakea, the other, Nareau. Although it is not our intention to examine here the various stages in the emergence of myths, it is important to note that of the two, the Tabakea creation story is the older, and the basis from which the Nareau creation myth is constructed. This I shall argue in Chapter 11, but meanwhile the following points are important in considering the above contention:

1. No *utu* or clan in the islands today claims Nareau as their *ikawai* (ancestor) or founder of their *boti*.
2. In most stories of Nareau, the 'independent' stories as well as those that form part of the '*maneaba* tradition', Nareau makes fun of and finds pleasure in teasing the *ikawai* - Auriaria, Tabuariki, Taburimai and the rest of the fair-skinned deities - the ancestors of all the '*boti*-holders' or '*boti*-founders' in the *maneaba*.
3. The *bomatemaki*, which Nareau used to create the sky and the heavenly bodies as well as the lands and the people below, is a being rather than an object. As a being it is closer to Tabakea, the turtle, the tight-and-cleaved-together being, than Nareau the Spider.
4. Tabakea, rather than Nareau, is usually called *te ikawai* (the oldest) amongst all the gods in the islands.
5. Nearly every island tradition that claims Nareau as the creator contains at least two creation stories, one following another; whereas in the Tabakea-creator myth there is a distinctively single creation story running clearly from beginning to end.⁹

against the chronicler, but usually people are satisfied, for the gods 'did what they did. No man knows all their work' A.F. Grimble, *A Pattern of Islands* (London 1952), 167.

⁸ This explains why some traditions have Tabakea as the creator instead of Nareau, for Tabakea is the turtle - the tight-and-cleaved-together, *te bomatemaki*, from whose body the sky and the heavenly bodies are created as well as the earth and all that is within. Nareau after all is but a spider.

⁹ See the opening of the Karongoa tradition below collected by Tione Baraka, translated by G.H. Eastman and revised and edited by H.E. Maude for publication as *The Story of Karongoa* (Suva 1991), where two creation myths are placed together one after another:

The Work of Creation

- I. The Bo (darkness) was called the male, and the Maki was called the female. Between them was their child Te Kai (The tree), whose trunk was hollow. And there was another child

6. In the Tabakea creation stories, Nareau is the hero of the people. This explains why in the Nareau-creator stories there is usually the younger Nareau, or the *kikiteia* or the *rabakau* who was given the task of completing the work of creation, while Nareau the first replaces Tabakea.
7. The Tabakea-creator myth is peculiar to the island of Banaba which according to tradition is the original and ancestral home for many of the people in the northern and central Gilbert islands.¹⁰
8. Apart from Banaba, the Tabakea-creator myth is found also in the creation story of Nauru, an island not of the Gilbert group, where Tabakea is not only the creator, but the father and protector of Nareau who is threatened by his brothers, Auriaria and the company of the fair-skinned beings.¹¹
9. Banaba and Nauru, and the islands of Makin and Butaritari, were not affected by the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, and therefore these islands have older traditions.¹² The traditions in the rest of the islands were

of theirs which grew from Te Neinei (Water) and Te Tano (Earth), named Rikin-te-atibu (Stone-created); and he married Nei Teakea (Nothingness), whose parents were not known, for there was neither Heaven nor Earth at that time, since they were not yet separated: and they had male children, Ten Te I-Matang, Ten Nareau, Ten Nakika and Ten Nao.

- II Heaven and Earth were not yet known, for they were not yet separated. There were many people underneath, but they could not walk about, and they knew nothing at all for they seemed as it were senseless. The underneath was divided into two parts, East and West; and their boundary was the tree in the middle known as their child, and that tree leaned towards the North. There was an inhabitant of the tree, Nareautekikiteia, whose body was not visible but who spoke from within the tree as if he were telling Nareau the worker what he should do, teaching him what he should say.

In the original Gilbertese version, there was a connecting paragraph placed by the chronicler between the two as an attempt to join them together; however, this had been removed by the editor of the manuscript to Chapter 2, Section 17. Thus, the beginnings of what must have been two creation myths are exposed quite vividly. See Tione Baraka (comp.), Nov. 1934, 'Karakini Karongoa', 1, Maude Papers.

¹⁰ See also the account by the beachcomber Kirby who had been in the Gilberts since 1834. Horatio Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, under the command of Charles Wilkes, U.S.N.: Ethnology and Philology* (Philadelphia 1846), 187, 188.

¹¹ Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations, Myth and Magic from the Gilbert Islands* (London 1972), 100f.

¹² The Makin and Butaritari traditions do not have the Tabakea creator myth, but they have the Auriaria myth, presumably an original creation myth of the 'Samoans' or the earliest attempt by the 'Samoans' to suppress the Tabakea myth and elevate Auriaria as the *uea* (king) and *anti* (god) of all the inhabitants of the islands. For details of the Makin creation myth see Appendix I of A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir No.12, 85f.

standardised to the '*maneaba* tradition' effected by the *maneaba* machinery established after Kaitu and Uakeia.

(b) *Aesthetic Myths*

The best example of an aesthetic myth in Gilbertese oral tradition is the story of Nei Ikiku and Nei Nibarara, the woman on the moon. In the Nauru myth, it is Nei Ikiku who is the inhabitant of the moon. The story ridicules certain customs which involve the wasteful spending of foods for entertainment regardless of scarcity in the islands. Although the story is closer to a folk-tale story than to myth, its character agrees with our definition concerning stories considered myth. Several versions of the story exist today, some already modified to suit modern listeners.

The story features a young girl, Nei Ikiku, in a typical family who is the beloved of her father. At the first menses of his two elder daughters the father calls upon the fish from the depths to entertain the two girls and their guests by staging a feast with all kinds of food. For the eldest there was a big feast and entertainment. For the younger, an even bigger feast and entertainment. At the first menses of the youngest and most loved daughter, no feast, no entertainment and no guests were invited. The sisters laughed and teased her as the illegitimate daughter of their father. She hated them; even more her father for shaming her by not hosting the feast and entertainment, when all these years she had thought she was the favourite. Offended by all these things, Nei Ikiku decided to leave her sisters and her home. Along the beach she kicked whatever was in her way. Under a certain *nana* (broken coconut shell) she kicked, she found a plant which she took and nurtured. The plant grew almost overnight, and she mounted it and climbed to the moon.

There Nei Ikiku came upon an old woman sitting beside a fire boiling her son's toddy but with little success for she was blind. She was Nei Nibarara. Nei Ikiku who knew the secret of eye-cleansing restored the sight of the old woman. As a reward, Nei Ikiku was given all the things that dropped from the eye of the old woman that had prevented her from seeing, all the things a young girl needs before she is married - in particular an *ikiku* and *bwere* (both used in making mats), as well as all the spells and skills of an *ainenuma* (housewife).¹³ What more could a father give to his daughter? All these she brought back to the land below, where, upon arrival, she heard screams and much beating; it was her older sisters beaten by their husbands who complained that they were spoiled and good for nothing. This youngest

¹³ In modern versions of the story it is not a *ikuku* or a *bwere* that dropped off the eyes of the woman, but instead a bicycle, a washing machine, even a typewriter.

daughter, who never realised the intentions of her father, was not reconciled with him until his death. She could never forget the day she was humiliated in the village.

Some tellers of tradition do not end their story with the return and prosperity of this youngest daughter, but trace her genealogy after her marriage to themselves and their *utu* in the village. Of course, every listener knows that no such genealogy exists, but it makes a good ending to the story to make it *aomata* (more real) by extending it to the present. This explains why nearly all of the myths, cosmological, aesthetic or etymological, end with a list of names from the time of the story in the past to the teller himself.

(c) *Etymological*

The etymological myths in Gilbertese stories are similar to those of other cultures. They can have customs or landmarks as their subjects around which the details of interesting stories are told. On Aranuka island, for example, there is an indentation in the rock which looks like a large footprint. According to the people of Aranuka it is the footprint of Riiki, one of the beings in the primeval period who was commanded by Nareau to raise the sky on his shoulders.¹⁴ But Riiki, who is an eel, could hardly have had feet. More than that, Aranuka is not only an unlikely site for the creation activities in the Nareau-creator myth stories, but Aranuka only appeared some time after Riiki had stretched himself and was flung upwards by Nareau to become the Milky Way supporting the sky on his back. Nonetheless, the story can be accommodated to some extent into the Nareau-creator myth for the name of the island is Ara-nuka, meaning 'Our-Centre', because of its geographical position near the centre of the group. Hence the name 'Aranuka', the centre of the 'Gilbertese world' where Riiki must have stood when he raised the sky from the ground.

Didactic

The didactic myths have one thing in common: they are transmitted with great care, accuracy and with some secrecy. Their transmission is for posterity, so the disciples must be keen learners. A cosmological story can be confusing or unintelligible, but that is no real problem, for no one knows all that the gods have done. This is also acceptable with aesthetic or etymological stories - they can even be expanded or exaggerated. But not so for didactic myths, which have to be accurate and intelligible, for most of them contain

¹⁴ In Banraeaba and Bikenibeu village on South Tarawa, similar prints on the rocks can also be found. Niel Gunson was shown a 'footprint' at Tabiang on Abaiang in 1957 which was said to be that of the missionary Hiram Bingham. This was probably an updating of an earlier myth. N.Gunson, pers. comm., 1991.

not only skills but also important stories concerning the origins of certain rights and privileges and the duties of all the people in the district.

(a) *Catechistical*

The catechistical stories are aids to memory, in particular the remembrance of the arts important for livelihood. The myth of Rimwimata and Nei Auti, for instance, preserves the knowledge of good fishing seasons as well as the right time to do gardening on the *buakonikai*. In the myth of Nei Manganibuka and her son Teraaka, important fishing grounds are preserved as well as the secretive art of land finding and the knowledge of days of good and bad weather by the observation of certain elements, phenomena or behaviour of animals and fish.

As didactics, they are not only hidden from outsiders and known only to certain people, but they are preserved better, for who can forget an entertaining story about the travels of Teraaka and his fishing competitions with his uncles on the leese of Maiana, or Nikunau, or the game of *te boiri* (ball game) in the Rimwimata stories. The stories are spell-binding. And hidden amidst all the details are the catechisms, the real interest of the transmission.

(b) *Legal and Customary*

Legal stories are concerned with the proper and right conduct of the people. Though some 'laws' are hard to define, not to mention the particularities of one island from another that add to the confusion in the application or meaning of a law, the laws of the islands are practically similar. Take incest, for instance: as mentioned in Chapter 1, all the islands condemn the practice, though they differ when it comes to the definition of a relative with whom a relationship is permissible. The story of the incest of the children of Tai is an example of a legal myth. It features the indignation of the sun and his desire to punish his children. He sent them away from his sight without teaching them any skill and magic.¹⁵ They were not allowed to see his face again on pain of having their navel pierced by his ray and left to die. As punishment for incest, therefore, villagers in former days on many islands might put the couple together on a log or canoe and send them out to sea to be scorched and killed by the sun. On Tamana, only the man was put out to sea, while the woman was killed by placing a log upon her throat and crushing it.

The myths about the *maneaba* are numerous and necessary, for together with the spells and rituals they give a sense of sanctity to the *maneaba* which helps it function; the myths control behaviour under the roof, for between the layers of thatch are the *bunanti* (multitude of spirits/beings) who continually

¹⁵ Somehow this legal myth had been taken over by the myth of Bue and Rirongo.

watch all that happens inside the *maneaba* and curse those behaving in an unmannerly way.

(c) *Historical*

The historical myths are mainly the interpretations of chroniclers, either as attempts to protect the original stories or as their own mark or style of story-telling. The clan Karongoa, for instance, who consider their tradition as the only true tradition concerning the past of the ancestors, cannot tell their stories in plain narratives; most are passed down through generations in the form of myths. Of course, within the secrecy of the clan the stories are explained. On Marakei, for example, the people of Karongoa have their 'own peculiar versions of the basic traditions, which were not for the ears of outsiders'.¹⁶ The non-esoteric stories were told in simple and straightforward narratives.

Because this type of reconstruction of the past, in myths, is peculiar to the people of Karongoa, they alone can arbitrate between debating groups concerning the past; they know most of the myths for they are the work of their elders. Mautake, for instance, one of Sir Arthur Grimble's most important informants, a Karongoa on Marakei, was usually umpire when *utu* were in disagreement concerning the past.¹⁷

But though many Karongoa historians claim that esoteric myths still preserve actual historical incidents, most historical myths have lost their historical content in the transmittal process, and many of what we are left with today are simply myths about the ancestors. To make matters worse, many members of Karongoa disagree with one another concerning whether certain stories are 'myths' or actual historical events.

The story of *Uruakin te Kaintikuaba* (The Breaking of the tree Kaintikuaba) is a perfect example of a historical myth, which, according to many members of Karongoa, is a description of an internal dispute amongst the members of a group because of the disgraceful habits of some of the leaders.¹⁸ A similar story at about the time of the burning of the tree tells

¹⁶ Arthur Grimble, *A Pattern of Islands*, 166.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁸ Some of the leading groups in the story are depicted as birds at the crest of the tree who had Tetaake (a beautiful bird) as their totem, but had no wisdom in them for they excreted and committed other disgraceful things upon those below, so that those at the base of the tree decided to burn the tree down. Tione Baraka, 'The Story of the I-Kiribati according to the people of Karongoa', 12, Maude Papers. See also H.C. and H.E. Maude, *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Suva 1994), 126.

a story of Teuribaba who felt offended by his own people and sought vengeance by joining the enemy to kill members of his own group.¹⁹

Ritual

Ritual myths are concerned with rites of worship and religious ceremonies, as well as the texts of the spells or incantations to the gods and the *anti*. Though some are embedded in other types of myth or form part of them, they are sometimes removed from other myths, such as the cosmological stories, and told separately as religious or cultic stories of the gods.

(a) Rite Stories

Many myths of the rites of the gods or the *anti* are merely instructions supposedly delivered by the gods. Some rite myths are quite recent, like the myth surrounding Kourabi, or Rakunene, while some are quite old, such as the myth of Nei Karua, Nei Tabuki and Kaabunang. Still others are so archaic that their details are lost, such as that of Riiki and Tabuariki.

A detailed origin of Nareau is given in the Banaban myth as well as of Auriaria and Nei Tituabine, but of these three, Nei Tituabine, probably because her worship is kept alive today, has the longest and most detailed story. Whatever the origin myths of Nei Tituabine tell us of the identity of this goddess, these stories are not quite the same as the stories about her one would hear from practising followers. To some of her followers she is Nei Kanna, the murderess and terrible *anti*.²⁰

In rite stories, the origin of the worship of a god or *anti* and the proper procedure in performing ceremonies are given together with the tabus that need to be observed. The rite myth, unlike popular myths which are told almost anytime that there are interested listeners, is told at particular times, usually during the performance of a magical ceremony or certain religious functions, such as to a dead person. On Makin island, for example, Grimble witnessed the performance of the *kaetani kawai* (straightening of the path) of the departed soul, a ceremony which included the telling of the origin of the ritual.²¹

¹⁹ This was the Teuribaba whose *bou* (canoe crest), which were supposed to look like human skulls from a distance, was adopted by the members of Karongoa as the *bou ni Karongoa* (canoe crest of Karongoa). Iotamo (comp.), n.d., 'Rongorongon Beru ae Karakin Nikunau' (The Story of Beru from the island of Nikunau), 'Manin Wa' (canoe crests), 26, Pateman Papers.

²⁰ In one Nikunau tradition Nei Tituabine is a wife of Taburitongoun who came from Samoa to the Gilberts with Riiki and Taburimai. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 72, 'The coming of Nei Tituabine and her friends from Samoa'.

²¹ Grimble, *A Pattern of Islands*, 147ff. Although the *kaetani kawai* is known throughout most of the central and northern islands of the group, the last ceremonies were actually performed, before they were abolished by the Christian missionaries, only on Makin, Butaritari and Banaba; the ceremony of the *kaetani kawai* had already ceased to be observed on most of the islands long before the arrival of the missionaries.

The myth says that Nakaa, a dark-skinned god, is the guardian of the gates on Makin islet to the land of the ancestors, Bouru. His main job is making *karaun* (seine/nets) with a *rika* (long wooden needle) for catching ignorant souls who do not know the right path to Bouru. The souls are either caught in the net or killed by the *rika*. If the soul misses the net and the *rika*, several tricks and riddles will then be posed; and then if the soul answers correctly it will travel unhindered and be given the right directions to the great feasting and dancing at Bouru; if he fails he will travel for all eternity but will never reach Bouru.²²

(b) *Rite Texts*

The rite texts are mainly incantations, spells, prayers, and proper ways to invoke and communicate with the *anti*. Although they may be found in stories of the origins of a worship or cultic practice, they are usually separated. Like esoteric myths, they belong mainly to the most senior of the *utu* and a selected few within the *utu*. However, it is not uncommon to find different texts of spells relating to a similar practice, such as the spells of the *tae-ibennao* (to cleanse oneself); or the *kanangaraoi* (to be considered favourably); or even the *tabe atu* (lifting of the head) in the *kaetani kawai* ceremony. Sometimes they are merely desperation-spells, constructed from the memory of a *unimane* or *unaine* in the *utu* because of the lack of knowledge of the original text. Taking the *tabeatu* as an example, in its text you cannot hope to find the names of islands in the Gilberts or even in the east upon which the departing soul will rest, and if you do then it only tells you that the text is not original or genuine. A proper text of the *tabeatu* will be something like this text recorded by Grimble as told to him on Banaba by a certain Eria:

I lift your head, I straighten your way for you are going home, Marawa, Marawa.²³

Home to Innang and Mwaiku, to Roro and Bouru.

You will pass over the sea of Manra in your canoe with Pandanus fruit for food; You will find harbour under the lee of Matang and Abaiti in the West, even the homes of your ancestors.

Return not to your body; leave it never to return, for you are going home, Marawa, Marawa.

And so, farewell for a moon or two, a season or two.

Farewell! Your way is straight; you shall not be led astray.

²² E. Tibwere (comp.), 1915, 'Karakia I-Tungaru' (The history of the Gilbert Islands). Traditions of the islands collected from Ten Teuea (Tarawa), Nariki (Tarawa) and Tabuia (Abaiang), 126-137, Pateman Papers.

²³ This young woman Nei Marawa was engaged to Eria but she fell victim to the great drought that hit Banaba and most of the island group in the 1870s. This *tabeatu* was performed on her behalf by her fiancé who gave the text to Grimble.

Blessings and peace go with you. Blessings and peace.²⁴

In this text, we have the right food (pandanus), the right sea (Manra), the right direction (west), the right resting homes, and the right land of the ancestors, Bouru, where the feasting and dancing is held.²⁵

The Historical Content of Myth

So far we have seen that myth in Gilbertese story-telling serves as a transmittal technique to preserve and keep secret important events in the history of the clans. And it is this aspect of myth that makes it very useful for historical reconstruction. However, several problems need to be considered in the use of Gilbertese myth for historical reconstruction:

²⁴ Arthur Grimble, 'The Curse of Nakaa', *The Listener*, 11 Aug. 1955.

²⁵ This travel of the soul 'homeward' indicates that the original home of the ancestors of the Gilbertese people probably lies in the west. In some *tabe atu* texts, as well as some of the myths concerning the earliest inhabitants of the islands, even before the coming of the Karongoa people and their allies from Samoa, many names of the 'islands of the ancestors' still found today in the Gilberts are close in pronunciation to names of islands or places in Indonesia just north of Papua New Guinea. See the examples below:

Gilberts	Indonesia
Bangkai (Butaritari)	Banka (Sumatra), Bangka (N.Celebes), Banggai (E.Celebes)
Matang (general)	Matang (Sarawak), Majang (SW Borneo), Matan (SW Borneo), Medan (NE Sumatra), Medang (NE Sumatra), Mutan (Celebes)
Katabanga (general)	Ketapang (Java)
Bare (general)	Bali, Pare-pare (Celebes)
Kuma (Butaritari)	Kumai (Borneo)
Tabanga (general)	Sabang (Sumatra)
Abaiti (Butaritari)	Sawai (Ceram)
Tawaiti (Tarawa)	Sawai (Ceram)
Tarawa Island	Talowa (Celebes), Salawaiti (N.New Guinea)
Onouna (Butaritari)	Onin (NW New Guinea), Unauna (Celebes)
Bouru (Banaba)	Bouru Island (Celebes), Pulu Babi (NW Sumatra)
Mwaiaku (Makin, Tarawa)	Weigiu (N.New Guinea)
Bikati (Butaritari)	Bekasi (Java)
Banaba Island	Palopa (Celebes)
Betio (Tarawa)	Pidjiu (Lombok)
Kota (Makin)	Kota Baru (Sumatra, Borneo)
Taribo (Makin, Nonouti)	Taliabo Island
Kiroro (Butaritari)	Gilolo
Teranga (Onotoa, Marakei)	Serang (Ceram)
Manra (general)	Banda Islands
Mire (Butaritari)	Miri (Borneo)
Mangiree (Makin)	Mangerai (W flores)
Obu (Makin)	Obi Islands.

For the complete list of the islands in the west and the rest of the ancestral lands see Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 1, 21 and 22. See also the lists in A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands* (Melbourne 1989), 28-32.

1. Transmittal problems, such as the conflation, assimilation, and embellishment of the stories by the chronicler.²⁶
2. Transmittal technique, especially the reconstruction of *historical myths* by the people of Karongoa to conceal the real stories, which leads to the problem of distinguishing what parts of the myth are to be interpreted and which are to be taken literally.²⁷
3. The problem of interpretation as stories are not always recounted for the purpose of telling the story of the past, but to see the story in the light of its relevance to a contemporary event, such as a funeral, a birth, a *moan tei-ao* (first menses of a young girl), a marriage, etc.
4. The emergence of detailed and more reliable myths by insignificant clans that can challenge the supposed orthodox texts on an island or district. On Butaritari for example, members of Kabubuarengana, the supposed guardians of traditional stories of Makin and Butaritari when there was a *Uea*, are now struggling to retain that privilege from growing competition of insignificant *bata* (houses).²⁸
5. The various genres or structures within a myth must first be distinguished before the myth is used - whether it is a straight-forward narrative story, a poem, a text of a spell, a chant or song for a dance, and various others. These genres, as settings of the story, contribute considerably to indicating the 'type' or defining the myth one is dealing with, which helps in understanding the background of the story.
6. Where the 'types' are found in one story they must be distinguished as units within that story, and each studied carefully to determine why they are put together in the same story, and much more, to understand the intention or function of that story in relation to the text of a whole discourse.
7. The scarcity of the oldest island traditions, as all the island myths, except for those of Makin-Butaritari and Banaba, followed the work of Karongoa historians automatically when they accepted the *maneaba* system. And because the Karongoa tradition is not concerned with the ancient history of the people, except for its own history, and the development of the *maneaba* machinery, the original myths of all the islands came to be lost. Our knowledge of the very early periods of the people of the Gilbert islands from the myths, therefore, will depend on those of Makin-Butaritari and Banaba.

²⁶ See Chapter 13 concerning the transmittal processes as problems of oral tradition.

²⁷ As I have said earlier, even the members of Karongoa are confused as to which part of the historical myths are symbols, metaphors, or analogies and which are real events or objects that should be taken literally.

²⁸ Tamuera, pers. comm., Tanimaiaki on Butaritari, December 1982.

After considering the above, one is ready to hear the whole tradition once again and understand the myths in it.

The following points about the historical content of Gilbertese myth can be made:

1. The historical content of a myth is the words of the text of the myth as *believed* by the people. Although this will especially concern the rite myths, other *types* can also be considered for they all are *reconstructions* of what the people believed to have happened.
2. The historical content of a myth is not only the words of the text of the myth, but the background. That is, the search for the historical content of a myth should not be concerned entirely with the text of the story, but the events 'behind' the myth that gave the myth its structure or genre and therefore its type and function or intention in the whole tradition.

Of course myth, or oral tradition for that matter, can err, but so can documents; and though many of them cannot stand a rigorous examination like written documents, they are, as we have said, what the Gilbertese *believed* to have actually happened, and are considered by them as reasonable anecdotes and social processes within the context of their particular society, culture, and environment.

CHAPTER 8

The Nature of History in Oral Tradition

HISTORY CAN BE defined either as a record of the past - verbal recollection, written document, material artefact, bones - or as a reconstruction of the past using accessible records. As record, it is 'raw material', the fabric with which the historian reconstructs as well as tests hypotheses about the past. As reconstruction, it is the finished product of the historian's work, communicated to others usually in published form. These are the usual two definitions of history, though the latter, the past reconstructed by the historian, is the more common and accepted definition. The former is referred to simply as a *record*, a record of human activity *of* the past or *from* the past.

The reconstruction, as history, must show a concern for objectivity, for 'what actually happened' as presented in the records to the historian, not what the historian wanted to happen or thought happened, for upon it hangs the integrity and credibility of the work. As history, the events it accepts as true are those which can be tested and proved for authenticity. This is the general and conventional understanding of history.

But not all history is a published reconstructed account of the past; there is also oral tradition, the organised verbal reconstructed account of the past, the chronicle of preliterate or illiterate peoples whose interests in the past are borne out of their concern for the present and future of their group. In the Gilbert islands these are the '*maneaba* traditions', or the traditions of leading and influential families.

Three major reconstructions can be found in the islands, the basis from which other island traditions or reconstructions take their shape and content. The earliest of these is the Banaban reconstruction, which unfortunately today exists only in fragments.¹ Then there is the Makin-Butaritari reconstruction of the northern islands, the work of the members of the *bata*

¹ See Chapter 11 below for the arguments for the Banaban tradition as the probable basis for the Karongoa creation stories. For the Banaban stories, see Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, A 1; D 21, 22; E 45, 46, 48, 49, 51-55; also H.C. and H.E. Maude, *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Suva 1994).

of Kabubuarangana, the traditional guardians of the royal traditions on Makin and Butaritari.² Finally, there is the reconstruction by the chroniclers of Karongoa, the *maneaba* tradition of the southern islands.³ These traditions are reconstructions from the individual stories known to the people for several generations through word of mouth. The stories are arranged in an orderly and unified manner so that when the whole reconstruction is told it is not only amusing and informative about the sequence of events in the past that makes the people who and what they are, but is intelligible and easily remembered as well.

But oral tradition, as reconstruction of the past, cannot be accepted as it stands in its transmitted form as academic or authentic history. The reconstructions, whether clan or *maneaba* tradition, include not only legends but myths. However, before discarding oral tradition, one needs to understand something of its structure, especially the work of the chroniclers in defining and selecting the appropriate classic stories to constitute a reconstruction. Moreover, one must understand the concept or sense of history in Gilbertese society, knowledge of which may help one to understand its content better.

The Classic *Karaki* of the Chroniclers

Classic or unique traditions, the *karaki* of the chroniclers, must have the proper and most fitting stories in them, arranged in an organised and intelligible format. Most Gilbertese traditions that can be found today cannot be strictly called *karaki* or true reconstructions of the chroniclers, for their stories are misshaped or displaced, and not totally intelligible from beginning to end. A *karaki* to be a clear and proper reconstruction of the past must begin with the myth of creation and the stories of the gods and end with the generation of the chronicler.⁴

Most of the *karaki* which are general reconstructions of the past and property of certain groups are usually particular discourses. Hence, individual accounts that constitute the *karaki*, the classic stories, must first of all be particular to the locality and people of the area to which the reconstruction

² The Makin-Butaritari tradition was put into writing by the people in about 1952 to present to the then Lands Commissioner in the northern islands, Richard Turpin, not only as a record of customary ways of settling land disputes, but as a proper account of the two islands, in particular the issues from the original founders of the ruling house, as a check on the right succession to the high chieftainship. An earlier version of the tradition, however, had already been collected and published by Grimble as Appendix 1 in A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Preliminary Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir No.12, 85-96.

³ The work of Tione Baraka is probably the most complete and best version of the Karongoa or *maneaba* tradition which he collected and put into writing in 1934. *The Story of Karongoa*, trans. G.H. Eastman, edited, annotated, and revised by H.E. Maude (Suva 1991).

⁴ Cf. the *taeka nikawai*, Chapter 4.

belongs. For a strand story to be accepted as classic for a reconstruction, it should:

1. have the proper names of the *bakatibu* (ancestors) of the people, in particular, the genealogical lists for the members of the important groups in the district or island;
 2. have the most fitting homes and origins of the *bakatibu*;
 3. have the proper and original names of the various *kainga* of the locality;
 4. have the right *maneaba* and *boti*;
 5. be able to be accommodated in the general sequence of events widely accepted on most islands; and
 6. include the epochal events, wars and migrations in particular;
- all that identify the people of the district or island at the time of the telling of the story.

The majority of these classic individual stories in an oral tradition are the *aomata* (real human) stories and *antimaomata* (spirit-human) stories. These two types are considered to be reliable and to refer to actual people and events. This is because an actual and real past event for the people must be a story in the oral reconstruction which is not only quite distant from the time of the *bomatemaki* (the age of creation and the gods) but be recent as well, not more than a few generations from the time of the narration.

However, the *aomata* and *antimaomata* stories do not share the same level or degree of historicity. The *antimaomata* stories, which are generally about very important ancestors, are usually exaggerated to the extent that they appear more supernatural than real. Some of the stories in the *antimaomata* are better classified as *anti* than *antimaomata*, for they are really mythical stories. The story of Nei Kimoauea or Nei Tokataneai, for instance, the rat queen and ancestress of the Tarawa rulers, is more of an *anti* than *antimaomata* story. Because of this, the *antimaomata* stories are generally placed immediately after the myths of the gods and before the *aomata* stories in their appearance in a tradition.

The *aomata* stories are believed by the people to be real and true accounts because their characters are not *anti* or *antimaomata*, and the events they record are not supernatural but possible. Moreover, the events agree with the culture and social structure, that is, fit well into possible social processes within the context of the way of life and institutions of the people.

But a reconstruction needs to have more than just the *aomata* and *antimaomata* stories, it must have the *anti* stories as well, the myths. They may not be genuine stories, may be impossible to accept as accounts of actual past events, but they are important in oral reconstruction, for not only do they provide important parts that make the whole reconstruction intelligible,

but they hold the whole discussion together as a unified work. More than that, they provide meaning to customs, behaviour and practices, as well as key information in the understanding and interpretation of some of the stories.

The arrangement of the classic stories identifies the oral tradition as the true *karaki*, distinct from the works of amateur compilers. A *karaki* may have all the classic stories but the displacement of the stories may be just enough to identify the chronicler as a competing apologist for the claims of his clan or group. Correct structure or outline of a reconstruction must begin with the time of the *anti*; then comes the *antimaomata*; and finally that of the *aomata*. The stories it tells must also be the orthodox stories. Hence, a reconstruction to be accepted as a unique and true oral tradition of a district or island must have the following characteristics; it must be

1. organised and unified from beginning (creation) to end (time of the teller);
2. intelligible and consistent, both genealogically and chronologically;
3. consistent with the reconstructions of leading and influential *utu* or *boti*; and
4. contain stories that are universal and known to a larger audience on most, if not on all, islands.

As a reconstruction of the past, it is a history of the people, of what the people believe concerning what actually happened. Of course, as we shall see later, oral traditions cannot be regarded as proper historical reconstructions, not only because of the acceptance of all stories as genuine, but because a lot of the *aomata* stories, the so-called reliable stories, are questionable as having real historical referents at all.

