

Precedence and Privileges of the Clans in the Maneaba

Many clans had hereditary privileges or duties connected with the ceremonial of the maneaba, which they most jealously prized and guarded. Among these, the group of Karongoa n Uea (Karongoa-of-Kings), as its name suggests, was facile princeps. Karongoa n uea was king of the maneaba; at all ceremonial gatherings within the edifice, its chief man - that is to say, the senior descendant through eldest sons of the original ancestor - assumed 'the first word and the last word' in debate; which meant in practice that none would open the subject of discussion until he spoke the introductory word, while the summing up or judgment, as the case might be, was entirely in his hands.

As a badge of supremacy in council and ceremonial, he wore a fillet about his head, made of a single kakoko, or coconut pinnule plucked from the ivory-white topmost shoot of the tree, and knotted above the middle of his forehead. This fillet must be made of a leaflet which had grown facing the sunrise on the eastern shore of the island, and was called bunnan tai, 'the amulet of the sun'. It rendered the wearer kamaraia, which means that he would cause to be maraia (accursed or in danger of sudden death) any person who contradicted him or otherwise offended his dignity while he performed his ceremonial functions. It seems, however, that this quality of 'perilousness' was attached to the person of the senior Karongoa n uea man even without the presence of the amulet of the sun, as will be seen later. This amulet, sometimes called alternatively te bunnani kamaraia (the amulet of making-accursed), merely enhanced the sacredness which was already inherent in the individual as a consequence of his birth and function.

Having taken his seat in his boti a little in advance of the rest of his clan members, as was the practice of all seniors of clans in ceremonial gatherings, the elder of Karongoa n uea first assumed his sun-amulet and then, in a low voice, muttered

the magico-religious formula called taematao, of which the object was to 'make clean the path of his words'. I have been unable to obtain a specimen of this formula, but it is said to have been recited with the head lowered while the hands were slowly rubbed together, palm on palm. After three consecutive repetitions, the hands were thrown out with palms upward and elbows against the body, and lifting his head the performer said, 'Anaia, ba N na ongo' (Take it up, for I will hear). The debate on the ceremony might then begin.

Attached to Karongoa n uea was a very clear-cut doctrine of infallibility concerning certain race-traditions. This clan is considered still to be the only genuine authority on the myths of the people, especially the creation-myth with its appendices, and on the legends of the immigration from Samoa. This does not mean to say that no other clans are in possession of myths and traditions; many people outside the Karongoa n uea group can give versions of the creation story and the arrival from Samoa, which are the more interesting because they sometimes differ considerably from the Karongoa n uea rendering; but they would never dream of putting up their versions in competition with those of Karongoa n uea, nor indeed even of mentioning them in the presence of an elder of that clan. In the more informal discussion of tradition that a little gathering of old men will often set going, it was, and still is, considered a grave impropriety to question a detail given by a member of Karongoa n uea, or to point out an omission, even though it may be glaringly patent to all present. To dispute such a matter in the past was considered to render a man maraiia, and liable to mortal sickness; and this applied whether the discussion took place in the maneaba or in a private dwelling.

This infallibility in matters of tradition seems to indicate that Karongoa n uea may have been an organisation closely allied to the wharekua of the Maoris, and the priestly

Colleges of Polynesia, which ^were also the repositories of such knowledge. It is very far from my purpose to oppose the idea that this was originally a priestly clan, but one of its principal differences from the sacred organisations of New Zealand and Polynesia is that it seems never to have performed the office of public genealogist. While pretending to absolute knowledge of the names of the ancestors who arrived from Samoa, and of the social groups to which they belonged, it does not claim to be an authority upon the generations locally descended from them.

Thus the members of a 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. Nevertheless, it seems possible that all genealogical information may at one time have been in the keeping of Karongoa n uea; for it is certainly a fact that the only meagre details that now subsist concerning the Samoan forbears of those clan ancestors who took part in the migration to the Gilberts are obtainable from members of this clan alone. That it does not now perform the function of public genealogist may be due to the scattering of the clans piecemeal over sixteen islands, which was the immediate result of the migration from Samoa to the Gilbert Group.

