

### DISK 3: CREATION MYTH

A Maiana version of the Creation-myths (showing Nareau<sup>1</sup> as an Absolute Spirit).

In the beginning was only Nareau, the Moanibai (First of all things). No man shall say, "I know whence he came", or "At such and such a time he was not." He sat alone in darkness as a cloud that floats in the void. So for a great while he rested. Then a thought came to him; he said, "I will make ~~Te Bo~~<sup>a thing</sup> ~~Te Maki~~ (The Darkness and the Clearing together)." So he held his left hand in the shape of a bowl and made water therein. His water was thick with a red mud.

When his <sup>left</sup> hand was full to overflowing he covered it with his right and shook the water between his hollow palms; he pressed it flat, he rounded it and rolled it, he worked upon it with his ~~hands~~<sup>fingers</sup> until it became sticky and swampy. Then he beat it flat and laid it beneath him and sat upon it as on a seat.

As he sat, a great swelling grew in his forehead. For three days it grew and on the fourth day it burst and a little man sprang from its middle. Then Nareau the First of All said to his son, "Thou art Nareau my son. Sit on my knees." So Nareau

1. Given by Joakai of Maiana.



the Younger sat on his father's knees and for a great while they rested. And again Narean the First of All said to his son, "Lie in my right eye or in my left as thou wilt." So Narean the Younger lay in his right eye or his left as he wished; and so for a great while they rested.

Then Narean the First of All began to look on the swampy thing he had made. He called aloud to his son, and his son answered, "O!" He said, "Come forth from my eye. Go down and tread on the swamp." So Narean the Younger went and trod on it; his father said, "Where are the ends of it?" He answered, "It has no end." His father said again, "Where is the middle of it?" He answered, "I know not." So his father plucked a hollow tooth from his jaw and thrust it <sup>h. 2.</sup> into the swamp saying, "Here is the middle. Suck at this tooth. What is the taste?" Narean the Younger said, "It is sweet as blood." His father said, "Push it farther in. Suck again. What is the taste of it?" He answered, "The taste is very bitter," and Narean the Father said, "It is the bitterness of the sea that lies beneath."

Then Narean the Father said to his son, "Go in under the swamp through the hollow



tooth, for it is thy doorway." And Naream the Younger entered. It was very narrow, for the swamp above lay on the sea beneath; between the two was a great stinking and rottenness. And in the rottenness grew a great multitude of maggots.

So Naream the Younger made Tiku-tiku-toungoung the <sup>Butterfly</sup> ~~Dragonfly~~ and sent it before him saying, "Go tell me the names of this multitude." It flew away and settled on the forehead of the maggots and called their names, saying, "This is Riiki, the Eel," "That is Tebakea, the Turtle," "Here is Bakananiku, the Sting-ray," "There is Na Kika, the Octopus," and so he did until the whole company was named. Then Naream went and stood before each in turn, saying "Move, Eel!" "Move, Turtle!" "Move, Ray!" "Move, Octopus!" and behold, as every maggot heard the voice of Naream he was turned into the <sup>creature</sup> ~~best~~ that Naream had called him.....

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It would be superfluous to carry the tale further, as its continuation coincides with the Nononti version given in Chapter , in almost every detail.

This version has been included in our material rather as a curiosity than for any future use as



evidence to support a theory. It appears to offer ground for a conjecture that at some period this folk had groped after the idea of an absolute Creating-spirit. The contrast between the grand simplicity of this basic concept and the crudity of its presentation in our myths is enough to suggest that it has travelled far from its original source. It compares sadly with the rugged beauty of the Maori versions, which name the successive aeons of time through which the universe struggled up from primeval and chaotic darkness, by steps of <sup>h. 3.</sup> one thousand years, to light and Man.<sup>2</sup> But this is not difficult to understand. Whencesoever the race may have come to people the atolls of Micronesia and whatever <sup>the</sup> theology that they brought with them, their spiritual and physical being must have been profoundly affected by the rustic nature of their surroundings. Nature has no exuberance in the Line Islands. There are no barbaric colonies, no towering mountain ranges, no rushing streams to enliven the imagination of a primitive folk; no store of gay or precious materials to act as stimulants to their artistic fancy; nothing but a few trees painfully fostered in a flat and sandy soil. The struggle for existence has been overhard; the ingenuity of the folk has been turned to the practical issues of



mere living. Thus their religious system, which may once have been elaborate, has simplified itself as their outlook on life was simplified by circumstance, and, if their ancient philosophy was a high one, its debris remains uncouthly presented by a modern race that has forgotten its inwardness. /

The period of three days allotted to Nareau's gestation in his father's forehead reads inconsistent -ly after we have been told that this was the age of Darkness, before the Sun was made to measure time. The word which has been rendered "day" from the native text is Bong, which means "night." This measure of time by the hours of darkness is common throughout Polynesia, perhaps because the seafaring Pacific nations did all their navigation, when possible, by night when the stars appeared. But it has been doubtful to us whether we should render bong in this place as "day"; it may be the equivalent of Polynesian Bo, which in the Maori creation myths is a period of 1000 years during the age of Darkness.<sup>3</sup> Using this interpretation we find that Nareau's generation took thirty centuries instead of three days. It is true that Gilbertese

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<sup>3</sup>. cf. Grey's Polynesian Myths:



story-tellers of today take it for granted that the shorter period is intended, but we may regard them as purveyors of traditions which contain much beyond their knowledge. The conservatism of native races has preserved intact many of the ancient phrases ~~and phrases~~ used by their forefathers, while the degarnishment of their theology alluded to above has robbed the inherited formulae of meaning to the modern folk.

<sup>h. 4</sup> We are again reminded of Polynesian Vatea, though faintly in this version, in the allusion to Nareau the Father's right and left eyes. It would have been more satisfactory had they become Sun and Moon in the sequel, but as a matter of fact our tradition agrees with the Noronti account and shows the luminaries to have been created from an oyster and a periwinkle.

The swampy mixture of heaven and earth alluded to in this tale is rather more lightly touched upon in the Abemaman version, which describes the muddiness of Nareau's entrance under heaven, and the finding of Riiki the red in the midst of mud. The detail has possibly some connection with the Marshall Islanders' belief that the created world was bounded on the



south by a vast swamp.<sup>3</sup>

cf. Inland: Die Marshall Insulaner, pub. Anthropos  
vol. page