Stories of Individual Clans or *Utu*

History in Gilbertese society is the *karaki* of what happened in the past. As history, the content of the *karaki* should include stories of individual clans or *utu*, as well as being accessible to all members of the district or island; however, that is not the case. The majority of the individual stories belong to the chroniclers' *boti* or *utu*, generally the leading families, and are not as a rule accessible to the people. The *maneaba* traditions of the southern and most of the central islands, for example, display the interests of the leading Karongoa clan, which is outlined clearly in the structure and content of that tradition. It is no wonder that in the past, when members of other *utu* or *boti* wanted to hear the *karaki*, selected portions were told to them, in particular those stories that were of interest to their group. Thus, the *karaki* or the reconstruction of the chronicler is not a comprehensible history of the people, nor is it a work freely shared with everyone in the village.

Of course, various clans, the insignificant and smaller ones, have their own *karaki* concerning the past, but, unlike the chronicle of the influential families, the Makin-Butaritari 'royal tradition' or the *maneaba* tradition of the Karongoa chroniclers, which are fixed because of the way they are arranged, and are accepted as the unique traditions of the district or island, their *karaki* are particular, flexible and independent as separate stories. They have no sense of chronology, for that is not their interest; however, they are concerned with the reliability of their clan records, especially their line of descent, for, apart from anything else, these are important for identity and claims to privileges and rights. Clan traditions to some extent are kept secret from non-members, but they are not as esoteric as the reconstructions of the *taani karaki*, the proper chroniclers of the district or island.⁵

The secrecy of the reconstructions shows that the past is very important to the people. Its importance lies in the application of certain stories to the life of the village or the whole island. Knowledge of the past, therefore, in the hands of the wrong people, in particular members of insignificant clans or of a slave *utu* who want to change the shameful identity of their group, can cause confusion and instability, with repercussions felt in the neighbouring districts, and on other islands. A limited or controlled sharing of the knowledge of the past with other groups is important, for it ensures that the whole community is controlled by accepting the status quo and relying on the wisdom, the judgements, and the leadership of the bigger and the ruling *boti* or *utu*. Because the chroniclers have no wish to be called *taani kewe* (tellers of extreme lies), since they are not allowed to tell every detail of all stories to the people, one way of controlling their sharing of their *karaki* is to tell the stories in metaphors, such as the myth of 'The breaking of the Kaintikuaba' for example, to conceal the real story or identity of their group.⁶

The whole of oral tradition, then, though regarded as 'history' by the people, is not in any way a history of how things actually happened, but rather a reconstruction of the past as remembered by the people and accepted by the chroniclers as 'historical'. In other words, oral tradition, as history, is the past as learnt and believed not only by the chroniclers but also by the people.

⁵ The secrecy of clan tradition, especially the genealogical lists of a *boti* or *utu*, is mainly to prevent the entertaining of a total stranger not entitled by birth to the hospitality of the clan, because he has knowledge of their list and can recite it publicly in the gathering of the *maneaba*. All members of a *boti* or *utu* whether they like it or not must entertain any *iruwa* (visitor) from other islands who has proved his connections with the *boti* or *utu* by the recital of his ancestry.

⁶ According to Grimble, the various myths of Auriaria are stories to conceal the real identity of Au, the sun-hero, the Lord of Heaven, and the real god of the Karongoa people. A.F. Grimble, *A Pattern of Islands* (London 1952), 167.

But, though the whole reconstruction is regarded as history, all the individual stories that constitute the reconstruction, are not *historical* to the people. Even the *aomata* stories in the reconstructions, stories that are supposed to be real and true because they are close to our time, are in many cases not considered historical. They may be genuine, and possibly refer to actual events and people, but this does not necessarily guarantee them as historical. What is historical in Gilbertese oral tradition is an account that serves the people best in their daily activities and in their relationships with one another. Rights, privileges, and duties within the community, that stabilise and hold the people together, are some of the determinants for an account to be accepted as historical.

It is precisely because of this that genealogical lists and accounts of epochal wars are some of the very important oral records for the people; hence, they are jealously guarded and kept secret, for they are *historical*. The wars of Kaitu and Uakeia for example, and events after the time of these warriors, are, for most island chroniclers from Marakei to Onotoa, acceptable as the most historic of events in their oral traditions; in fact, the only activities from the past that give sense and authority to their customs and manners. Hence, in claiming a privilege or right, or to act or perform a certain activity for example, one need only refer to the changes or innovations wrought by or after the coming of the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia to make that claim legal or accepted by the elders. In the employment of genealogy to show one's descent in competition for a privilege or right, one only had to trace one's ancestry back to the time of the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia for the claim to be accepted. This is understandable as the former traditions of these islands, together with the individual independent stories, the basis for many of their customs and practices, all became void with the acceptance of the *maneaba* system: a system where its own tradition had to be taken into consideration if it were to operate and function at all.⁷

The historical stories are usually the *aomata* stories, but the *antimaomata* and *anti* stories, the myths and legends, can also be accepted as historical; they only need to prove their worth by satisfying the curiosity, concern and interest of the people.

A historical story, therefore, does not necessarily have to be a precise and accurate record of what actually happened; rather, it must have an intrinsic

⁷ Because most islands after the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia accepted the Tabontebike type *maneaba*, most island traditions have the 'Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition', which is really the Karongoa tradition, as the tradition of their *maneaba*. On Nonouti, for example, the *rorobuaka* and *unimane* I talked with claimed that their *maneaba* or island tradition, from the creation stories to themselves, is unique to Nonouti, but the content of their traditions clearly indicates a Karongoa interest and intent.

value to the people. It must be one which not only can be used to mould and manipulate society but can also offer value and meaning to the puzzles of life as well as behaviour and social processes within the community. Oral reconstruction by the chroniclers is history to the Gilbertese, then, but not an academic, objective history that describes what actually happened. The problem with this reconstruction is the inclusion of myths and legends, many of which may never have happened the way they are told but were included because of their importance to the people and more so to the structure and unity of the whole reconstruction.

But this problem of oral tradition as history is more than just simply the problem of methodology in reconstruction because of the myths and legends; of course, myths and legends can cause problems, but they are not real issues compared to the problem of the *historic sense* of the Gilbertese people, which not only affects the telling of the tradition but complicates the interpretation of tradition altogether.

From all that has been said above, what is considered to be history or historical in Gilbertese oral tradition can be summed up as the following:

1. all *aomata* and most of *antimaomata* stories, including genealogical lists, that have been recounted and debated by *unimane* in the *maneaba*;
2. accounts considered *historical* by the people, even the *anti* stories, the myths, because of the meaning and explanations they provide to the structure, the institutions, and the way of life of the people;
3. accounts of events that are possible social processes within the context of Gilbertese culture and society;
4. events that are universally known on most islands, in particular those included as part of or alluded to in the *aomata* stories in the traditions of the influential *boti* or *utu* in the islands; and
5. *aomata* accounts of relatively recent events, close to the time of the teller of the tradition, most of which happen prior to or even after contact with Europeans;
6. all the classic stories that are most fitting and appropriate in the telling of the story of the islands where the ancestors and the people are not spectators but protagonists in that story.

CHAPTER 9

Gilbertese Narrative Traditions

NARRATIVES OR RECONSTRUCTED traditions do not come into being and are not intentionally communicated for posterity unless there is a strenuously compelling reason. For the Gilbertese, identity, social and political stability, and economic benefits, to mention a few, are reasons to preserve and communicate their stories for generations, as they do in the three types of organised narratives or reconstructions of the past: the common tradition, the *maneaba* tradition of the southern islands and the community tradition of the influential Banaban and ruling Makin-Butaritari *utu*; the clan or particular tradition; and the no-man's or harmony tradition. Of these three, the common traditions, which are the traditions of the *official* chroniclers, are generally accepted as the more genuine and more 'orthodox'.

The Classic Traditions (*Maneaba* and Community)

The classic traditions are reconstructed mainly from the individual stories of the *unimane* and *unaine* of the clans or *boti*. The stories are either fragments or strands, such as 'The calling of Tanentoa from Nonouti to Beru to fight Koura'; or whole units, such as the 'The Life and Voyages of Tanentoa'. From the individual stories the official chroniclers weave a tradition. Of the many reconstructions, two can be considered the best: the community tradition of Makin and Butaritari, the work of the royal chroniclers¹; and the *maneaba* tradition, the work of the Karongoa compilers and editors.²

¹ The 'royal' chroniclers, the *bata* of Kabubuarangana, are responsible to the *uea* for the stories of the islands. A complete text of the tradition was put into writing in about 1952 as 'Ana Boki ni karaki Na Kaiea' (The history book of Na Kaiea).

² The first complete text of the tradition of Karongoa was put into writing by Tione Baraka in 1934 as 'Aia karaki I-Karongoa' (History according to the members of Karongoa) (published in 1991 as *The Story of Karongoa*, ed. H.E. Maude). The Karongoa tradition is strictly a clan tradition, of the people of Karongoa, but since Karongoa was and still is on some islands an important group in the *maneaba*, its tradition is considered on most islands as the most unbiased and an 'official' tradition of the people. In fact on all the islands, except Butaritari and Makin, Banaba, and North Tarawa, the Karongoa tradition used to be the standard text to correct and advise the *maneaba* on proper procedures for ceremonies and the prerogatives of the various *boti* of the *maneaba*.

As classic traditions, the *maneaba* and community traditions are the generally accepted narratives, the standard by which the credibility of other clan or *boti* traditions are tested. Because they are concerned with all members of a district, common customs, practices, and behaviour of the community are judged by them.

Maneaba traditions used to be common in the southern and most of the central islands but today are found only in the south. Their disappearance from the central islands, from Aranuka to Marakei, is due mainly to the destruction of the *maneaba* system on these islands - the result of generations of inter-district wars and battles between large *utu* for primacy and rule. One can still find traditions on these islands, but they are more contrived traditions than classic traditions of the people. Proper *maneaba* traditions, therefore, are found only on islands from Nonouti to Nikunau. No *maneaba* traditions are found on Tamana and Arorae, the southernmost islands, for they have no *boti* in their *maneaba*.³

The community narratives are peculiar to Makin and Butaritari, as well as Banaba. The Makin-Butaritari reconstructions used to be called *Rikiia Uea* (royal narratives), though today more commonly *Rikiia kain Makin ma Butaritari* (Stories of the people of Makin and Butaritari), perhaps because there is no longer a *uea* on these two islands and, after all, they are the only reliable extensive accounts of the past there.⁴ The Banaban narratives are classic traditions as well, even though found today only in fragments.

The *maneaba* and community traditions are the reconstructions of the proper chroniclers in a district or island. Though usually interested in the chronicler's group, most give space to the activities of other groups, in particular allies and other important ones.

Genealogical listing is one concern of the classic traditions. A reliable list of names of the original founders of the *boti* and *kainga* within the jurisdiction of the *maneaba* is important. The members of each *boti* in a *maneaba* have their own lists, but the list of the *maneaba* tradition is the authoritative accepted list when there is confusion and argument among the people concerning founders and the rightful members. For the community traditions on Makin and Butaritari genealogical lists are not as important as they were when the islands had a *uea* - for then the community traditions

³ These two islands never had *boti* in their meeting houses for they were too small for the full exercise of the *maneaba* system; in the past, according to a Karongoa tradition, a visitor who arrived on these islands would go to the *kainga* of his or her *utu*.

⁴ Pers. comm., Anterea Betero, a renowned and accepted chronicler of the *karaki* of Butaritari and Makin, December 1982. See note 21 of Bernd Lambert, 'Uean abara: the high chiefs of Butaritari and Makin as kinsmen and office-holders', in Niel Gunson (ed.), *The Changing Pacific: Essays in Honour of H.E. Maude* (Melbourne 1978), 93.

acted as checks upon the members of the ruling families in deciding who should be *uea* after a *uea* died.

In all the islands genealogical lists are still important for claims to rights and privileges. In former times they were even more important and greatly exploited, especially in times of hardship, such as droughts or war, for support and alliance. For the *maneaba*, apart from identifying the *boti* and their members, genealogical lists were and still are important as checks upon claims of visitors from other islands and their connections to a *boti* or *utu*.⁵ Significant events are also the concern of the classic traditions, for example major wars and important migrations between the islands, even those outside the island group.

Classic traditions usually contain a lot of clan or *boti* stories. Those selected are usually general stories about the clan or *boti* with no real interest in exaggerating the stories of any group or *utu*. But though general, some are quite detailed concerning ceremonial functions and activities of important groups: the role and ceremonial duties of the prestigious *boti* of Tanentoa and Teimone, for example, in the Atanikarawa *maneaba* tradition of Temanoku district on Nonouti are extended compared with those of other groups. The warring expeditions of the Makin-Butaritari ruling families are some of the extended stories in the Kabubuarangana 'royal' or community traditions of Makin and Butaritari islands.

The *maneaba* and community traditions are also common traditions, and in the past, when recounted in the *maneaba* by a recognised chronicler, they were rarely challenged. It is said that the *karaki* was *kamaraia* (can cause severe pain and death) to anyone who interrupted or challenged a *tia karaki* (proper chronicler) when telling his story. Today, however, it is not uncommon for *utu* or *boti* elders to enter into heated debates with the proper chroniclers, the so-called guardians of the common or right traditions. From Nonouti to Nikunau, the proper chroniclers, though still retaining their role as principal tellers of the *karaki*, are not so much considered as custodians of the right and common tradition of the people. On Makin and Butaritari, the adage 'every *bata* can tell their own version of the *karaki*' is now becoming a reality, for with the abolition of the chieftainship there is no *uea* to regulate the telling of the *karaki* and control its content.

But though argument and criticism from outside the circle of the proper chronicle group lessen the control of the chroniclers, the classic traditions still remain the accepted traditions of a district or island. This is because in the classic traditions the members of the *utu* or *boti* have good reasons to be

⁵ Knowledge of genealogies and traditions was an important asset for travellers - see the discussion of *boti* in Chapter 2.

together and support one another. For in the classic traditions, as common traditions, every individual *utu* or *boti* not only shares the same past, but in that past every group is important, even the small, socially and politically insignificant. Each is considered equal and a partner because of its *ikawai* (elders/ancestors), with their particular offices or roles needed for the functioning of the whole community machinery. In the common traditions, each clan or *boti* is represented as part of a unified group. On Tarawa, Nauru or Banaba, for instance, in the usual places for members of several districts or islands to gather it is common for *utu* or *boti* elders to identify themselves and their members not by their own group tradition but by the common tradition of their origin; a Nonouti elder will identify himself and the members of his island by the classic tradition of Nonouti, rather than by the tradition of his *utu* or *boti*.

The Individual or Particular Traditions

Particular traditions, the clan or *boti* traditions, resemble the common *maneaba* or community traditions in their concerns, except for chronology and the organisation of their stories. The stories in the clan or *boti* traditions, for example, are not arranged, and usually are independent of one another. As individual stories in a cycle, the majority can be removed from the tradition without really affecting the whole discourse. In fact, clan or *boti* stories exist better as individual units than as parts of a clan or *boti* reconstruction.⁶

But clan or *boti* traditions, though not much concerned with chronology, proper arrangements of stories, or in their unity and relationships, certainly are concerned with accurate and faithful communication. Some of them, however, from the clans or *boti* that have accepted the structure and outline of the common traditions, have become not only intelligible, consistent throughout from beginning to end, both genealogically and chronologically, with the right sequence of events, but reliable also to the extent that they have replaced the original *maneaba* traditions of a district. The tradition of the *boti* Teimone in the *maneaba* Atanikarawa on Nonouti is the best example of a *boti* tradition exploiting and displacing the *maneaba* tradition.⁷

⁶ Individual clan or *boti* stories are vital for the understanding and interpretation of the stories in the classic traditions, since a lot of these were in the first place particular stories of the clans or *boti* before being incorporated into the texts of the classic traditions through the selection of the chroniclers.

⁷ As a rule, *maneaba* traditions follow the tradition of leading *boti* in a district, but this is not true for Temanoku and other districts on Nonouti. During my fieldwork, almost all the *unimane* I consulted for the tradition of the districts directed me to either a *rorobuaka* or *unimane* from the *boti* Teimone, not a leading *boti*, as the *taani karaki*, an indication that the *boti* Teimone had extended its influence with its tradition as the common tradition for the island.

On Makin and Butaritari the same thing has happened, with many *bata* claiming their traditions to be better, even more 'orthodox' and authentic concerning the past, than the common traditions of the 'guardians' of the community tradition.⁸

But not many clan or *boti* traditions are general oral reconstructions: most are peculiar to the clan or *boti* alone. They are not popular stories as they are rarely heard or told in gatherings; nonetheless, they can still be found today in practically every *utu* as 'clan history'. Many contain secrets of the clan or *boti*: stories about the origin or a skill given to their ancestors by the *anti* of their clan or *boti*; or stories concerning the proper rituals and secret passwords or formulae in the invocation and petitions to the clan or *boti* ancestral spirit. These stories include minute details of the affairs of the clan or *boti* - the *tinaba* (ceremonial and sexual favours by the daughter-in-laws to their *unimane*); the *kakaraoi* (distribution of rights, privileges and skills to its members by the elders); and stories that are domestic and of little or no importance to others.

Other stories common also in the clan or *boti* traditions, apart from the *boti* or clan's own genealogical lists and other particular narratives, are about the failures and weaknesses of other groups. Of special interest are stories about other clans or *boti* that can shame their members. A story of a war, for example, where the ancestors of other clans or *boti* showed fear in their words or actions, or a theft committed by their *ikawai*, or the negligence of a *kara* (*unimane* or *unaine*), are the favourite stories in the clan or *boti* tradition, communicated within the clan or *boti* secretly to control the ostentation, pride and arrogance of others.⁹ Today such stories are rarely told publicly, perhaps because intermarriage means that a shameful story about one clan or *boti* is now nearly always shameful for every member of the community. At all cost, the chroniclers in the *utu* or *boti* are keen to have them destroyed and forgotten.

But not all clan or *boti* traditions are narrowly parochial: a few are interested also in the stories of their allies, and even those of the ruling clans or influential *boti*. The *rorobuaka* class clans or *utu* on Makin and Butaritari, for example, not only narrate the unfortunate stories of their group, but also

⁸ A certain Tamuera of Kuma on Butaritari island claimed that the tradition of his *bata* transcends that of the *bata* of Kabubuarangana, even though his *bata* is not the proper teller of tradition on the island. Tamuera, pers. comm., December 1990.

⁹ In one of the wars of Tarawa known as *Te Buaka are Tem Matang* (The War of Tem Matang), the reluctance of one of the warriors, Ten Toani, to advance into the heat of the battle made him and his descendants cowards and unreliable, according to traditional judgement. Today every time the *katake* which commemorates this war is chanted his descendants are very quick to condemn the accounts as not true concerning their *ikawai*. Nei Kaingaata, pers. comm., Makin, December 1990.

the stories of the developments of the *toka* group, for instance, and the privileges and rights they obtained because of their past duties to the *uea*.

Clan and *boti* traditions, though not particularly important for a district or island community in comparison with the common tradition, are important in understanding the common or general traditions. For clan or *boti* traditions preserve the view of a group, of what members believe about the past concerning their group and several others in the community. Because they are particular traditions, their versions are rarely accepted for recounting as entertainment or as knowledge about the past. Nonetheless, in gatherings where no recognised chronicler is present, they may be recounted, but should be introduced as versions of certain clans or *boti*. The usual form of telling these *karaki* is in the manner of *taumanintananga* (chant), though it is not uncommon to find clan or *boti* elders narrating their whole version.¹⁰

The Harmony Traditions

Harmony traditions are contrived traditions. They are mainly reconstructions of amateur narrators or competing clan or *boti* elders. These traditions are constructed from stories known to these non-chroniclers for the purpose of attaining what they want from or in the community; showing their own view of the past and who the people were; and creating problems because of their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the community. Stories in these traditions, though generally confusing, are not hard to follow.

First, there are the *frustration traditions*, reconstructed by frustrated elders whose views are rarely taken seriously in the community and especially in *maneaba* meetings.¹¹ They were expected to promote reforms in the community and to encourage changes in the proceedings of the *maneaba*. And although disseminated as widely as possible, especially among the *rorobuaka*, they rarely infiltrate their cautious responsible minds, and, where they do there is usually very little result.

Second, there are the *raburabu traditions*, reconstructed by elders of insignificant small groups to protect the dignity of their group, though some can be traced to important and respected groups who do not wish those of their stories that impair the respect of their clan or *boti* to be known by others. In their efforts to hide or retell these unwanted stories they usually

¹⁰ See the methods of Gilbertese oral transmission in Chapter 5 above, the *taumanintananga* being the proper and polite way of telling one's version when it is not that of the rightful tellers of the *karaki* in a district or island.

¹¹ In *maneaba* meetings it is the views of the leading *boti* that are considered important. On Nonouti, for example, it is the *boti* of Tanentoa and Teimone that have the first say and final word in decision making in the *maneaba*.

contradict other stories known to the people. Where these unwanted stories have been incorporated into the common traditions, the work of erasing the unfortunate past of the group usually ends in the creation of new traditions that are neither common to the people nor specific to a clan or *boti* - but heterodox traditions. As 'new' traditions they are easily identified, for their contents do not always agree with the accepted classic stories.

Of course, many *unimane* actually accept the unfortunate past of their groups - not because they are uninterested in the dignity of their group but because every other group seems to have such stories. After all, it is the past of their ancestors, who said or did what they did, which we in the present cannot or should not judge from our point of view. These *unimane* are more interested in the harmony of the community than in the mutilation of the past for the benefit of their group. The best example is the work of a *boti* elder from Terikiai district on Tabiteuea North. He was a respected *unimane* but his 'new' tradition created problems, for not only did it cause the extension of the *inaki* (sitting space) of the members of his *boti*, which was contested by members of other *boti*, but confusion as well in terms of rights and duties of other *boti* in the *maneaba*. It caused such chaos that the *unimane* of the district were forced to take the matter to court.¹²

Third, there are the general histories. These harmony traditions are the attempts of *unimane* interested in a corporate general history or tradition of all the islands. Their harmony traditions are usually extensive, since they attempt to incorporate all known traditions. Some examples are the traditions collected by E. Tibwere from *unimane* on Abaiang and Tarawa.¹³ A version of this kind of harmony tradition collected by Tibwere from Tarawa and Abaiang was published in 1942 as the 'Te karaki mai Kiribati Meang' ('The history from the Northern Gilbert Island') in *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, edited by May Pateman.¹⁴

Many harmony traditions, such as these, appeared at the beginning of this century. Two important events led to their emergence: on the one hand, the coming together of the people from different island clusters of the group made possible by the Christian missions through their schools and evangelism; and on the other, the meeting of the Gilbertese people with people from other

¹² Pers. comm., several *unimane* and *unaine* of Terikiai village on Tabiteuea North in December 1984.

¹³ The traditions of these *unimane* are really attempts to construct a total history of the islands using all the traditions known to them.

¹⁴ I have in my possession the original copy of this harmony tradition collected by E. Tibwere (1915, 'Karakia I-Tungaru' - The history of the Gilbert Islands collected from Ten Teuea [Tarawa] Nariki [Tarawa] and Tabuia [Abaiang]), much of which, unfortunately, is not included in the published work by Pateman. See bibliography for full details.

places through employment and administration, when the archipelago became a Protectorate and later colony of Britain with the then Ellice Islands.¹⁵ The general histories were attempts to specify who the people of the Gilberts are.

Fourth, there is the amateur tradition. This is the work of amateur chroniclers, the *unimane*, who, though not well versed in the stories of the islands, still wanted to be regarded as knowledgeable, not only in the customs but the stories as well. From stories known to them, together with others circulating, especially among the children, these *unimane* compiled a tradition. A lot of this kind of contrived traditions contain stories from or about other places. Some stories, though placed in the Gilberts, are unique, such as the song of Nareau in one Nonouti story that tells of the making of Nonouti island, found neither in the classic nor the clan traditions.¹⁶

But not all amateur traditions are constructed by *unimane* who know little of the *karaki*. There are individual stories by *unimane*, who, though they know genuine accounts, are interested only in the telling of a fascinating and amusing story. A certain Tebarine from Maiana, for example, was not much concerned with the actual words of his story, but more with making his audience laugh and enjoy his storytelling, resulting in the communication not of the proper stories but amusing and somewhat unconventional ones.¹⁷ Tebarine certainly was not an amateur chronicler, nor was he ignorant, for he sometimes contested stories of known chroniclers where he felt they had departed from the common text; but it was his own way of storytelling that made his stories unconventional.

¹⁵ The events of the last century and of the beginning of this century are very important for understanding many oral reconstructions. In fact they provide important insights into the decay and problems of oral tradition. Schools and literacy, for example, not only changed the traditional way of preserving and communicating stories, but changed some of the stories; while the administration of the islands by a foreign and more powerful king decided the rights to land and settled disputes, rather than oral tradition. With the acceptance of Christianity many of the traditional stories were no longer allowed to be taught, for they are stories of the 'dark days' that do not benefit the community, according to the missionaries; they only entice them back to their 'pagan' lives before the 'light'. See Chapter 16 for a full discussion of the decline and recovery of Gilbertese oral tradition.

¹⁶ In this tradition, the song of Nareau tells the story of the making of Nonouti from the selected *nono* (rocks), which were symbols for the role of the island: to be a rock to protect other islands of the group. According to the Nonouti tellers of tradition this has been achieved or fulfilled in the election of the leaders of the people, like Reuben Uatiao, who was not originally from Nonouti, but was adopted and grew up on Nonouti; Naboua Ratieta, the first chief Minister of the Gilberts after Internal Self-Government; the present President, a true son of Nonouti, who has been in office since the independence of the country in 1979; the first graduates, and so on. Beia, pers. comm. Temanoku on Nonouti, December 1990.

¹⁷ As far as I can recall from my childhood, he used to be an occasional visitor to our home to tell jokes and share his stories. I loved his stories, but I hated his smoking pipe which he would not hesitate to burn me with every time I dozed off to sleep.

A similar type of this contrived tradition is found also in the works of modern or the so-called learned Gilbertese. Many of these 'learned' Gilbertese do not grow up in the 'islands', but on Nauru, Banaba, or South Tarawa, where there is very little or no proper contact at all with the niceties of the customs and traditions of the people. They know very little of the traditional stories, yet they speak and write as though they know the *karaki*. The *karaki* of these people are causing a lot of problems for the study of oral tradition, for not only are their *karaki* 'bad traditions', but many of their stories are now being heard or read more often by people in the islands.¹⁸

Although harmony traditions can be found in all the islands, they are particularly common in the central clusters from Marakei to Aranuka mainly because of the continually changing systems and structure of the communities there. In fact, these islands have gone through more change than any other island in the group. At one stage, for example, they were inhabited by independent clan hamlets who were concerned only with their own affairs, though undoubtedly subjected to the rule of the people from the islands in the north, Butaritari and Makin; then, following the invasions from Beru, by Tem Mwea and later Kaitu and Uakeia, they became democratic communities, with the *maneaba* as the symbol of that democracy.¹⁹ This did not last long, for iconoclastic movements by various *utu*, influenced and encouraged obviously by neighbours from the north, crushed the democracies on these islands, resulting in the emergence of rival rulers to organise what was left of the old system. Significant among these was the ruling house of Tuangaona, which controlled not only Abemama but the islands of Aranuka and Kuria; the house of Kaiea of Abaiang; and the house of Kirata of Tarawa.²⁰ Because of all these changes, many of the early clan and later *boti* traditions gave way to the traditions of the ruling houses: they became unimportant, with most of them mutilated and scattered as individual stories, to be reassembled later by *unimane* who were interested in the past of the various *utu* on these islands. The best of the harmony traditions of these islands come from Abemama, Abaiang and Tarawa - those collected by Tibwere in 1915, and those compiled and written by Paul Simon in 1916.²¹

¹⁸ Primary and secondary school teachers are usually the people who tell and write such stories.

¹⁹ Tewatu-ni-Matang, the Koura folk, and the ruling descendants of Nei Rakentai had significant influence over these islands.

²⁰ These ruling houses continued well into the 1890s when the British Protectorate was declared over the group.

²¹ See E. Tibwere (comp.), 1915, 'Karakia I-Tungaru' (The history of the Gilbert Islands) collected from Ten Teuea [Tarawa], Nariki [Tarawa] and Tabuia [Abaiang], Pateman Papers; and also E. Tibwere (comp.), 1932, 'Te Katei ni Kiribati' (Notes on Gilbertese Customs and Traditions) collected from Nei Teeta (Abemama) and Ten Taumoa (Abemama), and several other old men of

All these traditions - the classic traditions, the particular traditions (clan or *boti*), and the harmony traditions - are preserved and communicated the way they are, several generations for most of them, a few decades for some, because of what they hold and can do for the people. Apart from giving information concerning the activities of the ancestors, or providing identity, they offer explanations for social processes and cultural activities as they are or should be. But more importantly, oral traditions provide a charter for communal reflection and innovation, and courage to the communities to change for a better society. They are inseparable from communities: without traditions there are no communities, and vice versa. Without the traditions, or where a 'wrong' tradition is followed, the communities are lost, confused and on their way to destruction.²²

Abemama, Pateman Papers. See also Paul Simon (comp.), 1916, 'Taian Riki ao Kararki Nikawai' (Genealogical lists and history of the People of Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka), copied by John R. Tokatake on Kuria; and Burateiti (comp.), n.d. 'Taian Riki' (Genealogical Lists) copied by Namai Teikabi at Bangai, Tabiteuea, both in Maude Papers.

²² The *maneaba*, symbol of a whole or undivided community, brings the people together as one group. In Rotima village on Nonouti, for example, where there is no *maneaba*, the members of the village have many problems when it comes to deciding things for the community for many of the *rorobuaka* and the *unimane* are quite ignorant concerning the customs and oral traditions of their *ikawai*. Village affairs, therefore, are decided by two rival groups - the Protestant and Roman Catholic groups. In fact, Rotima is one of the villages in the Gilberts that does not have a 'community'.

CHAPTER 10

Problems in Considering Oral Tradition as History

The Study of Oral Tradition as a Historical Source

Primary and reliable sources are of vital importance for any historical reconstruction. They determine the value and the acceptance of such reconstructions as good historical works. Of all the sources, oral traditions tend to have been and still are the least popular with historians. Though many have argued for such materials to be accepted, there were and still are those who suspect oral traditions and would not value them as sources. There was for example the famous rejection of oral tradition by the anthropologist R.H. Lowie in 1915: 'I cannot attach to oral traditions any historical value whatsoever under any conditions whatsoever'.¹ If there were any good reasons for such thoroughgoing rejections, it is because such critics did not have the knowledge and skills to interpret them, and many oral traditions they collected were unreliable, invented with a purpose to achieve in the cultures to which they belong. This was obvious, Bronislaw Malinowski found, in the societies where he worked: their oral traditions were functional - to provide the society with its charter, give authority to leaders and explain the relationship of one to another; so he rejected them as sources for historical reconstruction.² It was however the uncritical use of oral traditions, in particular, by the late 19th and early 20th century evolutionists and diffusionists Percy Smith, W.H.R. Rivers, W.J. Perry, and other Polynesian specialists who utilised them 'in the most uncritical manner', that led many to reject oral traditions as sources.³ Added to this group were missionaries who were keen collectors of oral traditions; they too reached eccentric conclusions about the origins of the islanders through their uncontrolled

¹ R.H. Lowie, 'Discussion and Correspondence, Oral Tradition and History', *American Anthropologist*, 17 (1915), 598.