At all ceremonial feasts, when the food was divided formally between the clans in the manner to be described later, Karongoa n uea was given the first portion (te moan tiba), which it then shared with the groups of Karongoa raereke, Katanrake, and on Beru Antekanawa. These clans had the same totems and ancestors as Karongoa n uea; the other two groups claiming the same progenitors and sacred creatures, te Bakoa and Taunnamo, had their own separate portions.

On the island of Marakei I was told that after the pandanus harvest had been gathered in, which in a normal year would be about the time of the autumnal equinox, no islander was allowed to taste of the various products made with the fruit until a feast had been held in the maneaba of his settlement, and Karongoa n uea had eaten the first-fruits. But there seems to be some doubt about this on the island named, and I have been unable to confirm it elsewhere.

In the construction of the maneaba, the first file of thatches to be laid on the roof was that covering the middle rafter of the eastern side, whereunder the people of Karongoa n uea were grouped.

A Gilbertese explanation of the pre-eminence of this clan in the ceremonial of the maneaba is that 'it is Samoa'; that is to say, it represents the victorious immigration from Samoa into the Gilbert Islands. It is not asserted that Karongoa and its allied groups were the only clans whose ancestors took part in the invasion, or the series of invasions, from Samoa; but it is stated that the progenitors of Karongoa n uea were kings on Upolu before the immigration, and the ancestors of those legendary dynasties of kings which were established on Tarawa, Beru and Nonouti as a result of the successive waves of invasion from the south. That all the evidence of tradition supports this claim will be shown by reference to the sections in which the legends of the coming from Samoa are analysed. What seems to be fairly well substantiated by the analysis of these traditions is that the final immigration from the south was made by a swarm in which Karongoa was very strongly represented. It is true that an earlier movement from Samoa had already implanted on Tarawa a dynasty of Kings called Kirata, whose clan is also known to have been Karongoa n uea; but this movement seems to have immediately affected only that single island, whereas the later swarm is shown by direct evidence to have settled upon at least eleven out of the sixteen units.

Coming as conquerors to the group, covering so large an area, and having the prestige of a kingly ancestry upon Samoa, it is easy to understand how the people of Karongoa n uea were able to assume all the^{ir} hereditary privileges in the maneaba of their new homes, and to establish them so securely as part of the imported social system that even when the political organisation became modified to the extent that the kingly and chiefly regime developed into something approaching a democracy, as happened on many islands, the clan still continued to enjoy its ancient pre-eminence in the social and magico-religious ceremonial of the maneaba.

Beside the title of 'Samoa', which is known throughout the Group, common consent on several islands, especially Marakei and Maiana, also confers the epithet of 'Sun' on the clan of Karongoa n uea. It has already been seen that the fillet worn on ceremonial occasions by the elder of the group is called the amulet of the sun; that the stone stud of the maneaba which is included within the clan's sitting space is named Sun; and that an inhibition upon one who behaves in an unseemly manner within the edifice is the expression, Iai Tai i nanon te maneaba (The Sun is in the maneaba).

In the Gilbertese mind of Marakei and Maiana the various components of this complex of ideas connected with the sun are so dependent one upon the other that they must be regarded simultaneously. We cannot afford to examine them separately and individually if we are to obtain a true view of their significance, since the Gilbertese himself does not methodically distinguish between the elemental parts of any given compound of beliefs but regards them, however conflicting and contradictory they may seem in detail to us, as one and indivisible. It is their very quality of togetherness that gives them vital meaning to him. For example, in the complex of beliefs connected with the sun before us, he does not evaluate the force of the sun-title as applied respectively to a clan and a stone in the maneaba; he does not say to himself, 'The stone is so-named because it is a representation of the sun's body, and the clan because it is a representative of his power'; he does not even wonder why; he

simply accepts and states what to him is a perfectly satisfying fact, that both stone and clan are the sun. And because the fact is so, the one is permanently and indissolubly bound up in his mind with the other.