² B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London 1922), 300.

³ H.E. Maude, 'Pacific history - past, present and future', *Journal of Pacific History*, 6 (1971), 8. See also Greg Dening, 'Ethnohistory in Polynesia: the value of ethnohistorical evidence', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1 (1966), 23, 27.

interpretations of the oral traditions. William Ellis, for instance, believed in the possibility of the Hebraic origin of the Polynesians, though his researches actually enabled him from 'the bulk of the evidence to favour their derivation from the Malayan tribes inhabiting the Asiatic Islands', and he held that Polynesian myths have 'a striking resemblance to several conspicuous features of more Hindoo, or Braminical mythology'.⁴ But while we could point fingers at people and accuse them of responsibility for the continuing reluctance of many historians to use oral traditions, we cannot deny that the days of the oral sources were already numbered with the emergence of professional, modern academic history in the 19th century largely through the influence of Leopold von Ranke who wanted to see the new generation of historians 'trained in the critical evaluation of primary sources and especially the many archival sources which were being opened to research for the first time'.⁵ The emphasis on documented sources as demanded by the Rankean mould was part of the attempt to argue that history could be value-free and could be practised objectively, an argument rooted in the positivist philosophy of the 19th century that 'all knowledge is based on observation, experiment and the ascertaining of scientific laws'.⁶

Ranke's famous phrase 'wie es eigentlich gewesen' ('how it actually happened') became an historical methodology - to penetrate beyond the documents; documents which in the West had been systematically accumulated from as early as the 11th century or earlier when state archives took shape. Their advantages over oral sources with respect to chronological precision, place and accessibility and usually profusion, have led most Western historians since Ranke to concentrate their research in libraries and archives. The approach especially pleased those who wanted to see the historian only as a disinterested passive observer who could produce generalisations agreeing with known facts that actually emerge from his data. In the circumstances of the time, the growing imperialism contributed a lot to the nature of historical research and thus the choice of sources. The common themes for historical studies would be politics, biographies, economics and other areas closely related to the expansion of empire. The accumulated written records of the politicians, explorers, administrators,

⁴ William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches During a Residence of nearly 8 Years in the Society and Sandwich Islands* (London 1829), II, 42, 49, quoted in Alan Howard, 'Polynesian Origins and Migrations' in G.A. Highland et al. (eds), *Polynesian Culture History: Essays in Honour of Kenneth P. Emory* (Hawaii 1967), 47.

⁵ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims and Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London 1984), 5.

⁶ David Bebbington, *Patterns in History* (London 1979), 82. Ranke who was himself an idealist is usually thought of as a quasi-positivist because of his methodology, with its maxim: check the source for trustworthiness and against its own context.

traders, military officers, not forgetting the missionaries, all exhausted the energies of researchers, limiting their horizons of enquiry.

The changing scene in world affairs following the Second World War when the process of decolonisation was under way contributed to the reinstatement of oral traditions as sources for historical reconstruction. In their search for identity in the midst of other world powers, many independent nations sought their past, but their problem was that their past was often recognised only as that which had been recorded in the memoirs, reports and manuscripts of their colonial 'masters'. As a people they wanted their history, not as incidents in the history of their 'masters', but as their own history in which they were the actors and main characters. Such a history would consider the past long before the time of such intruders, and would mean consideration of not only the evidence that could be derived from archaeology, linguistics or other disciplines, but reconsideration of their own sources as well - the oral traditions. It was during this period also that historians broke new ground in the refinement of research methodologies using oral traditions.⁷

The direction towards these sources in the Pacific was anticipated when, in 1949, The Australian National University appointed J.W. Davidson to the first chair of Pacific History. Davidson was not a student of oral tradition, nor were his works concerned with it, but through his ideas he set a new perspective on the content of Pacific history if it was to be labelled Pacific at all: the islands and the islanders.⁸ Along this line historians once again were compelled to reconsider the value of the oral traditions. Among the enthusiasts of this new perspective was H.E. Maude, who among others spelt out the appropriate content and oral tradition as one important source of such a history. Maude was not the pioneer in the exploitation of oral tradition in the Pacific, but was among the first of those who, though critical of them, were engaged not so much in the validation of the traditions but rather in making the traditions comprehensible. In *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation*, first published in 1963, Maude demonstrated that oral traditions could be utilised and are invaluable as source materials for reconstructions. And in his Presidential Address to the History section of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Port Moresby in 1970, he continued to preach that message and made it clear that oral tradition was important to the serious historian of the Pacific. It was important 'not only in extending the rather brief historical period covered by documentation but also in

⁷ One of the first was Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* which first appeared in French in 1961 and in English in 1965.

⁸ J.W. Davidson, 'Problems of Pacific History', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1 (1966), 5.

providing a balance to the European viewpoint expressed in the bulk of the written sources'.⁹ For Maude there was no artificial division between prehistory and history. Pacific history is one, and must not only be island-centred but ought also to be islander-oriented.

However, in spite of the many works using oral traditions, the criticisms by Malinowski continue to circulate. That is, if oral traditions are to keep on changing in their contemporary contexts because of their functional role in society, one cannot attach much reliability to them for historical reconstruction. Nevertheless, they could be considered for a reconstruction of more recent events rather than for a 'remote' past. This can be seen in Raymond Firth's book, *History and Traditions of Tikopia*, which represented the view of Malinowski, but showed the sceptics that oral traditions to a certain degree could be useful in historical research. Using oral tradition, he was bold enough to take 'the time-frame back as far as about the middle of the seventeenth century' with respect to Tikopia history.¹⁰

There is also the problem of oral tradition's nature, being verbal and based mainly on the memory of the chroniclers, as there are limits to how much one could remember over a long period of time as well as how much of it would be lost or added unintentionally through communication. Even if there were serious attempts to maintain the accuracy of a tradition, time and place have always been responsible for the emergence of several versions of an event.

Problems associated with chronicler and communication are only part of the story, for there is always the problem of meaning too. 'Meaning' is an ambiguous word and, where applied to oral traditions, could signify two things. First, there is the literal: competence in a language to comprehend a word or sentence and understand it. Second, literary competence: the linguistic interpretive ability to recognise what is 'behind' the word, sentence or tradition as it was told. This involves the ability to recognise the intentions in the story whether as 'history' for posterity, as information, as knowledge, or simply as folk tales for entertainment, as well as the forms in which stories have been preserved and communicated - as poetry, dirge, or chants. One working with oral tradition finds this second aspect of meaning a real problem, for the 'meaning' of the words is never the same for the chronicler as for the listeners.

Theories about oral tradition have also added to the lack of confidence in its use as a historical source, especially theories concerning those aspects considered as myth. Myth is commonly defined as a story which, though historical elements may be contained in it, was fabricated to make the world

⁹ Maude, 'Pacific History', 16.

¹⁰ Raymond Firth, *History and Traditions of Tikopia* (Wellington 1961), 161.

and nature comprehensible. Having the qualities of imaginative thinking, otherworldly and supernatural, myths fall into the realm of fiction and therefore are unreliable as good records. Sigmund Freud, for example, saw myth as the dream-thinking of the people, a kind of unconscious preoccupation of a primitive race, one that belongs to wishful thinking or fantasies. But myth cannot be generalised as such as if there were a universal culture shared by all the peoples of the world; it could be true for some, but not for all myths.

The last and perhaps greatest obstacle is the problem of interpretation and analysis. This problem rests with the collector, the interpreter, the historian himself. Apart from his own bias with respect to the nature of his research, a myth or a tradition poses a dilemma to the researcher as it can have more than one possible explanation. Even an interpretation of a tradition where the historian has considered all possible explanations via all possible disciplinary perspectives would only be an 'explanation', for every plausible interpretation is but an explanation or identification of an aspect of social concern - communal, moral, cultural, religious - in the community to which the particular myth or oral tradition belongs, and that selected by the historian as the most appealing is not necessarily the truth. It seems, then, that if there is a solution to this problem, it would lie in the area of methodology and the scope of the research undertaken, as what would seem to be an issue to a historian would not necessarily be so for a sociologist, an anthropologist or a psychoanalyst analysing the same material.

To what extent these problems apply to Gilbertese oral traditions will be made evident in the following pages when we look at some aspects and characteristics of the Gilbertese oral tradition, and in Chapter 13 when we look at problems such as conflations through redactional techniques or the more obvious changes in the texts of the traditions made by the chroniclers. But before looking into those problems with respect to Gilbertese oral traditions, and how to resolve them if they exist, it is best at this point to outline the history of the use of Gilbertese oral traditions as historical sources.

If we discount Gilbertese chroniclers the first people to use Gilbertese oral traditions as sources for reconstructing the past were the beachcombers. John Kirby on Kuria, for example, told Horatio Hale, the first Western scientist to visit the Gilberts (in 1841), that oral tradition stated clearly that the first people came there from the southwest, Banaba; and that they were later

joined by light-coloured settlers from Amoi or Amoe which Kirby thought the people believed was Samoa.¹¹

After the beachcombers, missionaries were also interested in the traditions. Although their intentions were mainly to compile and collect them in order to understand as much as possible the culture and the people, they did do some interpretation. Many agreed that the people of the Gilberts had at one time settled in Samoa, or that Samoa was the last home for many of their forefathers. This is obvious in the lessons taught at their mission school in Rongorongo, Beru.¹²

But although interested in the traditions, missionaries were cautious enough to label them as *'karakin te ro'* (lit. 'tales of the dark days'). William Goward, who believed that through education the islanders would gradually come to realise that their traditions as well as certain aspects of their way of life were things of the 'dark days', was the real instigator of such a notion. He forced his converts to accept this view about their past as a fact; an attitude which Arthur Grimble, who had grown to admire the legends and customs of the people, could not tolerate. Grimble felt that the Protestant Mission

has attempted by education to do the work of evolution. It has endeavoured in a single span to bridge the abyss between savagery and modernism, and succeeded only in wrecking the native character. It is not surprising that in a period of 30 years the Mission has failed to achieve what in Europe was brought about only by twenty centuries of history and the clarifying influences of several systems of dogma and a dozen saving heresies. The most painful results of this abortive attempt are (a) the disappearance of the native gentleman with his primitive yet perfectly clean cut standards of conduct; (b) the birth of the native snob; a being ashamed of his ancestry, ashamed of his history, ashamed of his legends, ashamed practically of everything that ever happened to his race outside the chapel and the classroom. Anything therefore in the nature of a race ideal is lost upon him. His

¹¹ Hale had no doubt that the people were referring to Samoa. Horatio Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, under the command of Charles Wilkes, U.S.A. Ethnology and Philology* (Philadelphia 1846), 187. There was also another beachcomber, Grey, who had been on Makin for five years before the arrival of the United States Exploring Expedition. He was known to the islanders as Bob.

¹² Rongorongo, which was established in 1900 as a Theological School to train local people for the ministry, was also a centre training local teachers in the various mission schools throughout the group. Included in their curriculum was a study of the history of the islands and the people before contact with the Europeans. Much of this was based on the traditions collected by the local pastors from old men and women; many of them form the basis for the content of E. Tibwere et al., *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, ed. May Pateman (Rongorongo 1942), a source and handbook for those teaching the history of the islands. According to the early LMS missionaries before William Goward one of the reasons for the success of the Samoan mission in the Southern Gilberts could perhaps be that the Samoans were considered *iruwa* (honoured visitors or guests), 'distant relatives' from one of the ancestral lands of their *ikawai* (forefathers) - Tamoia (Samoa). One important reason was the hope that if the people had a missionary on the island the blackbirding ships would not come and take people away.

national tendencies are not merely revised, they are obliterated. The fine courtesy and respect paid in pagan days by young to old are dead with disuse: the Christian youth owes no reverence to his unconverted seniors. This is the seed of all insubordination. If a native official is not a Christian, he commands no willing obedience among the elect. If on the contrary he is a convert, he has no sympathy or understanding to waste upon pagan villagers. He cannot afford to show such qualities for fear of falling from grace.¹³

Because of such attitudes, the works of the missionaries show minimal indication of traditions being seriously exploited, either as historical sources or for any other reason. After all, they believed that if there was a history that the converts ought to remember and know by heart, it should be the history of Israel where God was active; a history that found its fulfilment and meaning in the Christ event; a history that continued in the witness and the story of the Church through its missionary agencies onto which they, the converts, were being grafted.¹⁴ Where these missionary teachers used oral traditions as avenues into the 'dark' past, their use of the traditions was similar to that of their amateur counterparts in Polynesia: using their sources in the most uncritical manner.

Grimble, then, was the first to make a critical evaluation of Gilbertese oral traditions and claim them as good historical sources, but being brought up in the one-time world-embracing speculations of historical diffusionism, he cannot be blamed for the exaggerated conclusions which he claimed to be implicit if not always explicit in his sources.¹⁵ As with other diffusionists of the time, his works cast further doubt on the value of oral traditions as sources for historical reconstruction. Nonetheless, he did add to the voices arguing for the recognition of oral traditions as good sources for reconstructing history.

¹³ Grimble to Elliot, 20 Nov. 1918, Western Pacific High Commission, WPHC 4, courtesy of Barrie Macdonald, Massey University.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that from the time of Goward onwards the oral traditions of the people were considered as of less significance than the 'traditions' of the first arrival of Christianity in the islands. An *animane* for instance who knows something of the 'history' of the Church from its roots in Judaism to the coming of Christianity to the islands was more likely to command respect and obedience in the community than the unchristian brethren. This was quite obvious, as Grimble noticed; he detested it because it caused problems for his unchristian and Roman Catholic assistants, and he blamed the Protestant missionaries for them.

¹⁵ See Grimble's construction of the migrations of the Gilbertese people entirely from oral traditions, beginning from mainland Southeast Asia, in A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Preliminary Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir No.12. Of particular significance is his unpublished Part IV of that study, 'Auriaria the Pandanus Spirit', and his notes on the 'Nabanaba Line [of islands]', where he traces the movements and connections of the ancestors of the Gilbertese throughout Polynesia from eating habits and utensils.

Grimble was followed by H.E. Maude, who in his study of the Gilbertese *boti* demonstrated that indeed the Gilbertese oral traditions are sources of intrinsic value for the study of history. Though the work demonstrates how one could manage a reconstruction with a technique (ethnohistory) using oral traditions solely as sources, it does leave space for doubt and suspicion; no clear indication is given of how the sources were tested nor how he arrived at his conclusions. Maude did take into consideration the following:

- (a) The special function of the clan genealogies and their supporting narratives to the Gilbertese;
- (b) the peculiar pains taken to ensure accuracy;
- (c) the number of narratives now available for study;
- (d) the possibility of comparing and checking records from different clans and from different islands;
- (e) the fact that most of them have been in any case checked at intervals by recital;
- (f) the relative recentness of the events described; and
- (g) the exceptional powers of illiterate people such as the Gilbertese to memorise when it serves an important purpose.

But even then, one cannot be totally convinced because the considerations did nothing more than argue for oral tradition to be placed on the same level with documents, rather than determining how one should understand oral tradition with all its related problems to be able to use it.

This is not to say that the historical reconstruction of the evolution of the *boti* is incorrect, not at all; but rather, that the study would have been more appreciated and understood had the problems related to oral traditions been raised and clearly addressed. The comment of J.W. Davidson concerning this work is not at all surprising, 'Congratulations, Harry, you have at last succeeded in making yourself totally incomprehensible', for the work is indeed hard to understand.¹⁶ In fact, the published study sold only about six dozen copies in 10 years to Europeans. This did not worry Maude as the work was well received by the Gilbertese who understood it better than any other people, and it was for them the work, after all, had been written.

Aspects of the Transmittal Process

For the sake of discussion and clarity the phenomenon of oral tradition may be divided into two aspects: on the one hand the process whereby traditional material is transmitted and preserved and, on the other, the oral material, the traditional material itself which is being transmitted. The two are obviously so intrinsically related that it would normally be superfluous to

¹⁶ H.E. Maude, pers. comm., June 1990.

separate them, but for our purpose we do so and use them as general rubrics under which the many particularities and facets of oral tradition can be grouped. This is because most, if not all, of the problems raised above concerning oral traditions are really not the problems of the traditional material, but rather the problems of transmission. The processes vary: at times rigid and faithful, at other times unfaithful, including unintentional changes which affect the length and meaning of the material.

Oral tradition is such a complex entity that generalisations about it will obviously produce naive conclusions and much the same attitude as those of its critics who saw in it material of no value whatsoever; but below are some of the obvious significant aspects of Gilbertese oral tradition emerging from observations of their use by the people as well as from analysis of the traditional materials in the written form and accessible for scrutiny. Special attention is given to the situations in pre-contact Gilbertese society.

(a) *Interpretation and Application*

Interpretation was from the beginning an integral aspect of the transmittal process of Gilbertese oral tradition. Though the traditions were recounted to tell what the people believed to have happened, they were intended to be interpreted and applied to living people. In public utterance, whether in a composed song or speech in the *maneaba*, they were not merely meant to inform the people about the past, but rather to be interpreted and applied to the community. Context normally determines the choice of the traditional material to be told as, whatever its application, it ought to be fitting to the nature of the gathering.

Unimane are by custom the proper speakers in the *maneaba*, but not all *unimane* would give speeches, for there would be outstanding speakers whom the gathering would prefer to hear. It is unlikely that these recognised speakers would not be chroniclers of some sort, well versed in the traditional stories of the islands, as one of the marks of a good talk is that it contains many references to the past and is delivered in fine poetic language.

(b) *Actualisation and Fulfilment*

Concomitant with interpretation and application of oral tradition is actualisation and fulfilment. This is particularly true in gatherings where those knowledgeable in the oral traditions would see, in the nature of a gathering, a fulfilment of the meaning of a certain tradition so that their telling of such a tradition was opportune and would give a fulfilling end to the purpose of the gathering. Though oral tradition is recounted here with the intent of informing the listeners about the past, the chronicler is merely applying his knowledge of the traditional material to the particular moment, during and after which, by custom, the listeners ought to affirm with

repeated '*e koaua*' (it is true) that the meaning of such a tradition is indeed being fulfilled and actualised in the present. In such instances, people are so carried away that imagination and a good knowledge of the oral traditions are required if one is to know the meaning of all that is being said and done in the *maneaba*. The past becomes very much a reality: people address one another by the names of their *ikawai* (forefathers).

Though this is common in the transmittal process, it could be unfortunate for the teller if the traditional material he tells has multiple meanings, one of them discourteous to a group in the gathering. An example of this was in a gathering on Tarawa at which I happened to be present. A group of builders from the island of Tabiteuea South were assessing the progress of their work. They were facing a financial crisis and the possibility of being shamed by workers from other islands if their project did not materialise at the expected time. It was in this context that a certain young man made a speech with the intent of encouraging the builders. He told the story of the *Uekera* - a mythical tree on Tarawa whose fallen branches dispersed from the *boto* (trunk) to become the islands of the group. His message was that, even if their project was the last to be completed and the least 'expensive' amongst others, that was not what the people were seeing as happening. What was happening was that the meaning of the myth of the *Uekera* was now being materialised by all the islands coming to Tarawa, the *boto*, attracted by developments and opportunities on the island.

Of course, the choice of the myth was appropriate, but because the myth could also mean that the Tabiteuea people were descendants of a branch already weak or dead when it left the *boto* or a lower branch upon the trunk, it made them inferior to other islands and especially its rival neighbours of Tabiteuea North and the other islands in the south.

(c) *Affirmation*

Contexts or moments do sometimes provide impetus for a chronicler to tell his story, as his desire is to have the tradition affirmed by the people as the proper 'text'. The context is used as a pretext, circumstantial evidence to endorse the authenticity of the tradition and so affirm the chronicler's text as genuine and legitimate.

This feature of the transmittal process can be opportunistic as some contexts, though they may not be fitting, can still provide favourable conditions which quick-witted chroniclers exploit. An example of this was the case of the old men of Tarawa during a gathering in Banraeaba village in the 1930s, where, being hosts to the *unimane* from other islands, they staged a drama in which they challenged rather than entertained their guests as to whose version of the creation story was the proper 'text'. They dramatised the story of the beginning of the creation of the islands. In this drama there

was a part which the guests were invited to perform, *kaukan te Bomatemaki* - the separation of the heavens and the earth. Not one *unimane* from the other islands attempted it, which, according to the Tarawa *unimane*, could only mean that they were ignorant of the details of how the earth and sky were separated by Nareau.¹⁷

(d) *Confirmation*

Perhaps the most important feature of the Gilbertese transmittal process is the confirmation of the oral traditions. The traditions were transmitted because they were believed to have happened. Whether telling them to the would-be-chroniclers in the seclusion of the sacred college or publicly in the village *maneaba*, the speaker's intent was to confirm to themselves, to their children, and their children's children that what they all had in the oral traditions were indeed true accounts of their *ikawai* and all that had happened in the islands. Even if they were being recounted for entertainment, with embellishments where the chroniclers thought appropriate, this did nothing to change their faith in the oral traditions as authentic accounts of their *ikawai* in the past. Whether they were stories in the category of *karaki aika Iango* or *karaki aika Rongorongo*, all were considered as true stories. And the people, though not keen to test the intricate details of their stories, certainly were concerned that the text of these traditions should comply with accepted beliefs about all that was supposed to have happened as well as things that did happen in the islands.

(e) *Catechism*

Certainly, a tradition is not transmitted without powerful motivation. One reason why oral traditions were transmitted was to be able to learn about the past. But though traditions were meant to teach about the past, they were more important than mere lessons about the past, for upon these traditions the cohesion and functioning of the community depended. To act contrary to what was expected by the community through the *karaki* meant challenging the customs and practices of the *ikawai* and disrupting the system.

This concern for the cohesion and functioning of the community compelled chroniclers to recount oral traditions faithfully; the concerns outweighed the stories in importance so that the stories became means to achieve such ends. The result was that the stories in the *karaki* were modified so as not to disrupt the stability and cohesion of the community. The chroniclers who

¹⁷ Interview with Ruka of Buariki village on Tarawa by Soama Tafia, June 1987. The *Bomatemaki* is an object resembling a tortoise shell cleaved onto a hard object which in the creation myth were separated by Nareau to become the heavens and the earth. From the lower part of the *Bomatemaki* lands were created, but not before the creation of the islands of the Gilberts had been accomplished.

taught them passed on what they wanted their disciples to learn and accept as gospel truth because of those interests.

(f) *Transmittal Techniques*¹⁸

With the accumulation of Gilbertese oral tradition now in written form, it has become possible to identify some transmittal techniques which, though listeners with good memories would notice them in particular traditions, were not quite so obvious in the oral state of the material. These techniques - the fusion of the materials, compositional conventions, conflation, and embellishments to entertain or comment which very often became integrated into the traditions - though never taught, are nonetheless quite apparent in the traditional material. Whatever the factors involved that justify such actions, the intent of the chroniclers was to transmit what they believed had happened as well as what they wanted to believe had happened.

Aspects of Traditional Material

(a) *Myth*

Gilbertese traditional material contains many stories which could be classified under the term myth. As defined earlier myth is any organised body of stories or even a single story that may contain historical as well as fictional elements: it is neither history nor fiction. Many of these traditional stories were produced with a purpose or function. A number were for religious purposes. The characters are usually *anti* and *antimaomata*, who are more spirit than human, with events very much supernatural.

The stories in the myth are bound together by a common theme and the achievement of a desired goal. Though these two factors may explain the emergence of a Gilbertese myth, this does not necessarily imply that all Gilbertese myths have a theme or a purpose, nor do the factors always have to complement each other, for a myth can have one or both or none.

Many of these stories, though not historical, have historical contexts which they either originate from or are affected by, and so many can be traced to a locality, or a period, or to a group in the Gilberts, or even to other Pacific islands. This oversimplifies a complicated process as the history of oral tradition involves not only an inquiry about the origin and development of every single strand of tradition, but also the history or background of certain words, phrases, expressions etc, that make up a particular strand of tradition.

(b) *History*

Many stories in the traditional repertoire contain what we might call fragments or records of past incidents that have actually taken place, as well

¹⁸ A fuller treatment of the transmittal techniques in the light of problems of the transmittal process will be dealt with later in Chapter 13.

as narratives which are historical, and by this we mean a history work in the conventional sense. Many of these fragments and historical reconstructions have been collected and put into writing, so that now it is possible to compare and check their accuracy from those obtained from different clans on different islands. The fact that many of these narratives have supporting genealogical lists makes it possible to draw an approximate chronological sequence of events that have happened in the islands.¹⁹ The fragments or records initially were reminiscences so significant that they were remembered and passed down for generations.

Most of the stories contained in the historical narratives are known by the people of the *maneaba*, since one important criterion for the acceptance of a narrative is that it ought to be '*Ara karaki*' ('Our tradition'), that is, the narrative should be peculiar to our district and *maneaba*; it explains why we live where we live, organise, and function. Though there may be stories of other people not members of our district and *maneaba*, we cannot be sure, nor can the chroniclers pretend, that what is said is the truth; it is their *karaki* and they know more than we do. With the narratives then being known practically by all the *unimane* as well as the *unaine* in the *maneaba*, a deviation from the orthodox is easily detected and refuted.

The earliest of these constructed historical narratives is the *karaki* of the *boti* Karongoa n Uea; it is the prototype of many if not all Gilbertese historical reconstructions or narratives.²⁰ This is obvious as the narratives of practically all the islands have frameworks or a chronology of events that tend to follow the work of a Korongoa n Uea historian which anticipates the emergence of the great Karongoa clan, its great men and women and the precedence of the *boti* Karongoa n Uea and allied *boti* in all the *maneaba* throughout the islands.

(c) Fiction

Fiction is oral tradition told as a romance, or as a fable.

(i) *Romance*. 'Romances' in the traditional form are prose narratives and usually short, originally told in gatherings the purpose of which was not 'storytelling', which takes a lot of time, but to offer advice on problems. Unlike the fragments or records that report events or describe persons that actually took place or lived, they do not; yet they are more true to life, for they depict not so much what has happened as what is happening. Their context is often quite unspecific, though usually they are set in the era of *antimaomata*, but it is not important to the truth one ought to find in them.

¹⁹ See Chapter 14 for the chronological sequence of events in the Gilberts.

²⁰ See Chapter 11 for further discussion on the history of oral tradition in the islands.

As depictions of life they are often entertaining as well as puzzling because of the overactive imagination sometimes put into them to get the message across.

(ii) *Fable*. Unlike the 'romances', fables feature plants and animals as main characters, though human-made objects (a canoe, a fish-hook) as well as human beings can also be found in them. These plants and animals talk and think and even make plots to punish, trap or teach people.

Because they allow room for imagination, fables are unreal but entertaining. They are the most commonly told stories, and people hear them almost anywhere. At home they are popular stories told by grandparents to grandchildren because they do not demand a serious communication of the proper 'text'. In *maneaba* gatherings, outspoken speakers use them as allegories or as satire concerning their own community.

A characteristic of these fables is that they usually conclude with a warning or advice in the form of a proverb or adage, such as '*Tai irira nako te moan ang, ma taininga te kauoua*' ('Never be tempted to sail away with the first wind, wait for the second') used when people are making hasty decisions on important matters.

The main functions of fables in the Gilbertese communities are to teach or communicate accepted customs and ethical standards and hence regulate behaviour; to provide rationale for the institutions and activities or customs; and to entertain. Though fables can be made to operate in the political sphere, this is rare and *unimane* and leaders of the community are not very keen on it as it disrupts stability, cohesion and order, with consequences that are quite predictable: vulnerability and a certainty of destruction by forces within and by rival districts.

(d) *Legends*

Many Gilbertese traditional stories are obviously legends. By legend we mean a story about an individual which is too well integrated into the past to be dismissed as unhistorical, yet cannot be totally accepted as historical. These stories are common among the clans and communicated not as part of the clan tradition or history but merely as stories of great interest and good to listen to, as they tell of the greatness and wit of the people of old.

May Pateman, in *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, defined legend in historical narratives (stories reconstructed by the 'master chroniclers') as those stories which tell of actual people, though not all that is told about them is true. She even identified the stories in the narratives of *karaki* as those concerned with *ueea* (rulers) from the age of '*anti ma aomata ni karokoa rongorongon Beiamatekai ma Tanentoa [ni] Maeao*' (semi-deified people to the time of Beiamatekai and Tanentoa [of

the] West).²¹ Of course, there are legendary elements in many stories in the historical narratives of the master chroniclers, but a story, once incorporated into the narrative of the master chronicler, is no longer considered as unhistorical, but as one that 'actually happened'. What we define here as legends are those 'legendary' stories not belonging to the narratives of the master chroniclers but circulated in the clans as stories of interest and curiosity. Even clan traditions which were never incorporated into the narratives of the 'master chroniclers' also fall under this category in this respect.

(e) *Versions*

Many stories exist in several versions, differing in size and meaning. Some versions are longer than others because of the commentaries of the teller which have been incorporated into the text. Some are longer because of the extra events or individuals in them.

The *maneaba*, or rather the *boti*, plays a considerable role in the composition and agglomeration as well as the contraction and trimming of the traditions, in particular the myths and the constructed historical narratives. Whatever context people are in (war, plague, etc) or events (incest, marriage, quarrels, etc), such contexts or events affect the partitioning or the stability of the *maneaba* and to that extent the cohesion and functioning of the community in the traditional, common and customary pattern. They become historical and find places in the *karaki* of the *ikawai*. Such events are very important and recorded for posterity as they explain changes in the organisation of the community as well as changes in privileges and obligations of certain *utu* or *boti*.

Some stories because of the differences in their emphasis through the use of certain vocabularies tend to give a different meaning as well. Meaning here is either how the story is interpreted and understood as a record of the past, or how it is to be interpreted and applied in the life of the community. The former affects our knowledge of the past, while the latter affects ultimately their function in the community.

(f) *Expressions of Community Life*

The content of most, if not all, traditional stories reflects the life of the people - their beliefs, hopes, interests, customs and practices. In theory these are the reflections or expressions of the life of past communities only, in particular those who initiated the myths, or the compilers and editors of historical narratives; but because these stories have been transmitted by tellers at given periods who are quite unaware in the transmittal process that they are

²¹ Tibwere et.al., *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru*, 1.

also transmitting aspects of their own culture and society into the fabric of the stories they tell, the stories, in fact, express the life of the people at almost any given time in Gilbertese history, even the time of the teller himself.

(g) *Poetry*

A number of stories in the traditional material must have been originally composed as poetry, to be chanted or sung in gatherings. This is obvious in the written form of the oral traditions as some of them betray the characteristics of Gilbertese poetry. Such stories contain a repeated formula, usually an invented phrase by the poet (professional composer of lyrics or professional mourner) with no clear meaning or a variety of meanings with the intent of arousing the imagination; sound patterns, such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance and rhyme; contradictions, where reality is expressed oppositionally; and imagery and metaphor. Poetry attempts to go beyond prose narratives by catching those aspects of human feelings and attitudes that are quite impossible to convey in ordinary language.²²

Gilbertese oral poetry is composed at the time of the event or immediately after it; dirges, for instance, were composed on the site or before an audience. *Taan tanginiwenei* (professional mourners) who were notified about a disaster were invited to mourn; they composed the epitaph and song.