Similarly, in his use of the expression, 'the Sun is in the maneaba', he does not stop to ask himself whether he refers to the luminary itself, or its invisible emanation, or the clan, or the stone bearing its name. As he speaks, he means all these things; that is to say, that just as an unscientific mind will view a complicated mixture of chemical solutions as one simple liquid, so does he embrace in a single thought and evoke in a solitary word the triple unity of sun, clan and stone. Only by realising this do we obtain a true view of the significance of the sun-title bestowed upon Karongoa n uea.

On Marakei and Maiana, though the kingly ancestry of this clan connoted in its appellation of 'Samoa' contributes towards its pre-eminence in the ceremonial of the maneaba, its title to precedence is considered to rest chiefly upon its identification with the sun. On Abaiang and Tarawa this is still apparent, though not so generally known; on Tabiteuea and Beru it is claimed by a few very old men who are themselves members of the clan; on other islands it seems to be the Samoa connection that now entitles Karongoa n uea to its privileges, both in the estimation of its own members and that of the general public.

Though there can be no doubt that the people of Karongoa n uea came as conquerors and chiefs to the Group, their prestige in the maneaba is now entirely divorced from the idea of temporal power, and their privileges are largely independent of political vicissitudes.

On Abemama, indeed, where the High Chiefs belong to the clan of Kaburara, the insolently despotic Binoks of 50 years ago, whose particular pleasure it was to override all Gilbertese custom and so display his power, became jealous of Karongoa's ceremonial prerogatives and deliberately assumed them to himself.

Since then Kaburara has performed on Abemama all the offices in the maneaba that used to be in the hands of Karongoa n uea. This is an exceedingly interesting illustration of the modification in a social system that may take place in a single generation as a result of local politics. This coup d'état of the High Chief of Abemama affected also the two tributary islands of Aranuka and Kuria. Had an enquirer been able to conduct his researches only on these three units of the Group, he would have entirely missed the importance of the Karongoa clan in the social organisation of the Gilberts; he would have heard nothing of its connection with the sun; and he would have failed to find any of the Karongoa immigration myths, which throw so much light on the coming from Samoa, for these too faded out of memory with the passing of the privileges of the clan.

The deliberate stroke of disorganisation which Binoks was obliged to effect on Abemama, in order to rob Karongoa of its precedence, only serves to throw into greater relief the durable character of its privileges, for before their spoliation they had subsisted intact through six successive generations of powerful High Chiefs. Their eventual loss for political reasons was quite exceptional, being without a parallel on any other Gilbert Island. Elsewhere, whatever may have been the accidents of war or other material circumstance, Karongoa remained supreme in the maneaba from the time of the Samoan immigration right up to the coming of the British Flag in 1892. A Karongoa man might be stripped of all his lands and forced to do menial work for the victorious chief of another clan, but in the maneaba he spoke with all the old authority; his chief listened meekly to his words, and forbore to contradict, lest he should become maraia. This was recognised on every island (except Abemama and its tributaries), where the chiefly system prevailed. Furthermore, a chief could not save his face by excluding a Karongoa menial from his maneaba, for the members of this clan held the sacred right of demanding entry on any ceremonial occasion, to refuse which was to become immediately maraia.

Neither did the accidents of war affect the internal organisation of the clan. It happened several times during the last two centuries of Tarawa political history that a younger branch of Karongoa was on the victorious side, while the senior branch had joined the conquered faction, and consequently became the 'eater out of the clan' of its junior. But this had no effect upon its rights of primogeniture for ceremonial purposes; its eldest representative still remained the spokesman of the entire group in the maneaba. The application of the genealogical method of enquiry on five islands has shown me no exceptions to this rule.

With reference to temporal power, there is a saying current throughout the Group that only a dynasty of Uea (High Chiefs) descended from Karongoa can stand firm for very long on any island. This theory is but feebly supported by facts on Abemama, where perhaps the most powerful of the three lines of High Chiefs found in the Gilberts belongs to the clan of Kaburara, and is connected with Karongoa only through an ancestress of ten generations back.

It is true, however, that on Abaiang the Uea Kaiea, the fourth of his dynasty, is one of the Karongoa n uea group, while on Butaritari, though this clan is not an entity of the local social organisation, the High Chiefs, of whom an individual also named Kaiea is now ninth in succession, are known to be descended in the male line from the ancient Karongoa kings of Tarawa.

Certainly when temporal power is added to the ceremonial prestige of Karongoa, as in Abaiang, the respect paid to the clan is most patent; and this is natural, since its functions are no longer confined to the maneaba but embrace also the duties and privileges of physical kingship. It is natural, too, that when both ritual and temporal pre-eminence are vested in the same person, a certain amount of confusion should be apparent as to the exact limits of his title to respect on the one ground or the other. On Abaiang, the High Chief's membership of the Karongoa ~~clan seems in the past to have endowed~~ ^{him}

clan seems in the past to have endowed his person with a sacredness not enjoyed by the infinitely more despotic Kaburara Kings of Abemama. Not only within but outside the maneaba it was an offence to discuss the lightest word of the Uea, and a man was considered to be maraiā if he made the smallest of impatient references to his peculiarities of habits or person. Thus it seems that the accident of temporal kingship on Abaiang extended to political and mundane life the scope of those sanctions by which Karongoa was ordinarily surrounded only in the maneaba during the performance of its ceremonial functions.

We have also an example of this in the legend of Nei Nimanoa and Beia-ma-Tekai. Beia-ma-Tekai were Kings and at the same time members of Karongoa; therefore, according to the tradition, they were kamaraia both inside and outside the maneaba; and when Tabutoa on Nonouti expressed his impatience that the heroes should have chased him and his folk to that island, he fell dead on the spot. It may be mentioned here that all the Karongoa clans on the Group trace their descent from Beia-ma-Tekai through one or another of the Beruan conquerors, who settled upon their islands 9 or 10 generations ago.

The precedence and privileges enjoyed by Karongoa n uea appear to have been the same on all the three styles of maneaba known to the Gilbertese; the functions of the other clans, however, varied according to the type of building in which the feast or other ceremony took place. The differences between the Tabiang and Maungatabu styles, as far as concerned the precedence of clans and the nature of their duties, were not very pronounced: I shall therefore deal with them together, taking the Maungatabu maneaba as the basis of my description, and noting in the text any divergence noticed in the Tabiang building. ~~The Tabontebike style I shall treat separately,~~
~~as~~ ^{in the Tabontebike maneaba} The organisation of the ceremonial ~~therein~~ was markedly different in detail, although similar in general character.

Maungatabu and Tabiang maneaba

The clan of Karongoa raereke was considered the companion (rao) and the acolyte (tabonibai) of Karongoa n uea in the ceremonial of both these maneaba; its members carried messages, generally in whispers, from the sacred clan to the other groups, and in the northern islands its elder often 'lifted the word' from the lips of Karongoa n uea spokesman; which is to say, the latter whispered his oration or his judgment into the ear of the Karongoa raereke man who then published it to the maneaba at large. The privilege of the group was to 'partake of (katonqa) the portion' of Karongoa n uea in the feast, and for this reason it received no individual share in the distribution of food. Its duty was to supervise the laying of the first inai (mats of green plaited coconut leaf) on the shingled floor of the maneaba. The 'first inai' consisted of a single file of these mats, laid end to end from the southern extremity of the building to the northern gable, up against the western side of the central pillars supporting the ridge-pole; and a second file laid from north to south up against their eastern side. While these were being laid by junior men of the clan, the elder stood in the middle of the building, facing east, and recited a magic formula of which the object was to prevent dissension among those who were to sit in the building.

By a stroke of ill-fortune, the only Old Man of Abaiang who remembered this formula died suddenly two days before an interview at which he had promised to give it to me. From a conversation I had with him in public, it appears that the materials used in the ceremony were the leaf of a newly sprouted coconut, whose pinnules had not yet separated (te bani kimaimai), and a kuo n aine, or cup made of half a coconut shell wherein oil had been boiled and which had subsequently been taken for magical purposes. A potion was made in this vessel and drunk by the officiator before the laying of the inai; while the work was in progress he recited his formula, at the same time waving

the coconut leaf towards the four sides of the building. The time for this ceremony was any hour of the morning, before the sun had passed its zenith.