Many of these dirges as well as other songs (about courtship, praise, worship, etc) tend to change their form: on the one hand, from sung poetry to properly constructed narratives, and on the other, as choruses or short chanted verses, though much reduced in length, in a properly reconstructed narrative. In the former, the poetry loses its identity as a chant or song and therefore is no longer sung. In the latter, the new narrative is identified from other narratives (those that existed from the beginning as verbal stories) as a *bakabu*.

Gilbertese oral poetry is not entirely concerned with actual historical incidents; a number of verse narratives were composed to tell of the mysteries of human relationships - the poetry of love and affection is the most popular.²³ Other poetry is concerned with the usual questions and

²² The art of poetry, with its magic and spell, somehow has become peculiar to the composers of chants or songs. The composers are usually well versed in the oral stories as well as the customs and practices of the people, and in most cases are the chroniclers themselves. Consultation with a chronicler is sometimes necessary if a poet or composer is unsure of materials he wishes to incorporate into his song.

²³ Love poetry, though the most popular form, was the most frowned upon by the older generations of missionaries. For the defence of the Gilbertese poets and poetry from the criticisms of the missionaries see A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 325, 327.

explanations about life, its origins and related problems.²⁴ Some of the best Gilbertese oral poetic compositions are descriptions of the flora and fauna or teachings about some kind of moral or ethical issue.

²⁴ Gilbertese oral poetry known in the form of *kainikamaen* is a complicated art and would require more space or a separate study if it is to be fully understood. One of the well known schools of poets or composers today is from the island of Maiana.

CHAPTER 11

Karongoa and the Emergence of the Gilbertese Canon of Oral Tradition

ANYONE READING THE contemporary Gilbertese oral reconstructions now available cannot fail to note that they have common elements as well as differences.¹ Firstly, most have the same structure - they begin with creation myths; then follow the activities and migrations of *anti*; the emergence of *antimaomata*; and finally the appearance of *aomata* ending with the generation of the teller. Those that do not follow this structure cannot be said to be disorganised, for they too have some unity and arrangement.

Second, the majority of the traditions include many common or similar stories. Stories of Nareau, for instance, are found in almost all traditions. The stories may not be exactly the same in detail, but the personality and deeds cannot be mistaken. The story of the rulers of Tarawa, Beia and Tekai, is also common to most traditions, as are epochal events, like the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia. The common stories are usually set in the *anti* and *antimaomata* period.

And third, some traditions have their own unique stories. The creation stories and activities of the *anti* in the Banaban traditions are specific to Banaba. The same is true also of the Auriaria-Taranga stories and those of Batuku found in the traditions from Makin and Butaritari. Many of the specific stories are concerned with events set in the age of *aomata*. This is understandable as in the *aomata* stories chroniclers were concerned solely with events on their own and neighbouring islands.

The elements of difference and similarity raise important questions. Why are some traditions similar in structure and content? How is it that most traditions have many common stories, such as the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia? Why are there differences in the content of these common stories? Why do the traditions from Banaba and the two northern islands have different creation stories from the rest of the island traditions? Why do the stories in the age

¹ See Bibliography for the major collections of Gilbertese oral tradition.

of *anti* and especially that of *antimaomata* have more in common than the stories in the age of *aomata*? A comparison of the individual stories of the traditions raises further questions - such as why are Tabakea creation narratives unique to the Banaban tradition, or why is it that most *māneaba* traditions have many similar stories to the clan or *boti* tradition of Karongoa? Why is the sense of continuity much stronger in most of the *aomata* stories than in the *anti* and *antimaomata* stories? These questions have no easy answers, and some raise further and more intriguing ones.

Nonetheless, the first thing that becomes obvious about all existing Gilbertese oral traditions is that they are reconstructions based on earlier oral traditions or compilations and a number of individual stories known to the people. Three early traditions seem to have existed, two of which are original, while the third is derived from one of them. This third tradition, however, became dominant after it was accepted as the major and official tradition of the great ruling house of Ten Tebau, which controlled Tarawa and its neighbouring islands as far south as Tabiteuea.² The three traditions are: (a) the Tabakea tradition; (b) the Auriaria tradition; and (3) the Nareau tradition, derived from the original Tabakea tradition of Banaba. An examination of methodology will show how these traditions are restored from the bulk of the available materials.³

Methodology

Step 1: All the available narrative traditions and individual stories are put into their various groups - Classic Tradition (CT), Particular Tradition (PT), or Harmony Tradition and independent stories (HT).⁴

² This ruling house is one and the same as that of the Kiratas of Tarawa North. E. Tibwere et al., *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, ed. May Pateman (Rongorongo 1942), 17-22; Tione Baraka, 'Karakini Karongoa' (History according to the people of Karongoa), 23-4, Maude Papers (pub. as *The Story of Karongoa*, Suva 1991); Kaure, Nov. 1926, 'Te Karaki Nikawai', 42-3, Pateman Papers; E. Tibwere, 'Karakia I-Tungaru' (n.d.), 79, 108-10, Pateman Papers.

³ This methodology is similar to an ethnohistorical methodology known as 'upstreaming', invented by Fenton, and described by him as a restructuring by direct sequence 'against the tide of history going from the known present to the unknown past'. William N. Fenton, 'Ethnohistory and its Problems', *Ethnohistory*, 9 (1962), 12.

⁴ Because of limited space not all individual stories can be translated. See Bibliography and individual Collections for the titles of all existing and available stories that have been used. The structure and content of an individual story determine its group.

MC - Maude Collection; TC - Tibwere Collection; GP - Grimble Papers; LS - Aonuka-Latouche Stories; BM - Baraka Manuscript; PP - Pateman Papers and Kambati Material.

This is further simplified as:

(a) *Particular Traditions*

(b) *Harmony Traditions*

(c) *Common Traditions*

Step 2. A comparison of the traditions and individual stories of the three groups is then made.

From this second step the following points become clear:

⁵ The Kabubuarangana version from Butaritari known as 'Ana Karaki Tebetero' (The story of Tebetero) and 'Ana Boki ni Karaki Na Kaiea' (The History Book of Na Kaiea) of Makin are perhaps the best versions for the common traditions of Makin and Butaritari.

⁶ The Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition is the best version and representation of the common tradition for islands from Marakei to Arorae, though the *maneaba* traditions strictly are confined to islands from Nonouti to Nikunau where the *maneaba* is still operating.

⁷ There is no surviving Banaban oral reconstruction, but the stories of Nei Tearia and other *unimane* and *unaine* from the island collected mainly by Grimble show that they belong to a once unified tradition of the island. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, D:22; E:45,46,48-55; I:84. See also H.C. and H.E. Maude, *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Suva 1994).

1. The longest of the traditions are the Harmony Traditions (HT). The Shortest are the Particular Traditions (PT).
2. Similar stories are found in many traditions in all three groups. These stories differ only in details: in place names; names and generations of some characters; and, where the stories appear in a tradition.
3. In all the groups the *aomata* stories are more organised with a clear thread of continuity, more detailed and have a lot more stories than the others; the *anti* stories being the shortest and fairly independent of one another.

4. Most of the Particular stories as well as the Harmony stories are found in the Common Traditions.
5. The PT group follows the structure of the CT group; therefore the CT group traditions must be oral reconstructions earlier than the PT group.
6. Many of the PT stories are original, that is, peculiar clan or *boti* stories, though a number of them can be found also in the text of the CT group.
7. The CT group, although they may be fixed because of their structure, change and expand mainly because of the acceptance of the stories from the PT group.⁸
8. The HT group, many of which are recent reconstructions, incorporate stories from the PT and CT group. They are generally the longest.

Step.3 When a comparison of individual stories in the traditions of the CT group is made, the following points emerge:

1. The *antimaomata* stories and a few *aomata* stories are generally the same for all the traditions of the CT group except the Banaban tradition.
2. Of the *anti* stories, the Banaba and Makin-Butaritari traditions are different from the rest. The Banaba *anti* stories are dominated and

⁸ See Chapter 13, 'Evolution of Gilbertese Traditional Materials in the Light of the Karongoa Narratives' and 'Redactional Techniques as Problems of Oral Tradition', where confluations, interpolations, or propaganda expand the content of a story.

determined by the person of Tabakea, the Makin-Butaritari *anti* stories by Auriaria. In the rest of the CT group the *anti* stories have Nareau as the main character.

3. The *aomata* stories of the CT group are concerned more with the events of their locality, and to some extent those of their neighbours; thus, an *aomata* common tradition of Nonouti is concerned more with the events on that island than on others.

Step 4. A further comparison of the *anti* and some of the early *antimaomata* stories in the traditions of the CT group yields the following results:

1. The Makin-Butaritari *anti* stories show Auriaria as the important deity and king of the ancestors who came to the Gilberts. He planted his tree, Kaintikuaba, in Samoa. This *anti* story of Auriaria is similar also to a Tabiteuea Auriaria story.⁹
2. The Tabakea *anti* stories, in particular Tabakea as the creator of the sky and the earth, are unique to the Banaba tradition. There is a Nareau in the Tabakea *anti* stories but he is a child of Tabakea, an important character who was commissioned to save the people of Banaba from a giant *urua* (fish).¹⁰
3. Nareau, except in the Banaba and some versions of the Makin-Butaritari and Tabiteuea *anti* stories, is the creator and protagonist in all the island *anti* stories. These Nareau stories show no interest in the Tabakea narratives whatsoever.

The following diagram summarises the findings from the above steps, namely the emergence of the two original oral traditions on which all existing Gilbertese oral reconstructions are based.

⁹ For a translation of the Auriaria *anti* stories from Tabiteuea and Makin see A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir No. 12, Appendices 1 and 2.

¹⁰ In a Nauru myth Nareau is also the child of Tabakea. See Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations, Myth and Magic from the Gilbert Islands: Early writings of Sir Arthur Grimble* (London 1972), 100ff.

From the two original Tabakea and Auriaria traditions, the history and development of Gilbertese oral traditions appear diagrammatically thus:

Level One Traditions

(a) *Tabakea Tradition*

This is the oldest tradition in the islands, and it belongs to several groups of dark-skinned people who dwelt on the raised island of Banaba. Unfortunately for the Tabakea tradition, no whole or complete version of it exists today nor can be found even among the *unimane* and *unaine* of Banaban origin. This classic Tabakea tradition, incomplete owing to the collapse of the Banaban social organisation during the prolonged drought of the 1870s, but still antedating in its content the material in other traditions, is the one which contains the greatest input of ideas derived from the autochthonic dark-skinned inhabitants. Nonetheless, from the existing fragments of the original Banaban Tabakea tradition, it is possible to reconstruct a probable text of the initial cosmogony of the Tabakea tradition. Below is a cosmogony of the Tabakea tradition told by Nei Tearia of Banaba, but in a version which obviously reflects the influence of the Auriaria people when they came into contact with the original inhabitants of Banaba:

*The Darkness and the Cleaving Together*¹¹

1. The first thing was Te Bomatemaki (the Darkness and the Cleaving Together): no men were within it, for it was pitch-dark (*rotongitong*) and Heaven lay upon Earth.
2. Heaven stirred (*ing*), and Earth stirred: they rubbed together as the hands of a man (are rubbed), and behold! Tabakea grew between them. Tabakea was the Eldest, for he was the first born between them. Heaven stirred again, Earth

¹¹ It is amazing that Nei Tearia, the acknowledged Banaban chronicler, had been able to learn as much traditional materials as she had despite the catastrophic droughts which reduced the population from several thousands to about 75. H.E. Maude, pers. comm., July 1990. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions. Collected by (Sir) Arthur Grimble Between ca. 1916 and 1930', A:1 Banaba.

stirred: Nei Tituabine was born - the sister of Tabakea.¹² After her grew Na Kaibuariki, a man, and Nei Tengangatu (the thousand-headed), a woman. This was the first generation.

3. Tabakea lay with his sister Tituabine, and these were their children: Auriaria, Taburimai, Tabuariki, Riki, Nei Tevenei, Nakaa the Elder, Korereke, Karabinobino, Nawai, Aorao.¹³ There was another child of Tabakea, who grew from no woman, for he grew from a cleft in the forehead of Tabakea: his name was Nareau.¹⁴ . . .

4. All these people, the children of Tabakea . . . dwelt on the overside of Heaven, for Heaven was (made of) rock: it had lands. Many were the lands of Heaven, and their name was Bukiroro.¹⁵ The navel of Bukiroro was Bana . . . Each land of Bukiroro was separate (*tan-nako* - lit. turned away) with its ancestors . . .

5. The land East [of Bukiroro] was called Abariringa (land [place] of burning sunlight - a collective name for the Gilbert Group): Tarawa was its head . . .

6. Heaven lay on the face of the Earth, and it was not yet light. Then Auriaria, the child of Tabakea and Nei Tituabine, arose and walked over Bukiroro. He was a giant. He saw that Heaven clove to Earth, so he asked Tabakea, saying, 'What shall I do to separate them?' Tabakea gave him a staff, so that he might pierce the rock of Heaven and enter beneath it: the name of the staff was Teraakau . . . Auriaria pushed Heaven upwards from below, and carried it aloft on his shoulders *amoia rake* . . . So Heaven was separated from Earth, but it was not yet light; and the lands of Bukiroro broke away from the body of Heaven and fell into the sea, they and their Ancestors . . .¹⁶

7. Auriaria the Elder, the son of Tabakea with Nei Tituabine, went South over the sea for it was his work to make ready all the lands of the Earth. He trod the sea to Southward and behold! his foot struck a reef which stood in his path. That reef

¹² In the Auriaria traditions Nei Tituabine is the sister wife of Auriaria. Here, she is the sister wife of Tabakea.

¹³ The first five names are the fair-skinned beings, who are nearly always in conflict with Nareau and the dark-skinned beings in other stories. It is important to note here that although Auriaria is the eldest Naaka is called the Elder, because he is indeed the eldest of the dark-skinned beings in the original Banaban Tabakea cosmogony.

¹⁴ Nareau is conceived not in a woman but in the forehead of Tabakea, for Nareau is indeed different from the rest of the people, for he is not a common person, but one closer to the gods. This means that the Nareau people must have been important on Banaba. In several Banaban stories we are told why Nareau left Banaba for the Gilberts - it was the decision of their father Tabakea to ease the tension between him and his brother Auriaria; hence, Auriaria remained as *uea* on Banaba while he became *uea* in the Gilberts.

¹⁵ Bukiroro is the Kiroro or Roro in the Banaban spell of *kaetanikawai* in the *tabeatu* rite performed on a dead person. In this ritual the path of the soul is straightened to Bouru in the west in the sea of Manra (Banda Sea) in Indonesia, assumed to be the home of the ancestors.

¹⁶ In the Nareau-Creator narratives (see Nareau Tradition below), which preserve the original text of the Tabakea tradition, it is not Auriaria but Nareau who separates the Sky and Earth below with his staff. This explains why there are always two Nareau persons in the traditions of the rest of the islands. Here in this Banaban tradition the first Nareau (Moan Nareau) is being replaced by Auriaria; while the second Nareau becomes the first and an important character in the later parts of this tradition.

he raised out of the depths, and he made of it a great land: he called it Tamoa-te-ingoa (Tamoa-the-namesake) for Tamoa was the name of his house-place (*kainga*) on Banaba . . . Auriaria planted his staff Teraakau upon Tamoa and it became the Tree of Tamoa.¹⁷

In this tradition the primacy of Tabakea is emphasised over that of Auriaria and Nareau; but the fact that Auriaria is identified as the one who separated Heaven and Earth, the Elder *ikawai*, and one whose work was 'to make ready all the lands of the Earth', betrays the greatness and ascending rank of Auriaria in the Banaban Tabakea cosmogony. In one Banaban myth Auriaria is actually called the *Uea* and lord of Banaba.

(b) *Auriaria Tradition*

This is one of the earliest traditions that came to the islands, though later than the Tabakea tradition. It first arrived with the fair-skinned groups of people from the west, and passed through Banaba and into the rest of the Gilbert islands. This explains why Tabakea is never a *uea* or great hero in the island traditions, even in the Banaban traditions, but remains only the father of all the important ancestors in the islands. In most of the stories he is superseded by either Auriaria or Nareau.¹⁸ This Auriaria tradition affected the initial Banaban tradition and would have taken over the Tabakea tradition, had it not been for the journey of the influential fair-skinned groups, who had Auriaria as their prime deity, to other islands in the east and further south to Samoa where they settled among former allies and distant relatives from Matang in the west, also worshippers of Auriaria.¹⁹ It was during this sojourn in Samoa that many voyages were made between Samoa and the Gilberts and versions of Auriaria tradition confused.

One of these groups that came from Samoa was the Taake who settled mainly on Makin and Butaritari after unsuccessful entry on some of the southern islands, while others went to other islands. The Taake clan on arrival on Makin and Butaritari destroyed the communities there and

¹⁷ This Tree of Tamoa is identified in the Makin-Butaritari tradition as the Kaintikuaba, the details of which can be found in the Karongoa Tabontebike tradition as well as in other classic traditions in the islands. From here this Banaban tradition goes on to tell of the breaking of the Tree of Tamoa and the fleeing of the inhabitants of the tree into the Gilberts, and finally the emergence and generations of *aomata* (real human beings) on Banaba and in the rest of the Gilberts.

¹⁸ See also A.F. Grimble, *A Pattern of Islands* (London 1952), 12, 13, where Tabakea is a turtle supporting the island of Banaba on its back.

¹⁹ This merger of the two Auriaria people must have made them considerable and significant enough to be able to 'plant their tree' (that is, establish their ancestry and influence) along the coastal areas and slopes of the mountain in Samoa (see paragraph 6 in the text of the tradition).

enforced their own customs and oral tradition.²⁰ It is the tradition of this group that remained intact and preserved a garbled version of the original Auriaria tradition from the 'west', influenced considerably during the sojourn of its custodians on Banaba and Samoa.

The last of the groups, that constitute the majority of the original clans from the 'west', finally left Samoa when the 'Kaintikuaba' was destroyed. Most of them settled in the southern and central islands.²¹

Below is a version of the cosmogony of the Auriaria tradition, but after several generations in Samoa and the Gilberts as preserved in the Makin-Butaritari tradition.²² This is a version of the Taaake group who migrated to Makin and Butaritari.²³

*The Growth of the Ancestor, the Tree called Kaintikuaba*²⁴

1. A certain being lived in Mone in the depths, and his name was Taranga. That being's thought was for ever busy seeking a way up to the land above; so he took the seed of a certain plant, a very small seed, and buried it in a hole in the earth.
2. And behold! that plant grew tall and great from Mone in the depths, and Taranga mounted its branches, for he desired to go up with it as it grew; but he did not see that another person was hiding in the top of the tree - even Auriaria withal.
3. And behold! the top of the tree reached its heights of Mone: the time came for it to spring forth above the land; the land was struck by it and cracked; Auriaria sprang forth on high, for he had mounted upon the top of the tree. As for Taranga,

²⁰ In the Keaki tradition it was Tetake who came from Samoa who killed and ate many of the people of Butaritari. See the tradition in Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People* (1934), 104-12.

²¹ The destruction of their influence in Samoa is partly because of the internal dissent between the rival factions or important members of the tree (people). According to the Keaki tradition Teuribaba, the king of the underside, is responsible for the breaking of the tree. Appendix 3 in Grimble, *The Migrations*, 104f. See Chapter 9 for the story of the sojourn in Samoa and the history of the Tabontebike tradition which preserves aspects of the Auriaria tradition.

²² 'Planting of the Tree of Samoa' Given by Nang Kabwi?, Na Makei, and Nan Tanaua, Grimble Papers, Mfm 133 'Gilbertese Myth', A. Island series: Makin. Note that there is a slight difference from the published form in Grimble, *The Migrations*, Appendix I, 85f.

²³ In the Tabiteuea version of the similar story, the activities took place before the time of creation. This story was given by Tekawakawa of Tabiteuea. It is the initial version of the Tabiteuea creation story of Appendix 2 in Grimble, *The Migrations*, 97f. Note that the pandanus is not mentioned in this version also.

The Darkness (Bo) and the Cleaving-together (Maki).

1. In the beginning was the First Tree; its name was Te Bakatibu Tai (the Ancestor Sun), and the name of the land where it stood was Abatoa, and the names of the people of the land were Teba, Te Atibu, and Teatinari, with Nanokai and Nanomaaka, the two great eels. Nanokai and Nanomaaka lay together and the name of their child was Nareau. Then came the Darkness and the Cleaving together. There was nothing at that time save only Nareau the Giant. His work was to find a way of separating heaven from earth, for they were stuck fast together.

²⁴ These stories form the prelude to the genealogy of the high chiefs of Makin and Butaritari.

who was the very owner of that seed, he stayed in Mone in the depths, for the branches of the tree were held down by the sky on Mone, so that he could not spring forth on high.

4. And that tree was named Kaintikuaba.²⁵ Auriaria mounted upon its crest, and the branches of it were many when it was full grown, and people grew thereon, even Tabuariki, Tetaake, Nei Korouangutungutu, Nei Tevenei, and Nei Tituabine.²⁶ And Taburimai grew from a crack in its trunk; and Teuribaba grew from its tap-root.²⁷

5. And all the inhabitants of that tree were gathered together, and Auriaria was the king of the top, and Teuribaba was the king of the underside. Even thus was the first growing of the tree called Kaintikuaba, the ancestor.

6. Then was planted on Samoa the tree called Kaintikuaba, for there Auriaria planted it when he trod the south. It stood on the slope of a mountain. Auriaria dwelt in the top, and the man Teuribaba dwelt beneath it.

7. This was the manner of the mountain whereon the tree stood: its summit smoked, and sometimes burned fiercely; and the people of Samoa could not walk upon that mountain, for it was sacred (*kamaraia*), even as a shrine; and its name was Maunga-tabu (sacred mountain).

8. There came a time when the summit of the mountain swelled, and behold! it was cleft asunder, and that which was within came forth - even a skull. That was the great skull whose name was Batuku, the king of Samoa of old, and his *anti* was Auriaria . . .

From here the tradition goes on to tell of the life of the people in Samoa; the getting of food for Batuku the skull, the first-born of Butuna (Futuna), Nukumaroro and Tonga;²⁸ the wars in Samoa; and finally the dispersion of the people from Samoa, many of whom sailed to the Gilberts.

Level Two Traditions

Nareau Tradition

This tradition belongs to one of the dark-skinned groups, an important group on Banaba. This group and another, the people of Naubwebwe, left Banaba and settled in the Gilberts, then uninhabited. They established themselves first on Tarawa and populated neighbouring Abaiang, Maakei, Maiana, Kuria, Aranuka and Abemama. Some went to Makin and Butaritari, though the majority settled mainly on Tarawa and the islands of the central and northern clusters.

²⁵ Grimble called the tree pandanus. Grimble, *The Migrations*, 85.

²⁶ What we have is the original list of names of the fair-skinned beings that have been incorporated in the list in the the Banaban Tabakea tradition above, paragraph 3, as the children of Tabakea.

²⁷ In the tradition of the Keaki clan, it is Teuribaba who destroyed Kaintikuaba. See Appendix 3 of Grimble, *The Migrations*, 104.

²⁸ The choice of first-born, bearded, and bald has a lot more to do with sacrifice than gastronomy.

It was in the Gilberts that the Nareau tradition became the sole tradition of Tarawa and all the islands from Makin in the north to Tabiteuea in the south, as a result of the emergence of the great ruling house of Tarawa, the house of Ten Tebau, for whom Nareau was an important deity. The tradition was found also on Beru and Nikunau because of the migration of some of the people to these islands.²⁹ The important members of the Naubwebwe group, however, who obviously would be contending rivals, were enslaved and made to work for the king of Tarawa.

Below is a story from one of the several Tarawa cosmogonies which is quite close to the original Nareau cosmogony derived from the Tabakea tradition from Banaba. However, like other Tarawa cosmogonies it is still a composite of several cosmogonies that had existed in the islands. Paragraph 11 in the text of the tradition, for example, reminds us of Auriaria and the origin of Kaintikuaba; hence, the influence of the Auriaria cosmogony.³⁰

*Te Bo ma te Maki (The Darkness and the
Cleaving-together)³¹*

1. In the beginning there was nothing in the Darkness and the Cleaving-together save one person. We know not how he grew; whence came he? We know not his father or his mother, for there was only he. His name was Na Aream [sic] te Moanibai.³² As for him, he walked over the face of heaven, which was like hard rock that stuck to the earth. And heaven and earth were called the Darkness and the Cleaving-together.

2. So Nareau walked over heaven alone: he trod it underfoot; he felt it with his hands; he went north, he went south, he went east, he went west, he fetched a compass about it; he tapped it with his fingers. Lo, it sounded hollow as he knocked, for it was not sticking there to the earth below . . . And none lived below in the hollow place, nay, not a soul, for there was only Na Aream. So he entered beneath the rock that was heaven and stood below.³³

3. And now is Nareau about to make men grow beneath that rock; he is about to command the Sand to lie with the Water, saying 'Be ye fertile'. They heard; they brought forth children, and these were their names: Na Atibu and Nei Teakea.

²⁹ In one Banaban myth Nareau went as far as Beru where he begot a daughter Nei Anginimaeao, who married Auriaria when he returned from his adventures in the south (Samoa). See Grimble Papers, Mfm 133 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions', D 22. Banaban Creation-myth with appendices (given by Nei Tearia of Banaba) #5 and #8; Maude, *Anthology*, 21-8.

³⁰ See the Auriaria cosmogony above (p.122) and the origin of Kaintikuaba.

³¹ A.F. Grimble, 'Myths from the Gilbert Islands', *Folklore*, 33 (March 1922), 91ff.

³² All the names of Nareau in this text have been misspelt (Na Aream), and I have corrected them for the sake of consistency.

³³ This paragraph is the original of the Tabakea text, but with the ascending importance of Auriaria on Banaba he took over this role from Nareau as we have seen in the Banaban version above.

4. Then Nareau commanded Na Atibu to lie with his sister Teakea. They heard; they brought forth children, and these were their names: Te Ikawai (The Eldest)³⁴, Nei Marena (The Woman Between), Te Nao (The Wave), Na Kika (Sir Octopus), and Riiki the Eel, and a multitude of others.³⁵ And the youngest child was Nareau the Younger, namesake of Nareau the Moanibai.³⁶ And Nareau the Younger was also called Te Kikinto (The Mischief-maker), for he made mischief among men.

5. So when their works were done, Nareau the Moanibai said in his heart, 'It is enough. I go, never to return.' So he spoke to Na Atibu, saying, 'Na Atibu, here is thy dwelling-place; thy task is to make a world of men; and as for me, I go, never to return. Finish my work.'

6. And Na Atibu called his son Nareau the Younger; he told him the words of Nareau the Moanibai. Nareau answered, 'Sir, what shall be done in this matter?' His father said, 'Do that thou wilt do.'

7. Nareau the Younger began his work; he looked upon the multitude of the children of Sand and Water. They lay, moving not, in their birthplaces . . . 'These be mad folk' and he named them Baba ma Bono (Fools and Deaf-mutes) . . .

8. He went back to his father Na Atibu and said, 'Sir, they are all in their right minds. What shall be done in this thing?' Na Atibu answered, 'Do that thou wilt do.'

9. So Nareau said to the children of Sand and Water, 'Arise.' They would have arisen, but behold, the heavens were not high; their foreheads smote the heavens. They fell back, crying, 'Sir, how may arise?' The Nareau called to him Riiki that great Eel and said, 'Sir, thou art long, and taut: thou shalt lift the heavens on thy snout'. Riiki answered, 'It is well'. . .

10 So the heavens stood on high, and Nareau said to Riiki, 'Thy work is done.' Riiki answered, 'It is done'. . . He said to him, 'Go, lie in thy place.' So Riiki lay across the heavens, and to this day his belly is seen to shine across heaven, even Naiabu (the Milky Way) . . .

[From here the tradition tells of the creation of the heavenly bodies and the lands in the earth below by Nareau from the parts of the body and bones of Na Atibu, his father.]

11 . . . He took the bones [of Na Atibu] and planted them on the first land, even the land of Samoa; and from the bones of Na Atibu grew the Tree of Samoa, the Ancestor.

12 . . . On the branches of Kaintikuaba [Tree of Samoa] grew many Ancestors, and at its roots also grew many others.

³⁴ The Eldest is most probably Nakaa. See the names of the children of Tabakea in the Banaban tradition where Auriaria though the eldest is not called the *Ikawai*.

³⁵ As a text of the original dark-skinned people on Banaba it is not surprising that this list has no mention of any of the fair-skinned names - Auriaria, Tabuariki, Nei Tituabine, Nei Tevenei and the others.

³⁶ Here we meet the second Nareau, which in the Banaban tradition above is the first, and the son of Tabakea.

13 When Samoa was finished, Nareau went north and made the land of Tarawa with its people. The first man on Tarawa was called Tabuariki-n-Tarawa, and his wife was Nei Beia.

14 When Tarawa was finished, he made the land of Beru with its people. Tabuariki was the first man of Beru, and his wife was Nei Teiti . . .

The tradition ends with the generations of those who returned to the Gilberts from Samoa.³⁷

This cosmogony, though not from a pure Nareau tradition, still contains much to indicate that the original Nareau tradition is derived from the Banaban Tabakea source. Three points, quite obvious, betray the origin or source of the Nareau tradition. First, the claim for Nareau as the most important being whose origin no one knows is clear indication of an attempt to elevate Nareau to a rank on his own, supreme above all others. In this cosmogony he not only takes the place of Tabakea as the first being before the work of creation, but replaces Auriaria also as the main protagonist in the separation of the sky and the earth. We know from the fragments of the original Tabakea tradition from Banaba reconstructed above that Nareau is an important being in the Tabakea tradition - perhaps an ancestor or deity of an influential group - but not the first being before creation or the one active in the actual work of creation.

Second, there are similarities in the structure and content of the cosmogonies in both the Tabakea and the Nareau traditions:

1. the beginning of both the stories with a pre-creation period in heaven;
2. the postulation of the main character or important deity (Tabakea or Nareau);
3. the identification of the parents who are brother and sister;³⁸
4. the list of names of children before the separation of the sky and the earth; and
5. the work of separating the sky from the earth, and the making of the Gilbert Islands and other lands under the raised sky.

Third, though the Nareau tradition reflects the considerable influence of the Auriaria tradition, the fact that the list of the children of Na Atibu and Nei Teakea in the Nareau tradition cosmogony does not mention Auriaria or

³⁷ Although this particular text may have Auriaria influences, the fact that it has the story of Kaintikuaba in Samoa indicates that it is influenced more by the Auriaria tradition of those that came from Samoa than by the original Auriaria tradition from the 'west'.

³⁸ In the Tabakea tradition the parents are Tabakea and his sister, whom the Banaba tradition has renamed Nei Tituabine in honour of the important sister-wife of Auriaria from the 'west'. In the Nareau tradition the parents of the beings in the pre-creation period are Na Atibu and his sister Nei Teakea. It is quite possible that this female Teakea is the male Tabakea in the Tabakea tradition.

even any of the fair-skinned people like Tabuariki or Nei Tevene indicates that the Nareau cosmogony is derived from the Banaba Tabakea tradition rather than from the Auriaria tradition. In fact, the names preserve the original list of the children of Tabakea who are all dark-skinned, with Te Ikawai (who is Nakaa) as the eldest and Nareau the youngest, unpopular among men because of his mischief.³⁹

Level Three Traditions

Nareau-Auriaria Tradition

The Nareau-Auriaria tradition emerged out of the new communities that formed in the islands - the original dark-skinned inhabitants, and the groups from Samoa prior to the destruction of their community there. It only became an important tradition when the main bulk of the people who settled in Samoa came, in particular the members of Karongoa, who made it their own clan tradition since there was much in it that reflected the stories of Auriaria, their great deity, as a prologue to the story of their group and allies. Three *maneaba* traditions emerged out of this Nareau-Auriaria tradition: the Maungatabu tradition; the Tabiang tradition; and the Tabontebike tradition.

(a) Maungatabu Tradition

This tradition, found today mainly on Tarawa, Beru and Nikunau, preserves some of the earliest strands of the Nareau tradition. It is based almost entirely on the Nareau traditions from Tarawa. However, through contact and influence from the Auriaria communities, those in the Gilberts but especially those that came from Samoa, many of the Auriaria stories and concerns have been incorporated into the Maungatabu tradition.

(b) Tabiang Tradition

This is originally a Nareau tradition that has been influenced by the Auriaria tradition from Samoa. However, unlike the Maungatabu tradition, it is not based on the Tarawa Nareau tradition but on the Makin-Butaritari Nareau tradition. Today it is found only in the Tabiang *maneaba* traditions of Beru and Nikunau. It was lost from its home in Makin and Butaritari following the conquest of the two islands by the Taae people from Samoa, who came upon the islands and 'ate the people'.⁴⁰ This Tabiang tradition survived through

³⁹ For the tricks and unscrupulous acts of Nareau see 'The Trick on the Wife of Na Utima and the New Fishing Art of Nareau', 'The Kun and the Toddy of Taburimai', 'The Trick Upon the Wife of Taranga' and many others in Rosemary Grimble, *Migrations, Myth and Magic*, 94-104. See also Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, A:Tabiteuea 4b,c,d; B:Nui series 6; C:Miscellaneous items 12.

⁴⁰ The Taae is a red-tailed tropic-bird, and a totem of the people who went and lived on Makin and Butaritari. See the *boti* tradition of the Keaki clan in Appendix 3 of Grimble, *The Migrations*, 104ff. See also A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 231f.

the Tabiang-type *maneaba* which was introduced to Beru by Tewatu ni Matang, whose grandfather Tewatu escaped from Makin when the Taake people established themselves on the island. According to the Tarawa and Nonouti tradition Tewatu first went to Tabiteuea, settled at a place called Teotirababa and married Nei Tebaibunanikarawa. He had a son by this woman named Tautua. Tautua left his parents and went to Matang in the 'west'. On Matang he married Nei Abunaba, the daughter of Rake and Nei Touna. He had a son by this woman named Tewatu ni Matang. It is this Tewatu ni Matang who introduced the Tabiang type of *maneaba* on Beru during the time of Tanentoa n Nonouti.⁴¹

(c) *Tabontebike Tradition*

This is a merging of the Tarawa Nareau tradition and the original clan tradition of the people of Karongoa. The merger first became a particular Karongoa tradition, concerned only with the stories of its members and allies from Samoa and those already in the Gilbert Islands.

*Stories from the Nareau-Auriaria tradition adopted
by the Karongoa chroniclers*

The Primeval Period

- (1) The Bomatemaki and the work of Creation by Nareau.
- (2) The creation of Samoa the First Land.
- (3) The creation of Tarawa and the rest of the Gilbert islands.

The Migratory Antiquity

- (4) The activities of Nareau in Samoa and in the Gilberts.
- (5) The Kiratas and the ruling house of Tarawa.
- (6) Baretoka, the people of Tarawa and Te Uekera.
- (7) Obaia-te-Buraerae and his descendants.

These stories provide the prelude to the coming of Tematawarebwe and the people of Karongoa from Samoa.

The original core stories of the Karongoa clan from Samoa

- (8) 1. Auriaria and the Kaintikuaba in Samoa.
- (9) 2. Wars of Upper Samoa with the people of Butuna and Tonga.
- (10) 3. Wars of Upper Samoa with Nikumaroro or Lower Samoa.
- (11) 4. The journey of Baretoka to Tarawa.
- (12) 5. The Burning of Kaintikuaba and the Great Dispersion.
- (13) 6. Tematawarebwe and the people of Tabuariki and Nainginouati on Beru.

⁴¹ Cf Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 235-6.

Stories of other groups were included as well, but these were merely anecdotes in the general 'history' of the members of Karongoa and their allies.

But the new Karongoa tradition did not long remain a particular tradition of the clan. The building of the Tabontebike *maneaba* by Tematawarebwe, an *ikawai* of Karongoa, saw the beginning of the end of the tradition as Karongoa property. With the allocation of *boti* to other clans in the new Karongoa *maneaba* the scope of the Karongoa tradition had to be expanded to include stories and interests of other clans for the new *maneaba* system to work. By the time of Tanentoa n Nonouti, the great-grandson of Tematawarebwe, the Karongoa tradition had become a community or common tradition incorporating stories from all the *boti* represented in the Tabontebike *maneaba*.

Tanentoa n Nonouti was a great leader and warrior, feared and respected on many islands. At one time he forbade inter-island travel because of his interests on other islands, and especially to protect his properties from rivals. The law remained in force until the time of Teinai II. With his growing popularity and greatness not only on Beru but on the neighbouring islands, together with the extension of the Tabontebike type *maneaba* to other islands by the members of Karongoa and other *boti* represented in the Tabontebike *maneaba*, the Tabontebike tradition became a common tradition for most, if not all, islands in the southern Gilberts.⁴² Because the *maneaba* belonged to the people of Karongoa, its members retained the privilege of being custodians of the Tabontebike-type *maneaba* tradition. In the gathering of the *maneaba* a Karongoa elder was the first to speak and the last, in case elders from other clans, through ignorance, should insult the ancestors. In telling their *karaki* in the *maneaba* the elders were not to be challenged by other clans or *boti* elders, for that would cause the *maneaba* and the ancestors to be *matauninga* (offended) and the culprits *maraia* (suffer severe pain and die).

But though the Karongoa tradition began to take form and content during the time of Tanentoa n Nonouti, it never became a finished work or closed tradition until several generations later when the *boti* within the Tabontebike *maneaba* became fixed. As oral and living history it was adjusted several times to agree with society and culture in the light of new events when the members of the Tabontebike type *maneaba* were affected, or where the *maneaba* was built. On islands where new *boti* were created or dissolved, the

⁴² See the discussion of *maneaba* and *boti* in Chapter 2. For further discussion of the spread of the Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition see below Chapter 12.

chroniclers had to incorporate or consider this in the transmission of the tradition.

It was, however, in the time of Teinai II that the Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition became fixed and complete (see Genealogy 1). No more changes were allowed; and what was included up to the time of Teinai II could no longer be expanded or removed. The epochal events of Karongoa history as well as the members of allied and related *boti* of the Tabontebike type *maneaba* became the core stories or canonical events for any *karaki* of the past. As canonical events they were considered *kamaraia* (miraculously death producing), especially upon those who wished to change them, for they were not 'any old stories' but *stories of the ancestors*. Stories after Teinai II could be recorded but were not to be confused with events that have gradually and insensibly over the centuries come to be accepted by the *unimane* of Tabontebike *maneaba* as canonical.

It was through the introduction and establishment of this *maneaba* system by the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia on all the islands except Makin, Butaritari and Banaba, that the Tabontebike tradition became the prototype of all community or *maneaba* traditions in the Gilberts. From as far north as Marakei to Nikunau in the south, the Tabontebike tradition either became the main tradition or influenced the content of already existing local traditions by imposing their canon of events upon them. But though the Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition is the source and prototype of all island traditions, local events on each island added extra or omitted earlier stories in the original text. This explains why it is rare today to find two *maneaba* traditions of Tabontebike that have the same stories from Teinai II to the present. Nonetheless, reading through or hearing Tabontebike traditions one can still find the core stories or the canonical events. Below are the canonical events as accepted by Karongoa chroniclers and *unimane* of other *boti* represented in the Tabontebike *maneaba*.

Canonical Events of the Tabontebike *Maneaba* Tradition

The Primeval Period

1. The Bomatemaki and the work of Creation by Nareau.
2. The creation of Samoa the First Land.
3. The creation of Tarawa and the rest of the Gilbert islands.

The Migratory Antiquity

4. The activities of Nareau in Samoa and in the Gilberts.
5. The Kiratas and the ruling house of Tarawa.
6. Baretoka, the people of Tarawa and Te Uekera.
7. The descendants of Obaia-te-buraerae.

8. Noubwebwe and Nei Nimanoa.

(All the above provide the prelude to the coming of Tematawarebwe and the people of Karongoa from Samoa.)

9. Kaintikuaba and the ancestors in Samoa.

10. Wars of Upper Samoa with the people of Butuna and Tonga.

11. Wars of Upper Samoa with Nikumaroro or Lower Samoa.

12. The Burning of Kaintikuaba and the Great Dispersion.

13. Tematawarebwe and the people of Beru.

Settlement and Early Gilbertese History

14. Tetake clan and the people of Makin and Butaritari.

15. Tematawarebwe and the people of Tabuariki and Nainginouati on Beru.

16. The building of Tabontebike *Maneaba*.

17. The Descendants of the Kiratas of Tarawa.

18. Beia and Tekai and Nei Teweia.

Modern Gilbertese History

19. Tanentoa n Nonouti and modern Gilbertese History.

20. Nei Rakentai and the ruling houses of Makin and Butaritari.

21. Tarawa after Nei Rakentai.

22. The Descendants of Tanentoa and other Karongoa members to the time of Teinai II.⁴³

However, because tellers of tradition wish to make their stories *aomata* (real), many existing Tabontebike type *maneaba* traditions do not end in the time of Teinai but continue to the present. The following are some of the common additions to the original Tabontebike tradition:

23. Wars for land in the islands;

24. The Wars of Kaitu and Uakeia;⁴⁴

25. The Wars in the Northern and Central Islands;

26. The Missionaries; and

27. Te Man ('the Flag').

⁴³ Each *boti* of the Tabontebike *maneaba*, including Karongoa members, from Teinai II to the present has its own peculiar genealogical lists as well as its own individual *boti* or clan stories which are not part of the Tabontebike tradition.

⁴⁴ Up to this point, most island traditions have the same stories. After these wars each district or island tradition has its own local events up to the time of contact and the coming of the Flag.

Genealogy 1
Genealogy of Teinai from Tematawarebwe
(Boti names are in capitals under founder ancestor)

From Teunaia to Tione Baraka (born c. 1900), the compiler of the manuscript of Karongoa traditions from Nikunau, there are 15 more generations. See Bibliography for details of the manuscript.

Most oral traditions extend into the present, as the telling of the stories usually ends with the generation of the chronicler; but because most chroniclers concern themselves with events in the times of the ancestors, only genealogical lists extend into the present, while the actual traditions end with the coming of the flag when Britain declared the islands a Protectorate in 1892. But some traditions, like the Makin-Butaritari and Abaiang traditions for example, do extend their cut off point beyond the flag into the 20th century.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Unfortunately for the Makin and Butaritari chroniclers, their history (or tradition) came to an abrupt end with the abolition of the *uea*ship on their islands by the then Resident Commissioner V.J. Anderson in 1963 after the death of their last ruling *uea* Na Uraura.

CHAPTER 12

Karongoa-Tabontebike Tradition

THE 'STORY OF the People of Karongoa' began with the breaking of the Tree of Tamoā or Kaintikuaba, a metaphor for the end of the influence of Karongoa together with their allies in Samoa. According to a host of island traditions the end of their influence was caused both by dissent among themselves and the revolt under a certain king in Samoa which led to the destruction of Kaintikuaba.¹ Whatever caused the internal dispute, or the revolt, it must have been very wicked, for it is symbolised in the traditions as though those at the top of the tree *bebekā* (excreted continually) upon those on the lower branches. Several persons are credited with ending such insolence by destroying Kaintikuaba, and all of them are regarded as the ancestors of the people of Karongoa.

A king who fits the identity of Batuku in the Samoan tradition is the Tongan king Tala'aifei'i, who ruled Tonga and Samoa from Safotu on Savai'i.² He was a 'cruel man and is even believed to have been a cannibal'. According to Samoan tradition Tala'aifei'i forced the Samoans to work like slaves building roads and forts around Samoa, especially in Safotu and in Lalovi in Mulifanua. The Makin-Butaritari tradition says that the ancestors in Samoa had never actually seen him for not a soul had ever ventured up his 'mountain'; and when his food was brought to him it 'was carried and set down at the base of the mountain, for the treading of that place was feared'.³

¹ A *kainikatiku* is literally a home or resting place for migratory birds, in particular the *eitei* (frigate-birds). Kaintikuaba, therefore, is the home of the ancestors in Samoa, a metaphor and symbol for race (flag) which identifies and unites the various groups in Samoa.

² Fred Henry, *Samoa: An Early History* ([Pago Pago], American Samoa 1980), 40ff. If Tala'aifei'i is indeed the Batuku in the Gilbertese traditions, the reluctance of the Samoan tradition to pronounce him a cannibal, and the choice of first-born, the bearded and the bald as his food as recorded in the Makin-Butaritari tradition, suggest that the collecting of prisoners and slaves from neighbouring islands was to offer them as sacrifices.

³ A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Preliminary Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir No.12, p.90. Batuku means skull, for that was the only identity of the cannibal king they served.

But collecting food for the king from other islands was not the only occupation of the people of Karongoa and their allies: they were coastal watchmen and expendable warriors to fight the enemies of the king from abroad and from within. And though the people of Karongoa and their allies shared in the meals of the king - 'the flesh divided among the families', that is, they had some influence on Samoa - they felt exploited and experienced hardship. Teuribaba, an ally of Karongoa, whose 'share of the flesh' was always forgotten 'was hot of heart, but he said no word, for he held his counsel'.⁴ He prepared the enemies of the king to go against him, not only on Samoa but on the islands where they used to fetch the food - Butuna (Futuna), Nikumaroro (?),⁵ and Tonga.

When the time was right the people of Teuribaba joined the enemies of the king and revolted.⁶ A version of this revolt is told in the Karongoa story of the breaking or burning of the tree Kaintikuaba by Kourabi and Tanentoa (an ancestor of Karongoa whose other name was Tematawarebwe) and their companions.⁷ The Makin-Butaritari tradition says that after the overthrow of the king,

Te-uribaba with his companions was held upon Samoa, to dwell upon the northern tip of the land, and not to leave that place.⁸ They were held for long on Samoa, but afterward all their food failed, for there was a great number of them; so Te-uribaba was called by the people of Samoa, in order that he might tell his friends to go back to their homes.

⁴Grimble, Appendix 1, 'Series of Traditions from Little Makin, forming the Prelude to the Genealogy of the High Chiefs of the Northern Gilberts', in *The Migrations*, 90. Teuribaba, who is an individual in this story, is but a representative of a group of people called Teuribaba. This is because when talking of the inhabitants of the tree Kaintikuaba in Samoa it is often customary to call the various groups by the name of their *kainga*, clan totem, clan deity or ancestor. Thus when it is said that Teuribaba was offended it means that a group whose clan deity or ancestor was Teuribaba was offended.

⁵Gardner, an island in the Phoenix (Eastern Kiribati), was called Nikumaroro by the Gilbertese who believed it to be the Nikumaroro of old in the oral traditions. H.E Maude, *The Colonisation of the Phoenix Islands*, *Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History* (Melbourne 1968), 329

⁶The Tongan ruler Tala'aife'i was defeated in a revolt or battle known as 'Matamatame' led by Tuna and Fata, which Henry dated at about 1250 A.D. Henry, *Samoa: An Early History*, 42-3. In Gilbertese traditions and according to the best genealogical lists now available this is about 22-25 generations ago from about 1900-40 when many of the local traditions were collected. See Chapter 14, 'The Dating of Oral Tradition' concerning the probable dates of canonical events in the Gilbertese oral traditions.

⁷Tione Baraka, 'Karaki ni Karongoa' (History according to the people of Korongoa), translated by G.H. Eastman, 12, Maude Papers.

⁸This would be Safotu on Savai'i in the Samoan tradition where the revolt of Tuna started.

And behold! they went away: they returned to their homes, and never came again to Samoa. As for Te-uribaba, he sailed northwards until he came to Onotoa, and Nonouti, and Tabiteuea. There remain his descendants to this day.⁹

The people of Karongoa, who comprised the majority of those that lived in Samoa, joined the migration northwards along the former invasion track of their allies and some of their ancestors to the Gilberts.

The story of Karongoa in the Gilberts began with the coming of Tematawarebwe, whose other name was Tanentoa, and his two brothers Kourabi and Buatara with their parents to the Gilberts:

they [first] came to the place called Taunnamo; and they wanted to set up their father and their mother there, but they saw that they would not be seen from the sea (from the west). So they took them farther north and came to the place called Umantaene, where again they wanted to set them up, but they saw that again they would not be seen from the sea. So they again went farther north, and they came to the place called Teakiauma. There they set them up; and when they turned west they saw that the sea could be seen from there; so they set them up there, and they dwelt in that place.¹⁰

Beru was inhabited by Tabuariki (the ancestor of Te Bakoa clan) and Nainginouati (the ancestor of the Tenguingui clan) when Tematawarebwe and his companions arrived.

Tabontebike *Maneaba* and Tradition

The story of the people of Karongoa in the Gilbert Islands is very much entwined with the story of the type of *maneaba* built by Tamatawarebwe on Beru known as Tabontebike, discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, much of our knowledge of the clan is preserved in the story of the development of the Tabontebike *maneaba* and the *boti* belonging to this type. This *maneaba* according to tradition is built from the timbers of a former *maneaba* on Samoa which Teweia, grandson of Tematawarebwe, was sent to fetch. It was built also in the style of that *maneaba* on Samoa.

Before the building of the Tabontebike *maneaba* the people of Beru had a meeting house, but the building was small and had no real connection with the people, that is, it had no *boti* and people sat wherever they wanted. It was merely a place for social functions and communal recreations, and Tematawarebwe shared this building with the people.¹¹

⁹ Grimble, *The Migrations*, 93f. The rest of the tradition from this point tells of local events in the new home in the Gilberts.

¹⁰ Tione Baraka, 'The Story of the I-Kiribati according to the Traditions of Karongoa', translated by G.H. Eastman, and revised by H.E. Maude, 13, Maude Papers.

¹¹ E. Tibwere et al., *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, ed. May Pateman (Rongorongo 1942), 40.

The building of a new *maneaba* and the assigning of sitting places for clans changed the character of the usual meeting house on Beru: it became sacred because, apart from being the place for social activities, it became a place where all the clans shared their thoughts and made important decisions. As a law court it tried those who offended against customary norms and settled disputes between large families. But most importantly, the *maneaba* was a 'tabernacle of the ancestors in the male line; a sort of social map, where a man's group or clan could be recognised the moment he took his seat, his totem known and his ascendants known, and his ceremonial duties or privileges discovered'.¹²

FIGURE 1. The first three *Boti* assigned by Tematawarebwe in the original Tabontebike *maneaba* at Nukantewa on Beru.

The first *maneaba* was erected at Nukantewa and had only three *boti* in it assigned by Tematawarebwe: the *boti* of Tabuariki on the eastern side called Te Bakoa; Nainginouati on the south side called Te Nguingui;¹³ and Tematawarebwe himself on the northern end called Teakiauma. The western end was left unoccupied (see Fig.1). But the *maneaba* did not remain with only three *boti* for long. As new clans came to Beru, new *boti* were created either by fission or consent. The *boti* of TEAKIAUMA, the whole northern end of the *maneaba* was, for instance, divided by Tematawarebwe to provide a *boti* for his brother Buatara; hence, the emergence of a new *boti* Te

¹² A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 203.

¹³ The *boti* of Te Nguingui was given to Teimone who married the daughter of Nainginouati when he came from Samoa. Since then it has remained the *boti* of the descendants of Teimone.

KAOTIRAMA. The *boti* BAKOA was divided in three: TE BAKOA N UEA, the INAKI NI BAKOA, and NEI ABINOA to provide for clans who came from Samoa claiming descent also from Tabuariki.

Genealogy 2

Genealogy of Tanentoa n Nonouti from Tematawarebwe

The greatest restructuring was by Tanentoa n Nonouti (see Genealogy 2). Tanentoa grew up not on Beru but on Nonouti, raised by his mother Nei Teweia.¹⁴ He came to Beru because he was called by the people to get rid of Koura who had come down from Butaritari and had built his own *maneaba* Maungatabu at Aoniman. He was a tyrant and declared himself dictator over the island.¹⁵ For his services in getting rid of Koura and burning his *maneaba*, Tanentoa was made *Uea* over the island. On assuming the headship of the *boti* Teakiauma, which was then held by his uncle Teweia, he

¹⁴ Nei Teweia was the wife of Uamumuri, Nanikain and Tabutoa, the sons of Noubwebwe by Nei Nimanoa. See p.60 fn 28 for the identity of Tanentoa. For the text of the orthodox Karongoa account see Tione Baraka, *The Story of Karongoa*, ed. H.E. Maude (Suva 1991), 38.

¹⁵ It is said that in his *maneaba* he had a raised platform where he sat as the *Uea* of all Beru. His habit of *tinging* (farting) over the heads of the people from his platform, and ordering the people to light a fire in the *maneaba* to warm his bottom at night when it was cold caused him to be hated by everyone.

changed its name to Karongoa. The following *boti* were assigned in the Tabontebike *maneaba* by Tanentoa:¹⁶

<i>Persons</i>	<i>Inaki / Boti</i>
Kotua	TEKOKONA
Tekiatau	TAURAKAWA
Teweia	TAUNNAMO
Ten Tabuia	NEI KOEKOE
Tabanga	KEAKI
Kabou	KEAKI TE ANGABAI
Uakeia	TE O
Bakoa	KARUMAETOA
Tewatunimatang	TEABIKE
M'am'anti	TEINAKI N AKAWA
Neui	KABURARA
Auriaria	UMANI KAMAURI
Bue ma Rirongo	BAREAKA

But although the repartitioning of Tabontebike *maneaba* by Tanentoa is the most distinctive as recorded in the traditions of all the Tabontebike *maneaba* clans, the final attempt to assign extra or create new *boti* was made by Teinai II (see Genealogy 3). After the time of Teinai II no more *boti* were assigned in the Tabontebike *maneaba*; and where a *boti* became too small for its occupants, members of related *boti* had to share their space. And so the *boti* of Tabontebike *maneaba* was finally fixed, and with it its oral tradition as well.

When members of Karongoa with members of other influential *boti* of the Tabontebike type *maneaba* migrated to other islands they took with them their *maneaba*. With the spread of the *maneaba*, so the Karongoa tradition spread. Because it was their *maneaba* through their *ikawai* Tematawarebwe, *unimane* of Karongoa played a leading role and controlled many of its functions and activities.

From Beru the Tabontebike type *maneaba* was first taken to Nikunau and then to Onotoa and Tabiteuea, and with it of course the traditions of the various *boti* in the *maneaba* that had been incorporated into the Tabontebike tradition by *boti* elders in the time of Teinai II. Where a meeting house (similar to the buildings on Beru when Tematawarebwe arrived) already existed on an island, as on Tabiteuea (the *maneaba* of Akau), or Nikunau (the

¹⁶ Tibwere, *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru*, 53.

maneaba of Taburitongoun) for instance, the members of Karongoa turned it into a proper *maneaba* by creating or assigning *boti* to the members of their party as well as to the usual members of the district.¹⁷ In some cases the members of Karongoa or others from the original Tabontebike *maneaba* on Beru would build their own new *maneaba* on the new island, following the style of Tabontebike.

Genealogy 3 Descendants of Tanentoa n Nonouti

Tanentoa n Nonouti = Nei Beiarung
(KARONGOA)

The Dissemination of the Tabontebike *Maneaba* and Tradition to the Central and Northern Islands

The dissemination of the Tabontebike type *maneaba* and tradition to other islands was by and large through migration of the members of that *maneaba*. There are several reasons for these inter-island migrations, though only two tend to determine the character of most migrations. One is marriage, usually

¹⁷ Although it is debatable, it seems probable that the partitioning of the *maneaba* or the practice of assigning *boti* to the people of the *maneaba* or meeting house is something new in the Gilberts and an innovation of the people of Karongoa. We read in the traditions that the people of Beru had a meeting house but it did not have any *boti*. It was in the Tabontebike *maneaba* erected by Teweia that Tematawarebwe assigned the various *boti* to the people of Nainginouati and Tabuariki. This practice was adopted by the builders and occupants of other meeting houses, namely Maungatabu and Tabiang *maneaba*.

of women who later invite members of their *utu* to live with them on other islands, and the other is the need for more land.

Of all the migrations recorded, those that contributed most to the dissemination of the Tabontebike *maneaba* and its canon of oral tradition to the central and northern clusters were the migrations of Bakarerenteiti and Taabora to Tabiteuea, Tem Mwea to Abemama, and that of the warriors involved in the great wars of Kaitu and Uakeia to the rest of the islands except Makin, Butaritari and Banaba. Of these three, the most significant, which contributed greatly to disseminating the Tabontebike type *maneaba* and its canon of tradition, was the migration of the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia. As recorded in all island traditions except the Banaban, the warriors went first to Tabiteuea, then to Nonouti, Maiana, and South Tarawa; from Tarawa some continued north to Abaiang and Marakei.¹⁸ And so from its home on Beru and Nikunau the Tabontebike type *maneaba* was established on all the islands except Makin, Butaritari, and Banaba.¹⁹ Where a meeting house had already existed, the migrating clans only had to transform it and create *boti* within it for clans in the district after the manner of Tabontebike on Beru.

Although the new meeting houses or *maneaba* erected on new sites were intended as replicas of the old *maneaba* on Beru, many did not always resemble the original, for some would have more and some fewer *boti*, and the *inaki* (place in the *maneaba*) of a *boti* did not always correspond with the *inaki* of the initial *boti* in the Tabontebike *maneaba* on Beru. The Tabontebike *maneaba* at Temanoku on Nonouti called Atanikarawa, for instance, had one *boti* fewer than the original Tabontebike *maneaba* on Beru.²⁰ New *boti* not resembling any *boti* in the original Tabontebike

¹⁸ As regards Banaba, Ririennang is said to have taken Karongoa there, but the *boti* organisation was destroyed in the depopulation of the 1870s. In 1931, however, a few *boti* places were still remembered, including Karongoa. See H.C. Maude and H.E. Maude, 'The Social Organisation of Banaba or Ocean Island, Central Pacific', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 41 (Wellington 1932), 278-9.

¹⁹ The descendants of Bakarerenteiti and Taabora together with the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia established the Tabontebike type of *maneaba* on Tabiteuea. From Abemama the Tabontebike type of *maneaba* was taken to Kuria and Aranuka by the descendants of the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia as well as the descendants of Tem Mwea.

²⁰ The missing *boti* is Uman Taburimai (see Figs 1 and 2), and this is either because the members of the clan or *boti* were not involved in the erection of the new *maneaba*, or were not present when the interior of the *maneaba* was assigned to clans after its completion, or because of the unnecessary creation of a *boti* which would perform a lot of similar duties, or to economise the space in the *maneaba*.

FIGURE 2

TABONTEBIKE MANEABA²¹

BERU	NONOUTI
1. Te Kaotirama	Te Kaotirama
2. Teuribaba	Nainginumaem
3. Karongoa n Uea	Tanentoa
4. Uman Taburimai	
5. Karongoa Raereke	Karongoa Raereke
6. Te Katanrake	Tekatanrake
7. Te Bakoa n Uea	Te Bakoa
8. Te Inaki ni Bakoa	Te inaki ni Bakoa
9. Nei Abinoa	Nei Abinoa
10. Nei Atimaiaki	Nei Atimaiaki (Reiati)
11. Niku Tengenge	Nikutengetenge
12. Te Kokona	Te Kokona
13. Taurakawa	Taurakau
14. Rautetea	Taunamo
15. Bakarawa	Nei Koekoe
16. Keaki	Keaki
17. Keaki Rangirangi	Keaki Teangabai
18. Te O	Te O
19. Karumaetoea	Karumaetoea/Maetoea
20. Te Nguingui	Teimone
21. Te Abike	Teabike
22. Te Inaki n Akawa	Te Inaki n Akawa
23. Kaburara	Kaburara
24. Tengeangea	Tengeangea
25. Nei Atimeang	Nei Ati
26. Ababou	Bareaka
27. Uma ni Kamauri	Uma ni Kamauri
28. Benuakura	Benuakura
29. Katanaki	Nei Terikano
	Nei Temaiti
30. Birimo	Birimo

²¹ Although the number of *boti* in both *maneaba* tend to be the same, the names and *inaki* (place in the *maneaba*) of some of the *boti* are quite different. One important *boti* missing in the Nonouti Tabontebike is the *boti* Uman Taburimai, the Speaker for Karongoa n Uea; hence, on Nonouti TENGUINGUI (also called TEIMONE) speak and discuss matters directly with Karongoa n Uea (called the *BOTI* of TANENTOA).

maneaba could also be found: these would be either the *boti* of the clans of a district not originating from any clan from Beru, or clan members from an original *boti* on Beru who decided to change the name of their *boti*.²²

The dissemination and acceptance of the Tabontebike *maneaba* was accompanied by wide acceptance of the Tabontebike canon of oral tradition. In fact, the Tabontebike tradition had to be accepted for it was the very source and guide on how the *maneaba* system operated. In some districts where the system never operated properly because of the resistance of the autochthones to the conquering party, as for example on Tabiteuea, North Tarawa and Abaiang, the Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition never actually penetrated into their tradition. Because of the resistance of certain groups, a few strands of the original traditions of the islands can still be found today. On Tabiteuea, for example, there is the story of Nei Bakatibu Tai (Ancestress Tai), perhaps a god of the people of Tabiteuea.²³ But though this may be true for some island districts, it is evident from the island traditions now available that the Tabontebike canon had indeed some influence on their traditional lore. From the story of creation to the time of the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia the content of all island traditions (except Makin, Butaritari, and Banaba) follows the Tabontebike tradition that tells of the grandeur of the initial *boti* of the original Tabontebike *maneaba* - and in particular the members of the *boti* Karongoa.²⁴

But however much the *maneaba* contributed to the widespread and general acceptance of the Tabontebike canon of oral tradition, the canon did not stay the same as when first introduced. On new islands and in new environments the members of less significant clans or *boti* in the original *maneaba* exploited the opportunity to elevate the prerogatives of their *boti*, especially where their members played a significant role in the acquisition of an entire island. This is the case of the members of the original KATANAKI *boti* on Nonouti; they enlarged their *inaki* and divided their *boti* into two, NEI TERIKANO and NEI TEMAITI, occupying almost half the north end of the western side of the *maneaba*.

And although Karongoa remained important and influential in most of the new *maneaba*, much of its former privilege and prestige had already been modified and even obliterated from ceremonies and gatherings of the *maneaba*. In other words, the new meeting houses, though they attempted to emulate the original Tabontebike *maneaba*, were mostly made to operate in

²² The *boti* BAKARAWA (15) on Beru, for instance, is called NEI KOEKOE on Nonouti after the *kainga* of BAKARAWA on Beru; RAUTETEA (14) is called TAUNAMO after the *boti kainga* on Beru; and KATANAKI (29) is called NEI TEMAITI after the ancestress of the *boti* who came from Samoa via Arorae and Onotoa, and then to Beru (see Fig.2).