The inai thus laid by Karongoa raereke were not furnished by members of the clan, but by the women of the settlement at large. After the feast two files were laid, the rest were introduced in any order by any clan.

The clan of Katanrake shared with Karongoa raereke the privilege of partaking of the portion allocated to Karongoa n uea in the feast. Its duty was to fetch this portion from the middle of the maneaba, where the food was divided, to subdivide it into three shares and, keeping one for itself, to hand the other two to their respective owners, giving the choicest bits always to Karongoa n uea. In payment for this office, it had the privilege of using the nikira (remnant) and the mange (waste) of the food, the nikira being any odd one out left after counting round such things as puddings or babai-roots, and the mange the broken bits that might fall during the process of subdivision.

The Tabiang group had the privilege of receiving the second share of the feast. If a porpoise were included in the food, the head of the creature belonged by right to this clan. In debate its elder 'used the second word', i.e. spoke as soon as Karongoa n uea had opened the discussion. With reference to these privileges of following hard on the heels of Karongoa n uea, and to its position in the northern gable of the maneaba, Tabiang is sometimes called Ueani Meang (King of the North).

The groups of Te Kirikiri and Te Ba partook of the portion of Tabiang in the feast, the former fetching it from the middle of the maneaba and setting it before the latter, which subdivided it and handed out the shares. In reward for its office of subdivision, Te Ba had the perquisites of nikira and mange, exactly as Katanrake in the case of the Karongoa groups.

The third portion of the feast and the 'third word' in debate were taken by the people of Te Bakabaka; the fourth by Te Bakoa; the fifth by Taunnamo; the sixth by the clan of Te Kua, which also took the tail of the porpoise when it was included in the food.

The seventh portion and the 'seventh word' belonged to Tabukaokao. It was the elder of this clan who supervised the collection of food in the middle of the maneaba, making scathing or complimentary remarks upon it as it arrived, and it was he who made the general division from the central point. This was a highly prized function, the officiator being the cynosure of all eyes. He had the right of the most absolute freedom of speech in respect of the donations of the various people, and it was expected of him that he should pour forth a stream of humerqus remarks during the performance of his duties. One of his chief methods of being funny was to make inept allusions to race tradition, such as the legends of the coming from Samoa, in illustration of his points; the humour lying in the inconsequence or the gross incorrectness of his quotations. It was said of the Tabukaokao people that 'they knew no traditions but they were clever in causing laughter', and it is certainly a fact to this day that the most successful raconteurs of humerous stories on the various islands are generally found to be Tabukaokao men.

The young men of this clan did the manual labour of dividing the food, under the direction of the elder, and they handed out the portions to those sent to fetch them. In payment for its work, the clan took the nikira and the mange left over from the general division.

The eighth share and 'word' belonged to Nikumauea. This group had the very important function of covering the ridge of the maneaba with its capping of plaited pandanus or coconut leaf.

After the eighth portion of the feast had been given, the other clans appear to have followed in any order; and similarly,

after the eighth speaker in debate the discussion became general.

The clan of Karumaetua was architect of the maneaba called Tabiang, its ancestor being the Towatu-of-Matang who built the first edifice of that type on the north end of Beru, twenty-odd generations ago. In its possession are all the magic formulae connected with the Tabiang style of construction.

Ababou and Maerua shared between them the method and the magic of the Maungatabu architectural style. But although in theory it was admitted that a Karumaetua man was the best architect for Tabiang, and a member of Ababou or Maerua for Maungatabu, a certain amount of confusion existed in practice.

When the people of a settlement wished to build a new maneaba in a particular style, say that of Tabiang, a Karumaetua man might not be available; they might then obtain the services of a Maerua or Ababou architect, who would copy the Tabiang style, but use the magic associated with Maungatabu. This would be considered satisfactory, the magic and the ritual connected with it being the essential thing. Takeuta of Marakei was a Karongoa raereke man, and therefore strictly the architect of the Tabontebike style. But his constructive ability was so great in Gilbertese estimation that he has been called upon to build in all of the three styles, in preference to experts whose clan gave them in theory the prior claim to consideration. In all cases, he used the magic connected with the maneaba of Tabontebike.