²³ Some traditions identify Tai as a male Te Bakatibu Tai.

²⁴ Most of my informants would not accept that their traditions follow the Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition. On Nonouti, for example, Beia, one of my informants, inferred that the Beru tradition was taken from the Nonouti tradition and not vice versa, when I mentioned to him the similarities in the traditions from the story of creation to the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia.

and to suit the new environment and the way of life of a totally new community, the result of the blending of the customs of the victors and the conquered. Taking an example from the Atanikarawa Nonouti Tabontebike *maneaba*, the *boti* UMANTABURIMAI, the official speaker of KARONGOAN UEA with the *boti* of Teimone TENGUINGUI, is not assigned to or contained in the *maneaba*; hence, TENGUINGUI speak and discuss things directly with KARONGOAN UEA.

The Tabontebike-Karongoa Tradition and the Emergence of Island Traditions of the Northern and Central Islands

With the changes to the roles and privileges of *boti*, many problems arose as well - in particular the confusion over individuals' duties and obligations to the community. The worst problem was the emergence of new stories which were then incorporated into the original Tabontebike tradition: stories to justify the new roles of some *boti*, or to promote reforms in certain sectors of the *maneaba* machinery.

Predictably, many original *boti* who had struggled to remain loyal to the system were dissatisfied with the developments. Most were prepared to see the *maneaba* stripped of its sanctity and reduced to what it was before the coming of the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia - a communal gathering house - rather than continue to be abused by other *boti*. Those *boti* who were interested only in the acquisition of power and prestige for their group encouraged the new developments. One such *boti* is KABURARA on Abemama. This, the *boti* of the *Uea* of Abemama, wanted to maintain the *maneaba* as it held the people together but did not want the *Uea's* *boti* to be considered inferior to the *boti* of Karongoa (the rightful *Uea* of the *maneaba*). So the leaders of the *boti*, being rulers of the island, reformed the *maneaba* and modified it to their advantage. Today *maneaba* or meeting houses can still be found in the central and northern islands from Marakei to Abemama, but none of them operates as a proper *maneaba* would, nor do they retain the essential hallmarks of a proper *maneaba* as found in the southern islands from Nonouti to Nikunau.

With the decline in the proper operation of the *maneaba* in these islands, communities were no longer stable: most returned to their initial state before the establishment of the *maneaba* system. Abaiang, Tarawa and Abemama with its satellite islands of Kuria and Aranuka were the scenes of most of the domestic feuds and violence in the northern and central islands, many of which would have been easily quelled had the *maneaba* continued to operate. Many of these wars led to the emergence of ruling families and the beginning of the end of the democratic *maneaba* monopoly in the northern and central islands, as many ruling families extended their rule onto neighbouring islands. The Kaieas ruled the majority of the districts on Abaiang, and also

Marakei to some extent; the descendants of Tem Mwea ruled all of Abemama and most districts on Kuria and Aranuka; and the various *bata* descended from the Kiratas of Tarawa ruled most of North Tarawa and had influence as well on Maiana.

The emerging ruling families, with power over many aspects of the life of the people, found the tradition of the ancestors of great assistance to their rule. Not only did it help them learn their own genealogical tables, for use as checks to the *ueaship*, but it also provided a means to control their subjects by providing them with intelligible divine reasons for their being *uea* over them. So many of the ruling families and related clans became chroniclers. The past was told by their group and could only be interpreted by their members; hence, today, the most extensive traditions in the central and northern islands are chronicles of descendants of one-time ruling families.²⁵ But the Tabontebike tradition was not simply grafted onto what they had compiled as the tradition of their ruling house to provide the preface and pre-history of their group; rather, many of the individual stories in the Tabontebike tradition were modified, mutilated or even discarded, as can be seen in this tradition from Abemama transcribed by Airam Teeko.²⁶

When the earth and sky were one, the universe was called *te bomatemaki* 'the Darkness and Cleaving Together' by our forefathers. Nareau alone existed long before anything else, and who his parents were is not known. He lived outside *te bomatemaki* and roamed over the top of the sky like rolling thunder. He came across a hollow space which he pierced and prized open. He went inside and found there a monstrous eel, Riki, whom he ordered to lift up the sky. Nareau then sat on the sky and instructed Riki and his companions to lift it up. Those who took part in this labour were: Nareau who exercised supreme power and authority; Riki, who straightened out his long body to do the lifting; and those who cut the restraining roots - Uka, Karitoro, Nabawe, Ngkoangkoa, Bakauaniku, and Utoaba, and perhaps others as well.

When the sky had been raised into position under his direction, Nareau remained there. He decided to cleanse it by putting all that was imperfect into a basket called *te ketenaiwa* which he lowered to earth where it still is. The contents were death, sickness, old age and gray hairs, toothache, hunger, and other sorrows.

²⁵ 'Ana Boki ni Karaki Na Kaiea', 'Ana Karaki Te Betero', and 'A History of Abemama' in Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 295-313, are some of the best chronicles of the northern and central islands compiled or collected from chroniclers of ruling families or members of the ruling families themselves.

²⁶ Airam Teeko, 'A History of Abemama', translated by Reid Cowell, in Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 302. Compare this story with the creation story in Tione Baraka, 'The Story of the I-Kiribati'.

After the sky had been lifted up, Riki fell down and became the island of Nikunau. But, from time immemorial, there has been wrangling among Gilbertese sages about this tale of Nikunau, for the stories have become confused in the telling - probably because no true course was set in the first place. There is agreement about one thing only - that Nareau was the Beginning, the first among the spirits and the gods, and that he would rule over them for ever.

When Naka saw the basket that fell from the sky, he fled north with his wife Nei Nibongbong, for they were frightened by the moaning, old age, and its other contents. Naka fled to the distant lands of Bouru and Neineaba to which the dead travel to join him.

This story of creation, greatly edited and shortened, is placed not at the beginning of the tradition but somewhere in the middle, an unlikely place for a creation story.

Some 'royal chroniclers', however, who felt that there was no point in taking the whole Tabontebike tradition from the Creator Nareau to Teinai II summarised it and concentrated on the events of their island, with the war of Kaitu and Uakeia as the most important event and a dividing point between 'pre-history' and the proper history of the island. The importance of this epochal event is shown by the fact that it is placed at the beginning of their *new* island tradition as can be seen in the same Abemama tradition quoted above:²⁷

So many people lived on the island of Beru that every bit of land was used. Among them were a number of strong and vigorous men who took the decision to wage war throughout Kiribati. One of these men was exceptionally powerful - Kaitu who lived at Maetua - and the people put their trust in him for the conduct of the campaign. Another of the men was Uakeia, the caster of lots, who was chosen to predict the fortunes of war. Even today, the campaign is known in Kiribati as the War of Kaitu and Uakeia.

The force set sail for Onotoa where no opposition was met; so they simply annexed and portioned out land. They travelled on to Tabiteuea where, in a fierce battle, they defeated the Tabiteueans, some of who escaped by canoe. (One story claims that they discovered the Ellice Islands).²⁸ After the battle, land was seized

²⁷ Airam Teeko, 'A History of Abemama', 295f.

²⁸ The story of the escape of some canoes to the Ellice islands (Tuvalu) is confirmed in the Nui tradition (of the Tuvalu group) given by Anitipa. According to the Nui tradition three canoes came to Nui from the Gilberts. There was the *Toantebuke*, a canoe from Tabiteuea belonging to Baiango brought by his son Ten Teroko and his sister Teitinimatang (wife of Temaro) with their navigator Tongabiri. On this canoe were Bubuke, Tataua, Tebania (son of Teikake), Tehobeatau (adopted by Bubuke), Teikake and his wife Tinamoe with their son Temaro, Rarateun, Nauama, Uakama and Tibareka. The second was *Te Ititi*, a canoe of Nonouti from Taboiaki belonging to Tentinti and his wife Terubeia. The third is the canoe *Banoti* of Beru belonging to Narei. This canoe went first to Nanumea and then to Nui. The people on these two canoes were about the same number as the one from Tabiteuea. According to Anitipa, 'Those were the canoes and their companies from which we are descended'. Today, Nui is the only island in the Tuvalu group that

and portioned out. Stones on the sea-bed near the land known as Teabuaeroa south of the village of Kabuna mark the site of the battle.

The pattern of the war on Tabiteuea was repeated on Nonouti and then on Abemama, Maiana, and Tarawa - each time with the same result. Coral-stone cairns were erected on Tarawa to commemorate the war. The voyage was continued on to Abaiang and, after it was conquered, east to Marakei and another victory.

While Kaitu and Uakeia and their warriors were on Marakei, they were surprised to receive a visit from an emissary from Butaritari, Mangkia, who came in his canoe *Tekaburoro*. He sought peace and his request that the campaign should not be extended to Butaritari was granted.

Demobilisation and the Return from War

When the warriors were free to return home from the war, some of them and their families settled on all of these islands. This is why tradition records that the Beruans were the forefathers of the Gilbertese. The lands which the diviner Uakeia acquired were Noumatong on Nonouti, Bike on Abemama. Betio on Tarawa, and Nuotaea on Abaiang. They were all fishing grounds.

About the Abemama People

Descendants of those returning from the war who settled on Abemama had neither chief nor king; their way of life is marked by family feuds, rivalry, the pursuit of glory and power, and pillage. They gave allegiance only to their ancient gods and magic, in which they followed the customs of their Beruan ancestors.

Establishment of the Kingdom of Abemama

One of the men who had come from Beru was Tem Mwea²⁹ and he was the ancestor of the Abemama kings:

Ten Mwea was the father of Ten Teannaki and other children; Ten Teannaki was the father of Ten Tetabo and others.

It was Ten Tetabo who became a power in the land and advanced the fortunes of the Tuangaona family. The people were resentful and would have liked to kill him but they were too weak and feeble to do so.

Ten Namoriki was the son of Ten Tetabo who had other children also. Teng Karotu was the son of Ten Namoriki and there were other children.

It was Teng Karotu who first established a government on Abemama, and the whole population recognized his pre-eminence in the land. He shrewdly set about accumulating property and his enterprise bore good fruit. While his son, Tem Baiteke, was still a boy, he was crowned king of the three islands of Abemama,

continues to speak Gilbertese. For the details of the Nui account see Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions. Collected by (Sir) Arthur Grimble Between ca. 1916 and 1930', 43:37f; H.C. and H.E. Maude, *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Suva 1994), 237-9.

²⁹ Tem Mwea was not one of the marauding party of Kaitu and Uakeia; in fact, he came to Abemama before the warriors and established himself and his family there. See Tione Baraka, 'A History of the I-Kiribati', 39.

Kuria, Aranuka. And the kingdom continued in existence throughout the days of Tem Binoka and Tem Bauro.

From here the tradition tells of some local customs with respect to the ruling dynasty.

As the ruling families grew in strength, so were their new traditions imposed on the old traditions and individual stories of their subjects. Because of this process, today what can be collected about the past of many islands in the central and northern clusters are mainly the stories of the ruling houses, their related clans, and their allies. Even if subjects had some interest in recording their own stories, there was no real motivation, as much of what they would record would be their defeats and the degradation of their ancestors by the *ikawai* of the ruling houses.

The 'royal tradition' of the ruling families, then, based on the Tabontebike-Karongoa *maneaba* tradition brought from its home in the southern islands by the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia, became the standard tradition for many people in the northern and central islands. However, it is a very different matter to try to convince the chroniclers in these islands that their 'royal' or island tradition emerged from and is based on the Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition that originated on Beru from the people of Karongoa.

CHAPTER 13

Transmittal Techniques as Problems of Oral Tradition

IT HAS BECOME axiomatic since the emergence of professional and modern academic history, and among anthropologists especially since Malinowski, that the content of oral traditions of many pre-literate peoples have always reached us not in their original form but in modified versions. The modifications involved a complex of activities from simple changes of narratives to conform to subsequent events, to the more complex ones such as revising the whole tradition for social, political and economic ends. Many of the detailed and much enlarged stories are composites, combining stories from traditions which were originally independent; many are conflated, welding together two or more variant accounts of the same subject. But though these complications present themselves as obstacles for those trying to use oral stories as historical sources, they also provide solutions as much as predicaments: if we are able to understand them and know why they occur where they do, then obviously we are in a better position to avoid error and even correct their mistakes.

Much of this chapter will be a re-presentation of the above complications as problems of oral tradition as they appear in Gilbertese oral traditions. Although examples of complications attached to oral tradition, they also show that not only can we follow the developments of many oral stories, but can even reconstruct probable original stories and check them with one another for reliability, particularly those that suggest actual historicity.

Evolution of the Gilbertese Traditional Materials in the Light of the Karongoa Narratives

I have chosen the Karongoa narratives as our first case study. Not only are they the most extensive of all narratives in the traditions and the most widely known, having more parallels than any others, but we can trace several stages in their development over several generations from their source, since fragments of the original narratives are preserved in the Makin-

Butaritari tradition, the Karongoa-Tabontebike *maneaba* tradition and the Aonuka tradition from Nikunau.¹

The Karongoa Narratives

As we have seen above, the Karongoa Narratives are stories of the members of Karongoa and their allies in Samoa as well as particular narratives of the clan itself, both sets of stories forming what I have identified as the core stories of Karongoa,² telling of events from about the time of the sojourn in Samoa to the establishment of Karongoa's paramountcy on Beru and the neighbouring islands. Important in these narratives are the records of the emergence of the *maneaba* system and of important leaders of the *boti*, in particular Tanentoa n Nonouti and some of his descendants, who improved the *maneaba* system and extended its functions.

The Original Narratives

In Gilbertese oral tradition the identity of the original narratives is not difficult to establish as we know something of the background of many of the traditions in which they are found.³ However, because we cannot compare and analyse all the individual parallels of Karongoa traditions, only three are used here, and upon them the reconstruction of the original outline of Karongoa narratives below is based. First, there is the Makin tradition which can be read in detail in Arthur Grimble's *The Migrations of a Pandanus People*; second, the Nikunau-Aonuka tradition in Jean-Paul Latouche's

¹ Because of the length of the Karongoa narratives they cannot be reproduced here, except for excerpts needed to clarify our examples. However, the whole texts can be read in Tione Baraka (comp.), 'Karakini Korongoa' (History according to the people of Korongoa), 1934, translated by G.H. Eastman, Maude Papers; or in Jean-Paul Latouche, *Mythistoire Tungaru: Cosmologies et Genealogies aux Iles Gilberts* (Paris 1984), 215-77.

² See Chapter 11, 'The original core stories of the Karongoa clan from Samoa'.

1. Auriaria and the Kaintikuaba in Samoa.
2. Wars of Upper Samoa with the people of Butuna and Tonga.
3. Wars of Upper Samoa with Nikumaroro or Lower Samoa.
4. The journey of Baretoka to Tarawa.
5. The Burning of Kaintikuaba and the Great Dispersion.
6. Tematawarebwe and the people of Tabuariki and Nainginouati on Beru.

³ For any theory of evolution of any subject or phenomenon, knowledge of the original phenomenon is important. This is because evolution is nothing more than an argument to show that the phenomenon has changed after a comparison of the original with a more recent one. At times the theory or argument is hard to substantiate, especially where the character or form of the original phenomenon does not exist in whole, or is known only partially, or is something that initially was postulated on the basis of experiences of similar or related phenomena.

Mythistoire Tungaru; third, the Beru Karongoa-Tabontebike tradition compiled by Tione Baraka from a certain *unimane* from Nikunau.⁴

The Makin-Butaritari tradition preserves the earliest strands of narratives concerning Karongoa and her allies when they were in Samoa; while the Nikunau and Beru traditions preserve what were considered by the leaders of the *boti* Karongoa when the *maneaba* had been established as authentic Karongoa narratives, from beyond Samoa, in Samoa, and later in the Gilberts. Although much is about the clan and allies in Samoa, somehow much has been neglected or deliberately omitted concerning the religious activities of the group, in particular their head-hunting and the cult where human sacrifices were offered. References to their head-hunting in the islands of Nikumaroro, Futuna and Tonga are numerous and can be substantiated in current symbols.⁵ In the final rituals related to the re-thatching of the *maneaba*, as noted previously, coconuts, in place of human skulls, are broken on the ridge after the capping has been placed.⁶

Whatever the original narratives were, the following ideas are repeatedly told in several ways in all three traditions:

1. that some of the ancestors before living in Samoa lived for some time on some islands in the Gilberts;
2. that when they were in Samoa, they participated in some aspects of the religious practices of the peoples they contacted;
3. that the majority of influential and powerful groups of Gilbertese ancestors came to Samoa from the west;
4. that among several important deities of the clan, Auriaria is the most highly revered;
5. that problems in Samoa beyond their control led them to leave Samoa for the Gilberts;
6. that in the Gilberts they established the *maneaba* system where they became important together with their very close allies and related clans throughout the island group; and

⁴ This was published in 1991 by the University of the South Pacific. Tione Baraka, *The Story of Karongoa*, translated by G.H. Eastman, and revised, annotated and edited by H.E. Maude (Suva 1991). Although the informant for this tradition is a certain *unimane* from the island of Nikunau, who most probably is Teriantau, his Nikunau Karongoa tradition is based on an earlier Karongoa-Tabontebike tradition from Beru. This can be seen from the content of the tradition itself where Beru and the leaders of Karongoa from Beru are important characters.

⁵ The canoe flag or tuft of Karongoa is explained as a symbol to look like skulls from a distance, the food of Teuribaba, the ancestor of one of Karongoa's allies, fetched from the neighbouring islands of Samoa. Iotamo (comp.), n.d., 'Rongorongon Beru ae Karakin Nikunau' (The Story of Beru from the island of Nikunau), 26.

⁶ See the spell on p.63. This brings to mind the skulls that were once crushed upon the *marae* of Rongo.

7. that harmony with nature and with one another, and all rights of members of the district or island, are better preserved, respected and maintained if Karongoa remains the *uea* of the new system (the *maneaba*).⁷

These elements have helped in the reconstruction of the core stories of the original Karongoa narratives below.

I

A multitude of people were begotten 'west of the tree ... from whom are descended all the people of the Karongoa clan'. These people were 'more intelligent in every way than those to the east [of the tree]'.⁸ These people from the west of the tree, who lived mainly on Tarawa and Beru, travelled to Samoa.

II

It was the party mainly from Tarawa, however, who were 'more intelligent' and skilled, being directly descended from people from the west. They went to Samoa and managed to subdue the coastal peoples there. After establishing themselves there, they then took Lower Samoa, named Nikumaroro.⁹

III

Samoa became the home of many important leaders of Karongoa, some of whom travelled back to Tarawa and Beru. Hence, Samoa came to be regarded as the first of the lands to come into existence, with Tarawa and Beru emerging from two great roots that grew from Samoa. From the end of the longer one grew Tarawa, and from the shorter one grew Beru.¹⁰

IV

The gods of these people from the west who went to Samoa were Auriaria, Taburimai, Taburitongoun, Tabuariki, Riiki, Nei Tituabine, and Nei Tēwenei. The most important is Auriaria, 'who was the king of the top ... of the tree called Kai-n-tikuaaba, the ancestor'.¹¹

V

Although the people established themselves and lived in Samoa for several generations, they were never incorporated into the Samoan communities, or

⁷ According to many Karongoa historians the main reason for the decline and end of many of the ruling families that emerged in the islands was because they were not of Karongoa origin. The only legitimate rulers in the islands are the members of Karongoa.

⁸ Tione Baraka, 'Karakini Karongoa', 2. The tree here in this Nikunau-Beru Karongoa tradition is the point or place that divided the people of the west and those of the east.

⁹ See Chapter 8 where Nikumaroro is identified by Grimble as the island of Niue.

¹⁰ Tione Baraka, 'Karakini Karongoa', 6

¹¹ A.F. Grimble, *The Migrations of a Pandanus People, as traced from a Preliminary Study of Food, Food-traditions, and Food-rituals in the Gilbert Islands* (Wellington 1933-34), Polynesian Society Memoir No.12, 86.

became one with the autochthones; and contacts with Tarawa and some islands in the Gilberts were maintained. Even in marriage, they continued to retain their identity; hence, we find in the stories: 'married a Samoan', or 'wife of you Samoans'.¹²

VI

Because of the internal crisis in Samoa, many of the people 'from the west' left. The majority of them, however, left Samoa when they saw that conditions were no longer favourable to them. They decided to return to the Gilberts along the invasion track of their forefathers. They were a great horde when they entered the islands. They first took most of the islands of the group south of the equator, and from there they went to the neighbouring islands and those in the north.¹³ One of the major parties of the people of Karongoa landed on Beru. This was the group led by Tanentoa, more commonly known as Tematawarebwe. On Beru they erected a *maneaba* where they were the *uea*.

VII

The party that went to Beru was followed by Teimone and his party, some of whom went to Tarawa, as well as some others who claimed that they were connected to the original Karongoa clan or related clan allies in Samoa.¹⁴ From Beru the people of Karongoa extended their paramountcy to other islands, particularly those where Karongoa influence had not been.

To show that the Karongoa narratives have evolved, the outline of the Karongoa narratives from the tradition of Tarawa will be examined. The Tarawa tradition is appropriate for our study as it represents the traditions that preserve the late versions of the Karongoa narratives that had come to their island, which had been blended with its own earlier version of Karongoa narratives.

Tarawa Karongoa Narratives

The tale of the tree of Samoa

The name of that tree was Teieretia, and the spirits grew upon it like fruit. Those who grew among the branches on the northern side were Naka and Tekarara, and Tetake and Tekorouangutungutu; and to the south were Tabuariki,

¹² Tione Baraka, 'Karakini Korongoa', 8.

¹³ Some old songs like the song of Mouia (Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions. Collected by (Sir) Arthur Grimble Between ca. 1916 and 1930', G.II, 67e; F:59 'Kunani Moia'), and some stories, like the stories of Tetaake or Nei Nimanoa, record that these 'Samoans' went beyond the equator as far as Abemama, Tarawa, Butaritari and Makin.

¹⁴ The descendants of Nei Temaiti, for example, 'who came from Samoa via Arorae, Tarawa and Onotoa, and were settled in Katanaki [boti]'. H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963), 22.

and Auriaria, and Nei Tewenei, and Nei Tituabine. And on the trunk of the tree grew Taburimai, for he sprang from a crack in the trunk (*raewaewaen oina*). And from the base grew Teuribaba, and Teimone grew under the roots.

But the tree fell. Teuribaba broke it in anger when those who lived among the branches made filthy the ground beneath.

When the tree fell some of those gods went North, even those who lived on the northern side. Thereof - Naka and Nei Tekarara, and Tetake, and Tekorouangutungutu. And those of the southern side went South, even Tabuariki and Auriaria, Nei Teweia and Nei Tituabine. And Teimone sank down into the earth until he reached Mone: then he made a path upward and came forth in the midst of Beru. He carried Teaikarewerewe. Teuribaba stayed in Samoa.

And when Naka set forth he came to Tarawa and stayed there. And Nei Tekara went to Nabanaba, and Tetake to Totoronga, and Tekorouangutungutu to Beberiki.

When Naka came to Tarawa he took to wife Nei Taunibong, and their children were Taunikai and Nei Karamakuna and Nei Mataruaru. Nei Taunikai married Te Kaintarawa, and bore him a child Nei Terere.

While Nei Tekarara was at Nabanaba she lay with Tanaba and they had two children, Nei Kauae and Nei Tekanuea. But Tekanuea did not love her parents and one day took a canoe and left them in anger (*e kanaeng ao e a nako ma unna*). The name of her canoe was *Uribantekai*. And for many days she voyaged, until she came to land at Buariki.

And it so was that Nareau Tekikiteia came walking from the south of Buariki at that time. So he said to Nei Tekanuea, 'Whence come you?' She said, 'I parted in anger from my parents and floated from the west in my canoe *Uribantekai*'. And he said, 'It is enough. Come ashore to my home; we will go together.' And she said, 'It is enough. But wait first until I have planted this plant.' And when she had planted the plant she went with him. They married. Then Nei Tekanuea was great with child, and a man was born to her, whom they called Tearikintarawa. The tree which Nei Tekanuea planted grew up, and was seen by all on Tarawa. Some call it *te Uekera* and some *Kaintikuaba*.

So the tree grew up, and the woman called Nei Terere, who was the grandchild of Naka climbed it to pick flowers. She climbed among the eastern branches, she climbed among the northern branches, she climbed among the western branches, for so long that the tree grew great while she climbed.¹⁵

From here the story continues to tell of the descendants of Nei Terere and Taukarawa, and ends with Nei Kirirere on Tabiteuea, who became the wife of Tem Beia the ruler of Tarawa. Their daughter was Nei Beiarung who married her half brother, Tanentoa n Nonouti, the *Uea* of Beru and a celebrated ancestor of the people of Karongoa.

¹⁵ Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions', H 68, The tale of the tree of Samoa' (given by Mautake of Tarawa). See also H.C and H.E. Maude, *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Suva 1994), 213-4.

By comparing this Tarawa account with other island traditions, and especially after a careful comparison with the original Karongoa narratives reconstructed earlier, a summary of the evolution of the Karongoa narratives can be made as follows. The original units or stories underlying the Karongoa Tradition were individual and independent narratives about the important *anti* (gods) of the clan and their leaders on Samoa. Such narratives were for the most part created, and transmitted, orally, in the form of clan songs or poetry.¹⁶ In the course of time, some were gathered together into units dealing with various individuals (e.g., Tematawarebwe, Teuribaba, Teimone, Nei Tituabine) or common subjects (e.g., the wars on the islands near Samoa; or the exploitation of the people by the 'Samoan' king and the revolt); the units were later linked together into larger complex units organised by the itineraries and genealogical links of celebrated ancestors and became long narrative series (e.g., the period of the great and important ancestors). Later, these series were linked into comprehensive historical stories (the history of the members of Karongoa from the Breaking of Kaintikuaba to the time of Tanentoa n Nonouti; or the story of related clans of Karongoa and descendants in the islands of the group). By this stage the narratives were in prose, merging into the common tradition of Karongoa. Apparently from this one tradition there branched off separate versions of the original Karongoa narratives which in the subsequent course of transmission developed their own unique characteristics. By this time certain local stories had also been incorporated and confused with the original Karongoa narratives, such as narratives concerning local events and those of the clans in the islands that became friendly with the members of Karongoa, or of those that came to be admitted into the *maneaba* of Karongoa. By the time the Karongoa Tradition was taken to other islands, some early Karongoa narratives were omitted.

After developing independently for a time, the main offshoots of the Karongoa tradition were joined into a single running tradition. However, because the texts of these versions had become largely fixed before they were joined, the chronicler did not have much freedom to revise them. Rather than retelling the sources in his own words, he strove to incorporate them essentially as he found them, using their own wording, making only such modifications as were necessary for fitting the various extracts together, or for purposes he hoped to achieve with the new version. Where the two versions still essentially duplicated each other, one version would be dropped,

¹⁶ The song of Mouia is one of the best songs in old Gilbertese which preserves this style and manner of oral preservation and composition. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, G.II 67e. The best known Gilbertese text and an English translation are given in Maude, *Anthology*, 252-8.

except for significant variants which were maintained alongside the main version. Separate versions of the same episode might be interwoven to present a more complete account. The chronicler who edited and joined the passages added his own connective and transitional phrases and often achieved fine artistic effects simply by skilful arrangement of the material. Somewhere in this lengthy process, materials deemed not suitable for the chronicler's purpose were omitted - as in our example above, the Tarawa Karongoa narratives, where Tematawarebwe units of the Karongoa narratives have been omitted.¹⁷

This summary concerning the evolution of the Karongoa narratives, though it attempts to show the basis of the arguments of the critics of oral tradition, is far from being all encompassing, is highly simplified, and selective. The point of the exercise is to illustrate the kind of phenomena presumed by the critics of oral tradition and the problems related to such criticism.

Redactional Techniques as Problems of Oral Tradition

(a) Conflation

One of the most important techniques of redaction is the combination of different texts - often variants of one and the same story - into a single text, that is, conflation. Many of the stories in oral traditions are not only composite but are conflated, that is, are composed of two or more variants of the same event spliced together by the chronicler. In the simplest form, a chronicler might simply place two versions of an event side by side, treating the second as an amplification of the first - such as the accounts of creation in the 'Series of Traditions from Tabiteuea' in Grimble's *The Migrations of a Pandanus People*, where two versions of creation, the Auriaria and Nareau, are put together; or he might keep the accounts separate and treat them as different events, such as the popular accounts of Nareau and the wives of Taranga, and that of Kabunang and the wives of Taranga. In other circumstances the chronicler would insert one version of an event into another, or would fully interweave two versions, suggesting that their conflicting details represent different stages of a process or different aspects of an event or theme, such as the Tarawa account of the tree of Samoa and the Karongoa account of the same tree in which two versions of the same 'tree

¹⁷ Another good example is the Abemama tradition where all the independent units relating to the origin of the people from Beru who ruled Abemama are omitted. See the tradition of Abemama given by Airam Teeko, in A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 295-313.

of Samoa' are preserved one after another.¹⁸ The Gilbertese redactor seems to have been intent on forging a continuous narrative. He, therefore, incorporated significant, complementary variants side by side, attempting to elaborate a single, reasonably effective narrative out of them. He may have regarded the result as a restoration of the true complexity of the events.

Although conflation is most familiar in *anti* and *antimaomata* stories, the phenomenon can be found also in historical narratives, where the chronicler, confronted with variant stories, refuses to choose one over the other but presents both, usually producing a redundant text. A number of redundant stories come about in this way, and the process is demonstrably common in the contrived traditions, such as those compiled by Tibwere from Nariki, Teuea and Tabuia.¹⁹ In principle, the chronicler's double reading was an attempt to preserve the two accounts of the same theme or event; but though this may be the case with traditions put in writing, it is more common for Gilbertese chroniclers to make bold choices when variants come their way. Their choices usually agree with the consensus of the members of their *utu* or their *boti*.

(b) *Interpolation and Embellishment*

Among the many techniques practised by story tellers, quite permissible in the art of renowned chroniclers and *unimane*, are interpolation and embellishment. An interpolation or embellishment is anything in a story that does not belong to it; it can be a character, object, statement, or even a sub-story. Both are attempts to insert new elements with limited or no change to either the flow of the story or its intended function in the community. Most interpolations and embellishments are made during the public telling.

Unlike deliberate modification, interpolations and embellishments, which are peculiar to the myths, legends and folk-stories of the people, are more congenial and less severe on the stories. Though they sometimes come to be attached to the story and become part of it as though there from the beginning, usually when removed the essence of the story or even the flow of the whole tradition is not altered. The best example of an obvious interpolation is the statement of one of the brothers of Nareau found in the creation stories of many Tabontebike traditions. From the Karongoa-Tabontebike tradition the account recorded that:

¹⁸ In this tale of the tree of Samoa, Mautake of Tarawa has put the two versions of the 'tree of Samoa' together into one long story. The first tree he called Teieretia and the second Kaintikuaba, which in his new version grew not on Samoa but on Tarawa. See Mautake's story quoted above.

¹⁹ E. Tibwere (comp.), 1915, 'Karakia I-Tungaru' (The history of the Gilbert Islands) collected from Ten Teuea [Tarawa], Nariki [Tarawa] and Tabuia [Abaiang], Pateman Papers.

Ten Teimatang, the brother of Nareau, went away to the South, and nothing more is known of him, or about his going or returning, with the exception of these words which he spoke to his brother, 'I am going away, and all things are yours; but if I should come back again later, then you shall have nothing'.²⁰

What we have here is an interpretation and new identity of Ten Teimatang who is now associated with white men who are called I-Matang by the people. The interpolation, which is the final words of Ten Teimatang, is to serve that interpretation in light of the contact with Europeans, and the controlling powers of white men or I-Matang in the form of whalers and traders and then colonial administrators, but above all in the coming of *atuaia i-Matang* (the god of I-Matang, referring to the Christian god) who has taken over the islands and people from Nareau.²¹

(c) *Propaganda*

Propaganda, unlike other redactional techniques of the chroniclers, is an intentional remoulding of stories in order to discredit others or to elevate the teller's group. Of the many interests of propagandists, two are quite obvious and important because of the way they affect the content and hence the reliability of oral tradition: political interests; and economic interests.

Political Interests: The achievement of social and political recognition with power and glory are common aspirations of all *boti* or clans. Of the many ways to achieve those goals, war is the most common, but, as communities have learnt, wars do not always guarantee the attainment of the goals. A more peaceful, but shrewd, method is the exploitation of oral tradition.

Propagandists can be any members of the community, though clan or *boti* elders, the *unimane* and *unaine* in the families, who are generally interested in the integrity of their group, are the usual preachers of propaganda. Their stories may not always be perversions, but neither are they concerned with accuracy. Hence, the details and 'extra' stories of the life of Nei Tabiria of Nonouti for example, her incest with her son, and especially her success in pacifying the warring party of Kaitu and Uakeia preserved in a certain *maneaba*, has kept that *maneaba* important in the gatherings and functions of the whole island for several generations. For the people of Beru, the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia are the most commonly told about; and in gatherings where people from different islands are present, the story is accentuated by them when making bold claims to primacy.

Economic Interests: Land largely determines one's stance in the community and how one is considered by others. Possession of much land means that one

²⁰ Tione Baraka, 'Karakini Karongoa', 3.

²¹ Any white man (not Asian) in the islands is called an *I-Matang* by the people.

is economically stable and very influential. Economic ambitions, then, such as obtaining as many pieces of land as possible, can be achieved in the same way as achieving political interests - war being the usual way. Nevertheless, many, again, have resorted to the exploitation of oral tradition, particularly the secret lore and genealogical lists of others, because with such knowledge one is able not only to graft oneself onto any *boti* and expect their hospitality but also to exploit them.

Guidelines for Reading or Testing Gilbertese Oral Tradition

The formulation of guidelines for testing the veracity of a story in oral tradition is not always easy, especially given that oral stories, because of their intangibility, are easily changed with respect to place and time, and given the influence customs, practices and beliefs of the people have on the stories.²² But though it is more common for the people to change the stories, the probability cannot be discounted that stories can influence and change the ways of life and beliefs of people. Nonetheless the following can be used as guidelines.

Step 1

It is important before looking at the stories to check if possible the status of the narrator: whether he is a Karongoa elder with some special knowledge of the subject; whether he is the authorised speaker for his *boti* or *utu*; and whether he (or she) is recognised as an authority likely to know the circumstances under which the tradition was told: in public or private, or to a limited audience. Those given in private may need referring to other authorities to eliminate the likelihood of error, bias or deceit.

Step 2

1. Is the story complete, consistent and intelligible from beginning to end? In considering this, one has to separate the marvellous and miraculous parts of stories from the conceivably factual. Skulls that walk and talk, people that fly and walk over the sea, and creation or other myths are cases in point, though one has to keep in mind that in Gilbertese traditions a factual event may be described in allegorical phraseology - for example, Obaia te Buraerae's flight to Onouna is presumably an allegorical account of an actual journey, particularly as recounted in the more detailed Banaban version. Other passages may have to be discarded for their improbability, or at least

²² This point although important to consider can sometimes be exaggerated, for what is the story of 'Nein Riki', for example, to the people of Beru? or the story of 'Nareau and his plot against Nautima' to the people of Nonouti? They may be important to people in the place of their origin, but for people on islands where such stories are of no value to them whatsoever, they have no good reasons to change them. Stories that are likely to be changed would only be those that have considerable worth because of their direct connection and importance to the customs and everyday activities of the people.

their unprovability, for example the floating of a raft of *kanawa* trees from Tamana to Onotoa, described on page 47 of the 'Story of Karongoa'.

2. Is the story compatible with stories that preceded it and follow it, that is, is it an authentic part of the whole tradition?

3. Will the removal of the story to another place or even deleting it altogether affect the flow and content of other individual stories in the same tradition, that is, does it play an important role in the place it occupies in the tradition?

Step 3

An internal examination of the content of the story is made:

1. What type of story are we dealing with. Is it considered by the people as an *anti* story (mythical); an *antimaomata* (legendary); a *iang*o (creativity or imagination); or a *taeka nikawai* and *riki* (historical stories and genealogical lists)? and in what mode is it told in the tradition, that is, is it in poetry, metaphor, or narrative?
2. Is there a sub-story or unit in the story?
3. What is the story about?
4. Where and when does the story take place?
5. Who are the main characters and what role or purpose do they play in the story?
6. What are the key words, objects, or statements made in the story?
7. What does the story mean for the people in the place of its origin?
8. Can any character, object, statement, or even a sub-story be removed without affecting the story, or the stories that precede or follow it, or even the whole tradition?

Step 4

A comparison of the results of the above with the result of a similar analysis on the parallels of the story if they exist is then made. If possible the texts or parallels should be from other islands: the wider the area over which matters contained in stories are known, the more likely that they are based on historical events.

Step 5

Finally one should check the information contained in documentary source material, if any exists, to see if it refers to matters dealt with in the tradition. Such written items can, of course, only provide first-hand evidence of events which took place during or since the discovery of the islands by Europeans, but it may well refer to oral traditions heard by the author which allegedly occurred in the past - for instance, Hale's 1841 record of a Gilbertese tradition of their having come from Samoa; Newell's article on historical traditions obtained by him in 1885 and 1894; and the translation of an oral tradition

obtained by an unknown Samoan missionary in 1886.²³ These early records of traditions are important in their own right as showing that their character and substance has not changed over the past 100 or more years.

To set out these guidelines or precautionary measures is to state the ideal and in most cases we have to rely on material obtained second-hand under circumstances when few precautions were probably taken. Nevertheless, by carefully comparing the texts of the main classic traditions, which by the basic consistency of their content, their wide geographical spread throughout the Gilbert group, and their acceptance by Karongoa and other Gilbertese historians over the generations as factually based, we can frame a credible outline of Gilbertese history from the period of the main migration from Samoa, and perhaps earlier.²⁴

How reliable then are Gilbertese oral traditions? Some major oral traditions that may be accepted as containing reliable historical information are 'Settlement of Butaritari by Rairaeana', the 'Advent of Europeans' and the 'History of Abemama, in *Tungaru Traditions*; and *The Story of Karongoa* (1991); several traditions incorporated in the text of *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru*;²⁵ and others reproduced as separate chapters or sections in *Mythistoire Tungaru* or *The Migrations of a Pandanus People*. Still others exist in manuscript only, notably 'The Three Canoes which fled Nui' and 'Origins of deep-sea Travel' given by Anetipa of Nui in the Tuvalu Group.²⁶

New material comes to light every day - for example, the traditional material collected by Latouche on Beru and Nikunau, and particularly the texts of the Aonuka School in the unpublished Pateman Papers in my possession, have still to be properly processed.²⁷ Among new materials, pride of place for historical detail and veracity must be given to the account of the Peruvian slavers in the Gilberts during 1863.²⁸ This is a most valuable oral tradition which fortunately can be compared for accuracy with a document-based account written over a century later: a comparison which shows it to

²³ Horatio Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition during the Years 1838 ... 1842... Ethnology and Philology* (Philadelphia 1846); J.E. Newell, 'The legend of the coming of Nareau from Samoa to Tarawa, and his return to Samoa', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 4 (1895), 231-5; Anon., 'A brief Gilbertese account', MS, 1886, Auckland Institute and Museum Library.

²⁴ See the next Chapter, 'Dating Gilbertese Oral Tradition'.

²⁵ E. Tibwere et al., *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru*, ed. May Pateman (Rongorongo 1942).

²⁶ Grimbale Papers, Mfm 133, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions. Collected by (Sir) Arthur Grimbale Between ca. 1916 and 1930', B.Nui series 6-10; E.40-43.

²⁷ For details of Pateman Papers, see Bibliography.

²⁸ PP4 'Ana mananga Kamoki' ('The travels of Kamoki') in 'Rongorongan Nonouti ao Tabeua Riki', 18-20, Pateman Papers.

be substantially accurate, while adding much valuable detail to events recorded in the published account.²⁹ Taking into consideration also:

1. the exceptional power of *unimane* and *unaine* to memorise stories;³⁰
2. the special functions or connection of the genealogical lists and their supporting narratives to a number of existent customs, practices, and beliefs of the people;
3. that most of the stories have been debated and checked in the *maneaba* by *unimane*;
4. the vast number of similar stories or unmistakable parallels in the traditions of all the districts and islands; and
5. the relative recentness of many of the events described, many of which can be cross-checked with events or activities of Europeans and others in the islands;

Gilbertese oral stories can be made to be as reliable as many written documents through the careful testing and controlled use of the available materials. Perhaps it is fitting to conclude this chapter with the view of one familiar with written documents and the author of a number of 'manufactured' documents now stored in archives and likely to have been used by researchers using archival materials.³¹ He wrote that documents, like oral tradition, can err; 'but even when proved to be mistaken the latter has its value as showing what people believed to have happened and thus, in many instances, what they consider to be reasonable social processes within the context of their particular culture'.³²

²⁹ 'Micronesian Afterthought: *Ellen Elizabeth* in the Gilberts', in H.E. Maude, *Slavers in Paradise: The Peruvian labour trade in Polynesia, 1862-1864* (Canberra 1981), 88-91.

³⁰ *The Story of Karongoa*, by Tione Baraka, is based on selected stories told by an *unimane* of Nikunau to Tione Baraka. Anitipa of Nui is another good example of informants with good memories. Transcripts of traditions recorded by Anitipa are included in Maude, *Anthology*.

³¹ Maude recalled that during his service under the Resident Commissioner in the Gilbert Islands during the colonial days there were times when he was asked to write letters whose contents were manufactured to enable the Resident Commissioner to achieve what he wanted from London for the colony. H.E. Maude, pers. comm., May 1990.

³² Maude, *The Evolution*, 9.

CHAPTER 14

Dating Gilbertese Oral Tradition

DATING OBJECTS, ACTIVITIES, or ideas has been one of the main preoccupations of researchers in many disciplines, an exercise, like categorisation, that has helped them in understanding their subject: the age of the universe for astronomers and physicists for example; the age of a rock or pottery for geologists and archaeologists; the age of texts or words for linguists and scholars; the age of customs and events for anthropologists and historians; and the list goes on. For most disciplines the usual system of dating is based on European chronology, a system that relies entirely on the clock, and the Christian calendar and measures time by years before and after the supposed birth of Christ.

This chronology became so much the dominant system for reckoning or defining the recentness or remoteness of events that today it is considered the standard for measuring time or determining age - to the extent that all other methods of reckoning age or particular times are considered unclear or unreliable, and therefore, it is held, they must be converted to this chronology. For historians, this calendar-time is even more important, especially in cross-checking and correlating events, since the system is in many ways more meticulous and reliable than other known ways of reckoning time, and the most widely used.

The most accurate way of dating Gilbertese oral tradition is the one employed in the traditions themselves, that is, by genealogical sequence. This has been the method employed by Gilbertese chroniclers over the ages for dating or identifying important events. One Abemama tradition, for instance, identifies events in this manner:

These are the issue of the first Koura by his wife on Beru Nei Kitanna. The eldest was Teinamotuna II. His wife was Nei Kamari, Teng Koura II appeared; he took to wife Nei Karubea, Ten Tabanga appeared; he took to wife Nei Burabaraba, Teng Koura III appeared with his brothers Teueaititi and Ten Naikora. All these brothers were members of the warring party of Kaitu and Uakeia which came from Beru to Abemama....

On Abemama Koura III took to wife Nei Terakum, Ten Takaio was born; he took to wife Nei Kaetata, Nei Nenge was born; she became the wife of Ten

Teangimaeao, Nei Rarabu was born; she was the wife of Ten Tabanouia, Ten Teruru was born. He was a great man and took part in the war of Ten Tabwia on Abemama against the people from Marakei. Ten Teruru took to wife Nei Tekaeiti, Ten Tekabu I was born he took to wife Nei Kanongnga, Ten Teruru II was born; he took to wife Nei Itiniman, Ten Tiribo was born he took to wife Nei Ngege, Te Uabong was born. Te Uabong accompanied Tem Binoka during his campaign on Nonouti against Karakaua. Te Uabong took to wife Nei Teewa, Ten Tekabu II was born, who is now over sixty years this year, 1932. He took to wife Nei Tenikaroi, Nei Temaete was born; she was the wife of Ten Tebureaki, Ten Tetabo was born; he took to wife Nei Taonatee, Nei Rateiti (8 years), Nei Tetiria (6 years) and their brother Te Karibaua (1 year) were born.¹

Of course, there were the cycles of the moon, but they were quite unreliable and confusing as they occurred regularly and could not be fixed to the lives of individuals. Many new moons would appear in the lifetime of an individual, and to use a new moon as a time reference for an important event would be misleading. Although this kind of reference can be found in some oral traditions, it is only to indicate the season, not a chronological specification.

Genealogical sequences are appropriate for several reasons: (a) their duration extends over a longer period than the regular cycles of the moon, which makes identification more accurate; (b) the names of the ancestors are usually the most jealously guarded and preserved elements in oral stories in the process of transmission, and, therefore, least misleading; and (c) it is easier to memorise, recall, and check the authenticity of events recorded in the traditions of other clans or *boti*, as most stories are part of the life-stories of the ancestors of the *utu* or *boti* that made the members who and what they are.

This only gives us a sequence of events and lives valid for the tradition itself, however. To bring this tradition into the mainstream of Gilbertese history we have to compare the events and names with those provided by as many other traditions as possible. By such a comparison we can obtain a good idea of when the events took place and the most important people lived, in genealogical sequence.

However, many genealogical lists are not as extensive nor as accurate as one might hope. As shown earlier, many of the traditions, in particular genealogical lists, the basis for land, property or right ownership, became unimportant after the conquest and the restructuring of the islands systems

¹ Beyond the first Koura, the genealogy extended back to personalities on an island identified in this tradition as Tawaii are i Tamoia (Savaii in Samoa). E. Tibwere (comp.), 1932, 'Te Katei ni Kiribati' (Notes on Gilbertese Customs and Traditions) Collected from Nei Teeta (Abemama) and Ten Taumoa (Abemama), and several other old men of Abemama, 9-13, Pateman Papers.

by warriors from Beru.² Even when the lists claim to go as far back as the migrating groups from Samoa, only two or three generations are mentioned from or relating to that migrating group, while the rest are the descendants from after the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia. The genealogical list of Tekawakawa of Tabiteuea below is one example:

From Samoa Batiku and Koururu were thrown to the Gilberts by Auriaria. They fell at Tauma on Tabiteuea and became the ancestors of the people there.

Manika took to wife Temaea, Tenikaroi appeared; she [Tenikaroi] became the wife of Kaintoka, Taoroba (ni Beru) appeared; he took to wife Nei Tetarae (a woman of Abemama from the *kainga* of Tetutongo), Tennariri appeared; he took to wife Nei Taramoro, Tabomao appeared; he took to wife Nei Tematang, Teariki appeared; he took to wife Nei Motikateang, Tenikaroi (te ataei) appeared; he took to wife Nei Teuru, Marea appeared; he took to wife Nei Tenikatang, Tekawakawa appeared.³

The only authentic names in this list that probably belong to the group from Samoa are Batiku and Koururu, belonging to the same generation. Several names or generations are missing to the time of Taoroba, which the informant Tekawakawa was not interested in. Certainly Tekawakawa could still argue that his ancestors came from Samoa, as he attempted to show by mentioning Batiku and Koururu and their place of origin, but his real interest was in Taoroba (ni Beru), a warrior of Kaitu and Uakeia, who got his wife Nei Tetarae on Abemama, from whom he is descended.

Nevertheless, there are some good genealogical lists, some of which go back to the migrating clans from Samoa. Of course, we would like to draw a genealogical reference that would go to Samoa or even beyond, but that would be superfluous, since many of the stories in the traditions of most islands beyond the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia are quite unreliable. Of the existing lists the best are the genealogies of the chiefly families and of the principal islands which are likely to be the least subject to errors and omissions. Many such genealogical lists have already been collected. The extensive lists in my possession are those concerned with the Abaiang, Tarawa, Abemama, Makin-Butaritari, and Beru chiefly families. Genealogical lists of eminent personalities, such as Nei Tabiria of Nonouti, also exist, and can be used to complement the best genealogical lists. With these it is possible to construct a general genealogical sequence of events in the islands.

Having constructed the best genealogical sequence possible for the main events and the lives of the main characters in Gilbertese history by the use

² For the people to make claims to rights they needed only to go as far as the warriors who accompanied Kaitu and Uakeia.

³ Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions. Collected by (Sir) Arthur Grimble Between ca. 1916 and 1930', E(36).

and comparison of the largest number of genealogies available, we must relate our resultant list with the mainstream of external, that is, world, history by constructing a table of dates for our model genealogies based on European chronology, in other words convert the generations into hard, standard, conventional dates. However, the construction of this chronology causes several problems:

1. The existing generation is based on a span of 25 years, as in Percy Smith's model for Polynesia, which has been adopted by Grimble for the Gilbertese people.⁴ To what extent is this valid for men, or for women?
2. The manner of transmission of genealogies in Gilbertese society, e.g. from father to son; from grandfather to grandson.
3. The foreshortening of genealogies due to the omission of unimportant persons, and particularly women.
4. The inclusion of *anti* and *antimaomata* in the earlier generations.

These problems can distort the dates of events when it comes to actually dating oral tradition using genealogical references. Nevertheless, one can still use genealogical reference points as guidelines, provided that one is certain that the list is complete, or the missing generations accounted for to the earliest ancestor on the list, and that all the names are exclusively male, which is not easy since many Gilbertese names commonly given to men may be given equally to women.⁵ One important point to note, though, is that, whatever date is assigned to any event using genealogical references, the date will always remain approximate; as with carbon dating, it must be followed by a plus or minus figure.

The Problems in Perspective

(a) *Twenty Five Years for a Generation*

The average length of a Gilbertese male generation in the old communities was about 29 years, that is, a married male Gilbertese procreated at about 29 years of age. A man generally married and procreated after being proven a warrior or having come to the age of *rorobuaka* (lit. age of warrior, with a lot of hair on his body), which was in the late 20s or early 30s. Although the span of 25 years for a generation may be quite reasonable, a generation of 30 years for Gilbertese society is more so. This is because not all the names in the genealogies are first born; some are second or even the *bina* (last born)

⁴ Percy S. Smith, *Hawaiki: The Original Home of the Maori; with a Sketch of Polynesian History* 4th ed. (Auckland 1921), 17-20; A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 274-5

⁵ In the Karongoa Beru genealogy (see Genealogy 1), the name Teweia is given to both the son and daughter of Tanentoa ni Beru and Nei Tenanoinimatang.

who were the favourites of the parents. The lists may contain names of women as well, who generally were married in their late teens or early 20s, but many of these girls would be the 'younger wives' of the male *rorobuaka* warriors. Gilbertese society was male dominated with many rights and privileges usually handed down in the male line. An example of this is in a dispute submitted to Grimble concerning Rioti, an elderly man on Beru, who was denied his membership of Karongoa n Uea *boti* on the basis that a name, Tearoko, in the sixth generation back from him in his 20 lineal ascendants to his ancestor Kirata I, a *uea* of Tarawa and a Karongoa, was not a man but a woman.⁶ On balance, therefore, 30 years for a Gilbertese generation and a standard for our genealogical chronology, is a reasonable approximation, even where women's names can be found in the lists.

(b) *From Grandfather to Grandson*

Transmission from grandfather to grandson is a problem where the grandparents become too old to pass on accurately the clan or *boti* tradition. Forgetfulness is a common condition among elderly people. Tamuera of Kuma, for instance, who claimed he could still remember many of the old stories he related to me several years ago, made many mistakes or differences when I heard him the second time.⁷ But there are still many *unimane* or *unaine* who can narrate a great number of individual stories or long continuous narratives for several hours and make few changes the second time. In fact, many of the stories and genealogical lists are told or chanted almost every night by the grandparents to their *tibu* (grandchildren); so that by the time the grandparents make mistakes, their *tibu* correct them. Nei Kaingaata of Makin learnt many *katake* from her grandfather, and she could still recall nights when she debated with him concerning minor details which he had forgotten or changed in his story.⁸ A comparison of all known stories, therefore, is imperative when it comes to testing the reliability of an oral story.⁹

(c) *Omission of Persons*

As we have seen earlier with the problem of transmission from grandfather to grandson, the foreshortening of genealogies due to the omission of unimportant persons is a real problem. Although women are the most likely to be omitted, there are several women who are hard to ignore in the traditions: Nei Rakentai for instance in the genealogy of the ruling house of Makin and Butaritari; or Nei Tea in the genealogy of the ruling family of

⁶ H.E. Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963), 25.

⁷ Tamuera, pers. comm., Kuma Butaritari, December 1990.

⁸ Kaingaata, pers. comm., Makin, December 1990.

⁹ See guidelines on testing oral tradition in Chapter 13.

Abemama; or Nei Teweia in the genealogy of the Karongoa *boti*, to mention a few. Women such as these form such an integral part of a genealogy that without them the list is declared void by the people or the *maneaba*.

Nevertheless, names will still be missing in many lists, and these will be those unproductive or irrelevant to the group, in particular those likely to cause disrepute. Names of thieves, or of ancestors who neglected their obligations to their *kara* (elders), or a generation of defeated ancestors, are less likely to be communicated for posterity. This problem also can be corrected by a comparison of the largest possible number of stories and genealogies, since unwanted stories in one group are important for others and therefore preserved.

(d) *The inclusion of 'anti' and 'antimaomata' in the genealogies*

The inclusion of names of 'not real' human beings in the genealogies is a common objection to the reliability of genealogical lists. The assumption is based mainly on the fact that names of deities are found also in the genealogies. But who made it a rule that names of *anti* or *antimaomata* cannot be used of real people? In the Gilberts it is not uncommon to have someone christened after an *anti* or *antimaomata*. Auriaria, Nareau, and Tabakea for instance, the principal gods in the old Gilbertese communities, were and still are common names in the islands today.

The problem of names of *anti* and *antimaomata* being included in the lists and distorting our chronology may exist in the earlier generations, particularly those in the creative epoch narratives where they have been included and taken to represent individuals, for surely most of them were not meant to represent individuals at all. Some of these names represent groups, so that 'Tetaake flew to the north' does not mean that an individual, Tetaake, flew to the north, but, rather, that members of the Keaki clan whose totem is Tetaake the red-tailed tropic bird went to the islands in the north and settled there.

However, in the light of the fact that the genealogies of important clans or *boti* have similar numbers of generations to the earliest ancestor or deity when 'Kaintikuaba broke in Samoa', with the average being 23 generations from about 1900, the Kaintikuaba event can be taken as the extreme end of our chronological dating. This, then, means the 21st (subtracting two generations for possible additions) or the 25th (adding two generations for possible omissions) generation is the extreme end for what can be claimed as the earliest reliable Gilbertese history according to oral tradition. Beyond Kaintikuaba to the time or stories of creation, the generations or genealogies are unreliable.

For anyone who still doubts that oral tradition can go back so far as 25 generations, and holds that already before the 25th generation we are in the

realm of mythology, we can reduce the extent of our chronology to the time of the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, which, based on the available genealogies of important groups and chiefly families in the islands, took place 13 generations ago from 1900, or about A.D. 1600. Since the wars are recorded in almost all island traditions, and the names have been used for several generations as the basis for claims mainly for land on many islands, there is little room to doubt the number of generations nor the names after these wars, whether they are *anti* or *antimaomata*.

It seems, then, that dating Gilbertese oral tradition using genealogical sequence is not easy nor strictly accurate: but until it is possible to correlate all the events with European chronology and assign them precise dates, genealogical indicators are helpful, for at least they provide us with some sense of how remote or recent an activity is. Below is a model chronology of Gilbertese history.

Chronology 1

	Makin-Butaritari <i>Uea</i>	Karongoa	Abemama	Approximate date of birth
1	Kaiea II	Tione	Tenikaroi	1900
2	Nan Tetabu	Baraka	Ten Tekabu	1870
3	Na Bureimoa	Tebutoa	Te Uabong	1840
4	Teitimaroroa	Tannang II	Ten Tiribo	1810
5	Teatumateatata	Kourabi	Teruru II	1780
6	Teauoki	Tannang I	Tekabu II	1750
7	Teitibonuea	Rokea	Teruru	1720
8	Kakiaba	Temarebu	Nei Raraba	1690
9	Natanga	Arikinibeia	Nei Ngeenge	1660
10	Nei Rakaentai	Namai II	Takaio	1630
11		Akau III	Koura	1600
12		Teinai III		1570
13		Bakarerenteiti		1540

Chronology 2

Table of Dates for our model chronology of Gilbertese history.

	Karongoa Uea on Beru	Abemama (Genealogy of Ten Tekabu)	Dynasty of Abemama	Nui (Genealogy of Anetipa)	Approximate date of birth
1	Tione	Nei Temaete	Tokataake	Anetipa's son	1900
2	Baraka	Ten Tekabu	Bauro	Anetipa	1870
3	Tebutoa	Te Uabong	Binoka	Tekie	1840
4	Tannang II	Ten Tiribo	Baiteke	Tangaba	1810
5	Kourabi	Teruru II	Ten Tawaia	Baturua	1780
6	Tannang I	Tekabu II	Karotu	Waea	1750
7	Rokea	Teruru	Namoriki	Kimaere	1720
8	Temarebu	Nei Raraba	Tetabo	Nei Takeiti	1690
9	Arikinibeia	Nei Ngeenge	Teannaki	Tekateariki	1660
10	Namai II	Takaio	Bakamwea	Nei Tenikobuti	1630
11	Akau III	Koura*	Arawatau	Tentintin	1600
12	Teinai III		Merimeri	Taunii	1570
13	Bakarerenteiti*		Tem Mwea*	Tabiria*	1540

*Bakarerenteiti, Koura, Tem Mwea and Nei Tabiria all belong to the same generation or time (wars of Kaitu and Uakeia) according to most island traditions.

Chronology 3

	Karongoa Genealogy	Approximate date when in early 30s	Important Events and approximate dates
1	Tione	1930	
2	Baraka	1900	
3	Tebutoa	1870	1892 British Protectorate.
4	Tannang II	1840	
5	Kourabi	1810	
6	Tannang I	1780	
7	Rokea	1750	
8	Temarebu	1720	
9	Arikinibeia	1690	1700 Abemama Dynasty
10	Namai II	1660	
11	Akau III	1630	
12	Teinai III	1600	

13 Bakarerenteiti	1570	1568 Mendaña discovered Nui ¹⁰
14 Nunaia	1540	1560 War of Kaitu and Uakeia
15 Namai I	1510	
16 Teunaia	1480	
17 Teinai II	1450	
18 Akau II	1420	
19 Teinai I	1390	
20 Tanentoa n Nonouti	1360	
21 Nei Teweia	1330	
22 Tanentoa ni Beru	1300	1300 First Tabontebike Maneaba
23 Tematawarebwe	1270	1260 Breaking of Kaintikuaba

Age of Antimaomata

Age of Anti

¹⁰ Nui is an existing Micronesian outlier in Polynesia. The settlement of Nui was from the Gilberts, and this is clear from the Gilbertese traditions and those of Tuvalu by Anetipa of Nui. Grimble Papers, Mfm 133, 'Gilbertese Myths, Legends and Oral Traditions. Collected by (Sir) Arthur Grimble Between ca. 1916 and 1930', E.43. The settlement took place not long after the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia, for there were people on Nui when Mendaña came close to the island. Nui according to the Nui tradition was uninhabited, and therefore it was a favourable place for the refugees to start a new life. Tataua, for example, one of the passengers in one of the canoes, *Ioantebuke*, was fleeing from defeat at Abaiang when he lost his way and arrived at Tabiteuea. This war was the most important event in Gilbertese history between the main migration from Samoa and the establishment of the British Protectorate in 1892, and it may be dated from a comparison of several genealogies as having occurred approximately 12-13 generations before 1900.

CHAPTER 15

The Importance of the Past

EVERY GILBERTESE WAS constantly concerned with the past. Because of its connection with and influence on the life of the people, the past was considered invaluable to the extent that he who knew no story of the past was already an unfortunate person. The past was almost everything - it provided a Gilbertese with knowledge and skills, joy and laughter, friends and enemies, and land and wealth to live and enjoy a long and contented life.

The Past and the Gilbertese People

As a source of knowledge about the lives, the activities and the ideas of the ancestors, then, the past was treasured and respected. Through the past the people had their identity, and could speak of themselves in distinction from others. Through it a Gilbertese knew his *bakatibu* (ancestors) whom at home he would keep happy by offerings of food and by conversation on family matters or subjects related to the *utu*. Where the family kept the skulls of their forefathers, they would share the household pipe with them.¹ Through the past, again, a Gilbertese knew the *anti* of his *utu* whom he had to propitiate with worship and food offerings, and knew also of their totems which he would remember, lest out of ignorance he destroy or eat them and bring a curse to the *utu*.

In the *maneaba* the *unimane* and *unaine* spoke more of the past than of the present, forever talking about events in their own island, their district or even in Tamoā (Samoa). The *unimane* and *unaine* never tired of talking about the past - it was eternal for them, and if there was anything that was truly authentic for most of them it was the past.

Although in telling the stories it was customary for the story tellers to start from the creation and work their way through to the time of their generation, it was quite common also to hear chroniclers beginning from the time of the earliest recorded ancestors who came from Samoa to the Gilberts. Some tellers, however, would begin from the ancestors in the islands that

¹ See Chapter 2, fn 12.

were important in their genealogy and well known by other groups, and continue to their own generation.

Members of Karongoa, who were generally well-versed in the stories of the past, were the usual story tellers. As we have seen, their tradition was generally accepted by other *boti* as containing the more genuine account of the past concerning not only the *anti* of the islands and the ancestors of all the people but other activities as well, even on other islands. Though other *utu* or *boti* had their own stories, the dominating role of the *boti* of Karongoa in most *maneaba* made the past as narrated by a Karongoa historian the accepted version.

Traditionally no *unimane* would dare contest a Karongoa historian when telling his story. Taking his place inside the *maneaba* and sitting cross-legged, the Karongoa chronicler would narrate while others listened attentively, breaking their silence occasionally only to show their interest with repeated '*Uotiko!*' ('Continue'), or to affirm his story '*E koaua!*' ('It is true'). The Karongoa tradition has the story of Kaintikuaba as the focal point of its primeval age, and the establishment of the clan and the *maneaba* throughout the islands of the Gilberts as the climax of the later events and of the generations of human ancestors.

Generally the *unimane* and *unaine* were in accord with one another, and usually in telling the stories they would help each other out where they were lost, since the general and main historical features of the past as told by the Karongoa historians in the *maneaba* were generally the same in other groups. Whoever, other than a Karongoa elder, got the chance to tell his story in the *maneaba*, the story was meant to educate the listeners, the *rorobuaka* and the younger generations so as to uphold the customs and the traditions of the ancestors. However, though the talks about the past in the *maneaba* were generally meant to be entertaining, instructional and edifying, heated debates sometimes took place between *utu* or *boti* members, precipitated apparently by some old men who had made it their habit and favourite pastime to debate with others. In most cases it was *utu* or *boti* patriotism or aggrandisement that was involved, particularly where the details of the stories of the groups differed.

As a repository for the customs and values of the people the past was the norm on how activities and things were judged. All behaviour and activities therefore were expected to be in line with its customs and values. It was common to hear *unimane* and *unaine* complaining, especially to the *rorobuaka*, that the values and customs of the forefathers had been neglected. Even today where many of the traditional customs and values have already become lost and discarded - mainly through the efforts of Protestant

missionaries - this does not deter some island communities in their determination to continue reminding the people of the ways of the *ikawai*.²

In hard times, droughts and wars, knowledge of traditional allies and groups obliged to come to one's assistance because of a certain event in the past was important and could save a *utu* or group from its enemies or from disasters. The descendants of Obaia on Tabiteuea, for instance, were spared together with their properties by the warriors of Kaitu and Uakeia during their invasion of Tabiteuea (c. 1600) when they told the warriors that they too were related to the people of Beru through their ancestors. It was the same also on Nonouti where Nei Tabiria, knowing her relationship to the people of Beru, exploited the situation to prevent her lands being taken by the warriors, and at the same time gain personal recognition on the island.³

The Past and the Gilbertese Maneaba

Perhaps the greatest importance of the past was in its relation to the *maneaba*. The past and the *maneaba* were inseparable. As the centre for almost every activity in the district the *maneaba* was a revered place, but without the past the *maneaba* was merely another hall for informal meetings

² See the revival of local dancing for example in A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 314-8. One of the manuscripts I have from the collection of stories collected by local Protestant missionaries is entitled 'Karakin Kiribati n Tain te Ro' 'The stories of Kiribati in the dark days', denoting that any story of the past is a story of the people when they were evil.

³ The Ancestors of Nei Tabiria as given by Anetipa of Nui. Kouraabi on Samoa had as wife Nei Tekawainimoone and Nei Aeriki, Baretoka was born. Baretoka left for Tarawa for he did not desire to marry Nei Abinoko whom his parents wanted for a daughter-in-law. Baretoka took to wife Nei Batiauea on Tarawa.

and social activities. The past - the *karaki* of the *ikawai* - provided the *maneaba* with an aura of sanctity, and to its activities it gave direction, meaning and authority. Today, the significance of the *maneaba* in the life of many districts has gradually declined, so many stories have declined and been lost. On Nonouti, for instance, the disappearance of a village *maneaba* in Rotima for several decades has resulted in the ignorance of many villagers of the stories of their village and the general history of the islands and the functions and operation of a proper *maneaba*.

In the *maneaba* discussions on laws, punishments, war, peace and all matters requiring decisions, precedents were invoked. The past contained not only ideas and illustrations needed for enlightenment and advice, but gave authority as well to all the decisions taken by the *unimane*. Breakers of customary norms and accepted standards of conduct would appeal to the past if their punishments were too severe. Just as where there is a constitution or a written law common to the people an offender would quote or make references to defend his case or lessen the punishment, so too would the *unimane* to illustrate and justify their decisions. In fact, on most islands, the past was the law or laid down the law and the standard concerning almost everything, and where decisions were made in accordance with the past they were rarely challenged; however, this would be quite different on islands where there were ruling families as the *Uea* could override the decisions of the *maneaba* even if based strictly on the principles and analogies of the past.⁴

The past was important in decision making for several reasons. First and foremost, the past was the only common basis for judging or assessing activities and ideas which the *utu* or *boti* elders could agree upon. Each group might emphasise their own independence when voicing the views of their group, but there was nothing that could bring them more together and to closer agreement than analogies and examples taken from the life of the ancestors. The experiences of the *ikawai* as related in the traditions became so much the norm, that decisions contrary to those settled or decided by the *ikawai* concerning similar activities were controversial and in most cases carried out with reluctance. Generally these contrary decisions were not effective as people were ignorant of how to implement them successfully or, in many cases, were hesitant for fear of the ancestral spirits who might curse them for deviating from the usual.

⁴ Although a 'Karongoa remained supreme in the *maneaba* from the time of the Samoan immigration right up to the coming of the British flag in 1892', this is true of Karongoa in the southern islands but not in the central and northern islands where ruling families emerged: it is the words of the *uea* that are final and binding on the people, even under the *maneaba*. Cf. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions*, 223-4.

Second, the past provided common ground for starting a discussion on an issue facing the community. Even where the issue was unknown in the traditions the past seemed to be a fitting place to begin and conclude a discussion. An *unimane*, for example, would begin the *maneaba* discussion on a particular issue with a story of an event or situation in the past, interpret that story and apply it to the subject of discussion. From there others would pick up his point and either agree with him or challenge him with reference to the same story. The story as the basis of dialogue focused the discussions and controlled the debates.

Third, the past was referred to in decision making for it contained not only practical solutions for issues of the present similar to those of the ancestors, but the wisdom, proverbs and riddles of the elders as well, especially where situations had changed and an application of the usual decisions or punishments for non-conformists were no longer considered humane, or even permissible.⁵

The Past and the Boti

As we have seen, a man's position in society was determined by his *boti* - without a *boti* he was a mere *iruwa* (visitor/stranger) or else a *kaunga* or *toro* (slave), in either case dependent on others for everything. Whether one had a *boti* at all depended on one's knowledge of one's own genealogy from the *boti* founder to the present day. Because a *boti* had its own *buakonikai* (*e bon tau te boti ma ana buakonikai*), he who was without a *boti* had no land; thus,

⁵ On Kuria, for instance, a certain community was bewildered by the choice of two of their members when they decided not to comply with the decision of the *unimane* to provide food for the visiting dancing team from Maiana, a neighbouring island. The traditional punishment was death if the nature of the action was considered absolute disloyalty to the *unimane*, and banishment from the community and the island if the culpability was deemed less great. The *rorobuaka* who were eager to execute the traditional punishment asked the *unimane* for the matter to be decided by them (*rorobuaka*) rather than by the *unimane* in the *maneaba*. They almost got their wish and might have carried out either of the punishments, were it not for the good counsel of a certain *unimane* who reminded them that in the past 'only graceful dancers were allowed to decide the fate of such people'. Of course that was not true, but it confused the people and the *rorobuaka*. A heated debate took place centring on the issue raised by this *unimane*. After a lengthy debate the *rorobuaka* realised that they could not decide the fate of these nonconformists, for indeed their way of dancing was not at all graceful and entertaining, but tumultuous, insensitive, and uninteresting. If there was to be constructive reproof, criticism, and punishment, it would be from the *unimane*. They were indeed graceful dancers, since one of the marks of a good dancer was that he rarely raised his arms above the shoulder line and obstructed his view of those on his left or right, and the *unimane* who would find it hard to retain their arms in the air when dancing would have them low most of the time; therefore, they had a good view of all that was happening on all sides. So, through the decision of the *unimane*, the punishment of the culprits was repealed, and they were pardoned, though they were made to assure the community that no more would they embark on such disloyalty as the decision of the *unimane* was the decision of the whole community on Kuria. Baiteke Nabetari, pers. comm., Tangintebu, Tarawa 1989.

he was a *rang* (poor/fool) and could be a *kaunga* too, for like them he would also be dependent on others for certain favours and livelihood, hence the importance of knowing one's genealogy, without which one could not hope to gain lands by right of custom, or could lose land by being cheated by others. Today, however, genealogical lists are no longer used for such a purpose, and, in fact, on most if not all islands the practice of using genealogies to claim rights to land ceased to be practised after Captain Davis of the *Royalist* declared the islands a Protectorate of the British Empire in 1892; thus, today most Gilbertese are ignorant of the names of their ancestors. They may know the name of the founder of their *boti* but they cannot give the complete list of names from that founder to themselves.

So every free Gilbertese had to have an accurate knowledge of his genealogy: but not only his own genealogy, for this would be like a collection of bones without any flesh on it, and if he were to travel, the *unimane* of his *boti* or an allied *boti* on any island would ask him about past events in which his *boti* had been involved, to check the genuineness of his claim before granting him admission. If he were a young man they would not expect much, but everyone would be expected to know the main events of local history involving the *boti* - for example, who came with Taburitongoun from Samoa to Nikunau and who conquered Abemama.

If the members of the *boti* and the *maneaba* were not satisfied with the story of the stranger, as was often the case, for fear of entertaining and welcoming a total stranger to their *boti* and homes, the traveller would then be asked to identify himself and his fathers, and this he would do by identifying the founder *boti* of the one he claimed was his, and from there trace the descendants to himself.⁶ Once the *maneaba* was satisfied, the members of the *boti* concerned would then welcome him, and on his return to his island he would be provided with gifts of food and mats to share with his *utu*. And so the parents and grandparents always reminded their children and grandchildren of the importance of the past and encouraged them to learn the history of their group, in particular the *utu* or *boti* genealogy, for it could save them embarrassment and poverty when arriving on other islands where they were strangers.

But there were specialists, as there were in canoe building, *babai* planting and the other Gilbertese arts and crafts - men and women who spent the best part of their lives acquiring and memorising the oral traditions of the *maneaba* district. These people were the most honoured men and women in

⁶ A.F. Grimble, *A Pattern of Islands* (London 1952), 154-7; H.E Maude, *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti: an Ethnohistorical Interpretation* (Wellington 1963), 52.

the community, who decided all the important matters concerning community life. Although they were normally members of the *boti* Karongoa n Uea or related *boti*, *unimane* and *unaine* of other *boti* could also be experts in the knowledge and stories of the past.

CHAPTER 16

The Decline and Recovery of Oral Tradition

The End of Oral Tradition

Contact with the outside world has always been blamed for the destruction of many aspects of the Gilbertese people's way of life. Amongst those agents that have been labelled as synonymous with change are the European whalers, traders, and Christian missionaries. It is sometimes overlooked that societies as living entities change from within also: and though the decline in the perceived value of oral tradition climaxed with the arrival of Europeans, particularly with the new Christian order, the introduction of literacy and teaching of a new historical perspective, it was the people who precipitated and enhanced change through accepting the ideas and the new ways of life. Several events before contact already anticipated the end of the significance of oral tradition. Two that are quite obvious are the systematic organisation of the *maneaba* made possible through the growing complexities of Gilbertese society where the old order, with its ways of settling and guiding problems, was no longer relevant or adequate; and the control of the ruling families over the content and interpretation of the traditions on their islands.

(a) The Systematic Organisation of the Maneaba

As we saw in Chapter 6, the *maneaba* originally was a *marae* where the descendants and followers of Auriaria gathered to offer worship and sacrifices; but after several generations the *marae* was transformed into a court of Auriaria and the deities of the allies of Karongoa to cater efficiently for the needs of the community immediately and directly, rather than wait for advice from the gods. As a court, the *maneaba* was the reconciliatory as well as the consolidatory force which bound the community together.

This change in the nature of the *maneaba* brought about the end of the priestly role of the members of Karongoa, because, with even the weaker and unimportant clans and their deities accepted inside the *maneaba*, Karongoa members could no longer function properly as priests. Even with the *maneaba* working as a court, though, the *unimane* of Karongoa still retained their primacy, by occupying the *boti* of the *uea*, usually at the centre of the north end of the *maneaba*. Bearers of the office of *uea*, as they were, their identity

as priests was soon superseded by the duties of the new office. With the perfection of the *maneaba* system, the priestly function of the Karongoa gradually ceased to operate except on occasions such as completion of a new *maneaba* or distribution of the first fruit of the pandanus inside the *maneaba*, where members of Karongoa still perform their duties more as priests than as bearers of the office of *uea*.

The gradual end of the priestly role of Karongoa saw decline in the authenticity and significance of oral tradition. This is because as a priestly group one of their primary roles was to guard the true traditions and genealogies as checks upon the integrity of the priesthood. Concern with the traditions was closely related to the blessings demanded by the community from their god which only those truly descended from the priesthood could impart. Now the universal priesthood was no more and new priests from other clans and *boti* emerged, as the people and their deities experienced more freedom and recognition in the new order. There was no need for accuracy: hence, the beginning of the confusion of oral tradition. And with the growing systematic organisation of society through the *maneaba* system of obligatory roles of *boti* members, there was no great need to take the traditions seriously because the *maneaba* provided a social map where a person's group, his *utu*, his deity, his totem and so forth were all known. And so the need to know the past, to be able to recollect it with great accuracy, was much reduced.

(b) *The Emergence and Control of Ruling Families*

On a number of islands the decline in the use and value of oral tradition reached its nadir after the wars of Kaitu and Uakeia and particularly when ruling families started to emerge. Genealogies and traditions of individual groups became less important: one could even say that they had become less reliable. It was not that the people were no longer interested in their lineage or in the past before the establishment of the ruling families, but even when the people kept their own lists and stories, the stories and the genealogies of the ruling families were accepted as authentic and authoritative.

Although these two developments anticipated the end of the value of the oral tradition in the minds of the people, it remains true that they are not as significant as the coming of Europeans to the islands.

(c) *The Christian Missionaries*

Contact with the missionaries widened the historical as well as geographical horizon of the people. Adoption of the new faith meant acceptance of the traditions of the new religion, with the history of Israel and of the Christian Church as the only true history - not only ordained by God but involving God himself: a history that superseded their own 'false' history when their

ancestors were still in the 'days of darkness'. This was the history onto which the traditions were grafted through acceptance of the new faith.

The Samoans working with the London Missionary Society were the most influential in the expansion of the peoples' historical horizon and in the increasingly indignant attitude towards the traditions of their ancestors. Although the Hawaiian missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the north and central Gilberts left an impression in the islands, the Samoans had greater influence on the life of the people. The perspective of the Roman Catholic mission on oral tradition varied from island to island and year by year, being essentially dependent on the views of the particular priest in charge on an island at the time, from the enthusiastic interest of Father Sabatier to the disapproval of Father Maye. The LMS Samoans were mainly teachers, infatuated with the idea of a 'Samoan Christendom'; and they saw that their work would be enhanced if they could limit the influence of tradition and custom upon the people. They condemned oral tradition as *Karakin te Ro* (Stories of the Dark Days) that had no place in the chronological sequence of God's time, and outside the purpose of God. On Arorae and Tamana, the southernmost islands in the group where the Samoans were most successful, the people annihilated their old history and began anew with the coming of Christianity to their islands. On Arorae, for instance, in 1970, the people celebrated the coming of Christianity to their island as *Tienturen Arorae* - the One Hundred Years of Arorae - as though their past began only 100 years ago. Although traditional stories can still be found on these islands, they are more *karaki aika iango* than historical narratives. In fact, these two islands are today the only ones lacking proper tradition and genealogies of their ancestors, for the Samoan missionaries suppressed them.

The suppression of the pre-Christian order and its substitution by a new Christian one spread to other islands as well. Many habits and objects that were thought to be a threat to the Christian communities were destroyed, especially those that might carry them back to the pagan v. ays. Dancing, smoking, and practices regarded as indecent according to the standards of the missionaries were discouraged and prohibited. Oral tradition in missionary eyes not only corrupted the minds but was a medium for returning the people to the pagan ways of the ancestors. The result was considerable: people became ashamed of their ancestry, ashamed of their history, ashamed of their folklore and legends, ashamed practically of everything that ever happened to them.¹

¹ See Grimble to Eliot, 20 Nov. 1918, in Barrie Macdonald, *Cinderellas of the Empire: Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu* (Canberra 1982), 132-3.

Nevertheless an even greater, lasting effect on oral tradition, especially in terms of the reliability of its content, was that of education, in particular literacy. Education, an integral part of mission activities and inseparable from proselytisation, occupied much of the time of the missionaries. This long-held missiological approach by the Western Churches continued to be applied in the islands - educating pagans to convert them.

The first mission school was established at Koinawa village on Abaiang in 1860 by emissaries of the Hawaiian mission, who came under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Before the establishment of such formal Western education, informal classes were held by the missionaries in which the chief of the island, Na Kaiea, was an enthusiastic pupil. The progress of the schools was at first poor as the desire for reading among the people was very small, and some pupils were interested only in acquiring the English language, but as the work of the mission grew and other islands opened to mission work the schools became popular. The chief Binoka of Abemama, for example, became a 'star pupil' in the 1870s. By the 1880s Abaiang had five schools. Already on Tabiteuea island in 1869 there were about 200 pupils in mission schools.

The progress of the mission and in particular education owes much to the arrival of the printing press in 1864, and the printing of the Gospel According To Matthew, with the people eager to learn to read and write in order to have a copy of the translated book. Although this was not their first opportunity to read in Gilbertese, it was indeed the first time the people possessed in their households a complete printed copy of one whole book of the New Testament containing 'the word of God' in their own language.²

With the establishment of a proper colonial administration, education was seen by the people as one of the means by which they could enter the colonial service, and rise to a rank a little above their kinsmen.³ People desiring to go to school or to offer education to their children started to migrate from their villages and islands. Gradually, they belittled their traditional knowledge, and, therefore, oral tradition. It was common in those days - as it still is today - to hear old people advising young children, '*E kakawaki te reirei*', 'Education is very important'. Most parents were prepared to part with their children in order to secure their future. Yet the effect of literacy upon oral tradition was not noticeable at first, and many felt that the stories could now be preserved with accuracy. Many stories were, in fact, put into writing,

² Clarissa Bingham wrote the first Gilbertese book in 1858.

³ It was only in the early 20th century that pressure was put on mission bodies to assume more responsibility for educating the people. Though there were complaints that mission schools could not offer a good educational standard for the islanders to be employed by the government, as interpreters for example, the government did not decide to open a secondary school until 1922.

but often the books became family heirlooms and because of their connections with, say, a grandfather they were treasured and locked away for good, and some were not properly stored so that they were destroyed by insects, or rain, or even lost. As secrets, the content of many became less and less known, and many were forgotten. They had very little significance because they could not in any way secure the future or employment.

Literacy helped not only to limit the power of memory and the techniques of recollection, but also to reduce the number of people who knew the stories. Relying now on characters written on paper, they could always refer to the *boki ni karaki* (story books) for events of the past. Little time was now given to teaching *utu* members the stories of the *ikawai*; and if told, it was not with such seriousness as to ensure that the disciple learnt his lesson. And so with the death of the *unimane* of the *utu* came the end not only of the *boki ni karaki* but the *karaki* of the ancestors as well.

But while all these forces destroying the value and authenticity of oral tradition were growing, there were forces of recovery mainly from outside the culture and the people, though precipitated by the problems confronting them. And confronted with new challenges, self-government and the road to independence, competition and island rivalry, contact with people and ideas from around the world, the Gilbertese found refuge, as well as power and wisdom, in the *karaki* of their *ikawai*.

The Rebirth of Oral Tradition

Credit for the revival of oral tradition and some of the ways of the ancestors goes to such administrators as Arthur Grimble and H.E. Maude. During his Resident Commissionership from 1926 to 1932, Grimble's policies, in particular his 'museum policy' informed by his romantic view of the people and the islands, were aimed at preserving the islands - except perhaps Banaba - and maintaining their isolation. He sought to counteract the changes, in particular those initiated by the Protestant missionaries, that tended to destroy traditional customs and practices. Because of his fondness for the people and the wisdom of the ancestors, Grimble collected traditional stories and compiled notes on many aspects of their customs and practices. Even today many of his works and notes remain authoritative on Gilbertese history and culture.⁴ Grimble's attitude to the culture and in particular to the traditional stories strengthened the confidence of the people in the value

⁴ For a full list of Grimble's works on the Gilberts see Bibliography in A.F. Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*, ed. H.E. Maude (Melbourne 1989), 357-359. There is also a Part IV of his study *The Migrations of a Pandanus People* which unfortunately has never been published.

of their *karaki*. It restored their faith in their old systems of regulating their own affairs in line with their traditional ideas.

It was during the Resident Commissionership of H.E. Maude from 1929 to 1948, however, that the Gilbertese were actually involved in running their own local governments. Maude emphasised the role of traditional leaders and wanted it maintained, a move not readily accepted by the colonial authorities. Under Maude the traditional patterns of leadership were revived, along with the recollection and compilation of many of the traditional stories in which these patterns were embedded. Maude, like Grimble before him, had a great and genuine affection for the people, and much of the best part of his life in the islands was spent with *unimane* in the *maneaba* or in their homes taking notes and collecting stories. Like Grimble's, many of his policies were aimed at boosting the confidence and pride of the people in their oral traditions and the wisdom of their ancestors.

Other factors that contributed to the recovery of oral traditions were social and cultural problems which could not be resolved without friction by the colonial administration: land rights and traditional privileges, for instance, ranked high in the list of issues that began to get out of control in the hands of the administrators. In the mid-1930s there were about 76,000 outstanding disputes concerning land, *babai* pits and fish ponds. Land Courts were created, with fair hearing given to the parties concerned and the authenticity of their claims checked with the *unimane* and *unaine*, the recognised authorities on custom and oral tradition. Richard Turpin, Lands Commissioner in the Northern Gilberts, collected oral traditions of Makin and Butaritari from Betero, a renowned and official teller of the traditions of the two islands for the *uea*.⁵ This was important, for where land and property were concerned some people would even distort the stories and the customs during court hearings.⁶ Arbitrators had to be well versed in oral tradition to be able to recognise invented stories, as distinct from those generally accepted by the *unimane* and *unaine* and other recognised authorities.

Another force that helped to establish or revive the use and value of oral traditions was the continuous search by the people for their identity, which was very much connected to historical enquiry. The search for identity began mainly in the 19th century when the people came under British protection and were no longer independent individual entities. Later when the islands became a colony together with the Ellice and Tokelau at the beginning of the

⁵ The stories of Betero known as 'Ana Karaki Te Betero' are very much the same in content as those in the 'Ana Boki ni Karaki Na Kaiea' of Makin.

⁶ The distortions were aimed at securing the coveted land or ensuring that the *utu* who was not the rightful heir was not disgraced for obtaining the land.

20th century the question of identity was intensified. Nationalism and patriotic aggrandisement soon emerged, especially between the Ellice communities and the Gilbertese on Banaba, Nauru and Tarawa, to prove that one ethnic group was better than another. In the pre-independence parliament, two factions were recognised - a Gilbertese party and an Ellice coalition - each concerned only with the benefits their people would reap.⁷ The climax of all this national aggrandisement and racial tension was the separation of the Ellice people and their islands from the Colony in 1975 to become Tuvalu.

Against this background, many of the Gilbertese leaders saw a need for the collection of the stories of the Group. In a meeting of the House of Assembly a member from Nikunau, Tetoa Ubaitoi, moved that:

Government is requested to invite all story tellers of the Gilbertese genealogy from the outer islands to come to Tarawa to compile the true Gilbertese genealogy that can be used in schools.⁸

Ubaitoi believed that it was important for young people to know their past, myths and traditions. With the idea of independence lurking, the quest for identity was intensified, and for that matter oral tradition - for 'Political independence' as one leader put it 'needs to be associated with increased confidence and greater reliance on our own perceptions and points of view'.⁹

From the time of Grimble and Maude, and even after these two had left the Gilberts, interest in oral tradition increased, especially among the younger generation. Even today when many people are still uncertain about the value of oral tradition, others have come to realise that the past has significance for the present as well as for the future. Changes in the attitudes of churches - particularly the Kiribati Protestant Church, which had previously been the main adversary of those reviving the traditional customs and knowledge of the past - have helped greatly in revitalising interest in oral tradition, from as early as the time of the Reverend G.H. Eastman, who was in the Gilberts from 1919 to 1945. Many of Eastman's notes and collections clearly demonstrate that not all LMS missionaries were against

⁷ The parliament was an Advisory Council established in January 1963. It was within this Council that the first political party was established - the Gilbertese National Party, on 16 October 1965.

⁸ *Atoll Pioneer Supplement* 14, 29 May 1975, p.15, from deliberations of the G.E.I.C. House of Assembly.

⁹ 'Forward' by the Chief Minister, Ieremia Tabai, to [Alaima Talu et al.], *Kiribati: Aspects of History* (Tarawa 1979), xi. A first 'Short History of the Gilbert Islands' had been produced in typescript by Major Holland, headmaster of the King George V school, with the assistance of H.E. Maude, in 1933.

the recovery of Gilbertese oral tradition.¹⁰ Eastman saw that the work of the church would be enhanced by knowledge of the people, their past, their customs and practices. He knew that an important avenue into their minds and culture was through understanding their stories, their past, contained in their *karaki*. Because of this, it became possible in 1942 for May Pateman to publish *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbert Islands*, to the disappointment of many pastors, and despite their disagreement.¹¹

The first significant attempt of the Protestant Church after her establishment as an indigenous local Church to show her attitude towards oral tradition and the culture of the people was seen in the report of a workshop conducted at Bonriki, Tarawa, in 1981. Although the workshop and the report *Christ and Kiribati Culture* did not strictly address the value of oral tradition, in many ways it provided an impetus that contributed immensely to the growing interest among the people in the *karaki*.

An official statement is yet to be made by Church authorities on their attitude towards oral tradition, but already the Christian communities, which comprise about 95 percent of the population, have shown signs of welcoming new perspectives on aspects of the people's way of life of which oral tradition is one.

MANY if not all Gilbertese communities are now concerned with the *karaki* of the ancestors; many *karaki* are beginning to be referred to less as *karakin te ro* (stories of the dark), or *karaki n aki akaka* (unimportant and fallacious stories) than *karaki nikawai* (stories of the past). Even now, there are some Gilbertese in official positions as well as among the public who maintain that there is no need for those coming of age today to learn anything about their culture, customary way of life or historical heritage. They could not be more wrong; and if their destructive views are accepted the I-Kiribati as a

¹⁰ Eastman's notes and collections on various aspects of Gilbertese history and culture are kept at the Eastman's Archives Collection, 'Rongorongoia Aomata', in the Library of The Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji. Eastman, more tolerant and understanding than his predecessors, emphasised oral tradition as merely stories before the coming of Christianity, not as *bain te ro* (things of the dark). The former missionaries, represented by Goward, were the butt of Grimble's criticism for their ignorant and aggressive approach in their evangelism. Eastman became a sufficient expert on the language to enable him to revise the translation of the Gilbertese New Testament. Even today he is considered by many *unimane* as an authority on Gilbertese culture. Although Eastman never published an essay concerned with oral tradition, the amount of material he collected reveals that he considered oral tradition an important part of the people's identity to be collected and preserved for future generations.

¹¹ Although the LMS Press published the book many of the local pastors were dismayed at their leaders' action and sought to get rid of it. Today very few copies of the book can be found in the islands.

distinctive society with its own cohesion and mutual support based on a justified pride in its achievements will simply cease to exist. Gilbertese society was the most efficient specialised atoll society in the world: a society in which customary behaviour was sanctioned by unquestioning observance of *unimane* in their district *maneaba*.

Today the community ethos, its ethics and values, has been disrupted by a rash of foreign influences, for the most part European. Gilbertese life is in a state of flux: housing, clothes, food, material culture, all are changing, and with them many of the certainties, the motivations, aspirations and pleasures that made life meaningful in the past. Change must come; the danger lies that with it Gilbertese society will, unless we are alert and careful, become an amorphous and rootless mass of individuals, without pride in the past or hope for the future. It is useless to say that it cannot happen here. It has happened hundreds of times all over the world, and in the Pacific it has happened to the Marquesans, the Easter Islanders, the Morioris, several of the Tuamotu communities, and others in Micronesia and Melanesia.

For those in big establishments or organisations, and particularly for the makers of policy who in many ways affect the life of the people in terms of economic development, relations to other world communities, and other areas, oral tradition is of immeasurable import for they cannot test or know the value or success of their enterprises by working with preconceived notions or naïve conceptions of the people and defining them as stereotypes. They have to know the context of their activities.

Research aimed at discovering, studying and recording every existing oral tradition is the only means by which the nation can gain and retain a real understanding of, and pride in, its unique and colourful past. There is no other way by which a genuine knowledge of what it is to be an I-Kiribati can be obtained; and no substitute will serve as a basis for a properly constructed and functioning school curriculum in 'Gilbertese studies' - without which the Gilbertese, who have so much to be proud of and even a little to contribute to the world, may possibly survive as a dependent economic group, but will surely cease to be a virile social and cultural entity in their own right. Those Gilbertese who still think that oral tradition or the stories of the *ikawai* (ancestors) are of no value whatsoever may usefully be reminded of the old Gilbertese saying that 'only a *kaunga* (slave) has no history'.

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LINE DRAWINGS

from Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition* . . .
(Philadelphia 1845), V:

- p.79 - Man from Makin (p.83)
- p.178 - Warriors, Beru, 1841 (p.48)
- p.195 - Interior of a *maneaba*, Tabiteuea (p.56)
- p.201 - Woman from Beru (p.51)

from James Edge Partington, *An Album of the Weapons, Tools, Ornaments, Articles of Dress of the Natives of the Pacific Islands* (facsimile of the original work, London 1969), Part 1:

- p.xv - Necklace of plaited grass and three bone pendants, ?Nikunau [British Museum]
- p.50 - Necklace of shell discs [British Museum]
- p.65 - Necklace of white shell and coconut shell with points of white shell and pendant of a piece of shell [British Museum]
- p.96 - Necklace of discs with pendants of teeth and shell [British Museum]
- p.113 - Warrior wearing coconut fibre armour, Gilbert Islands
- p.133 - Necklace of shell discs [British Museum]
- p.148 - Coconut fibre armoured cap, Gilbert Islands
- p.171 - String of porpoise teeth, Arorae [British Museum]
- p.206 - Warrior wearing coconut fibre armour, cap of fish skin and sword of palm wood edged with shark's teeth

The foremost Gilbertese historian Kambati K. Uriam has written a comprehensive and authoritative book on Gilbertese Oral Tradition. It has come at an opportune time, when in the lifetime of the Elders oral texts have been superseded by the written word.

Kambati Uriam deals with all the types of traditional texts, from the instructive, on navigation, farming, fishing and other arts and crafts, to historical works covering islands, districts or families, and the purely fictional, intended for entertainment. He concentrates, however, on the three main classical collections: those of the Karongoa school, the school founded by the High Chief of Butaritari and Makin, and the Banaban community school.

There are important chapters on the composition of texts, the unique methods adopted to ensure their transmission through succeeding generations without change in wording, and the techniques of public recital. Other important subjects dealt with are dating of traditions by genealogical comparisons, and the value of a knowledge of traditions in the changing world of today.

The book is essential reading for all wishing to know the culture and ethos of the Gilbertese people living in the Republic of Kiribati, which comprises the 33 low coral atolls of the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands of the Central Pacific. It is a definitive book which nobody else had the knowledge and ability to undertake.

H. E. Maude