Te Wiwi had the duty and the sole privilege of blowing the conch, at whose signal the people gathered in the maneaba. The order to sound it was sent by the elder of Karongoa n uea, who transmitted it first to the elder of Karongoa raereke, who in his turn deputed a junior of his clan to carry the message. As noted elsewhere, the conch was one of the totems of Te Wiwi, being the invention of the clan ancestor and god Te I-Mone, King of the Underworld.

Members of Keaki had the right of prior entry into the maneaba, not in the sense that they took their places before anyone else went in, but that when one or more arrived in a crowd at the western side of the building their companions of other clans would stand aside to let them pass first.

Boti Clan	Ati God	Bakatibu Ancestor	Atua Totems	Man Crest
Karongoa ⁿ + ^u Nea	Tabuariki	Teuribaba) Tabuariki) Matawarebwe) Kafawa ⁿ + tree)	Cockerel) Shark) Wind) Kafawa ⁿ + tree)	Te-bou-teua ⁿ ra
Karong ^r raereke	"	" (3)	" (4)	Te-bou-uoua
Te Bakoa	Tabuariki the Shark	Tabuariki the Shark	Shark	Te-ra-tabito
Ante ^h ma ^a Karawa (Beru) ^a ntekana ^a wa	"	Tabuariki) Matawareb ^w we) Kafawa ⁿ + tree)	Shark) Cockerel) Wind) Kafawa ⁿ + tree)	Te-bou-uoua
Kato ⁿ prake	"	" (3)	" (4)	"
Nukum ^a puea	Riki the Eel	Riki the Eel	The Centipede) The Eel)	Te-man-ri ⁱ ki
Taborau ^e a	Tabakea the Turtle	Tabakea the Turtle	The Lady-bird) The Turtle) The Noddy)	Te Ka ^{ek} henu ^a / Saurian A bush called Ibi
Tabukaokao	Nei Te ^{na} potarai	Nei Te ^{na} potarai	A Crab called) Nei Te ^{na} potarai)	Te Atua
Teba	Taburimai	Taburimai	Te Kun ^F a parangoid fish)	Te Atu "
Tabiang	"	"	"	Te-man-uoua
Te Kua	Kaburoronteun	Kaburoronteun	?	Te- Kai-ni- ^h katik ^u
Tebakabaka	Tabuariki) Nei Titua ^a bine)	Tabuariki) Nei Titua ^a bine)	Cockerel, Shark,) Thunder, Stingray)	Te-ra-tabito
Ababou	Bue and) Rirongo)	Sun, Bue and) Rirongo)	Porpoise) Sun) Coral called Rirongo)	Te Kai-ni- ^h amata
Maerua	"	"	"	"
Kaburara	Nei Titua ^a bine	Nei Titua ^a bine) Nabiri)	Stingray) Creeper Tarai)	Te Man-n-aon-rama
Teurawaka	Tao ^h Karawa	Tao ^h Karawa	?	?

Boti Clan	Arti God	Bakatibu Ancestor	Atua Totems	Man Crest
Te Wiwi	Te I-mone	Te I-mone	Uri-tree) A Conch)	?
Karumaetow ^a	Bakoa the Shark	Bakoa the Shark) Tojatu of Matang)	The Shark	Te-ra-tabito
Bakarowa ^a	Nei Moaine) Fools & deaf Mutes)	Nei Moaine) Fools & deaf Mutes)	Brittle Star-fish	Te Kikannang
Keaki	Nei Tituaabine	Nei Tituaabine) The Tropic Bird) Kouraiti)	The Tropic Bird) The Stingray) Bêche-de-mer)	Te buki ni banga
Te O	Auriaria	Auriaria	The Tern) The Pemphis-tree)	?
Uma ni Kamauri	"	"	The Tern) The Pemphis-tree)	Te-ra-tabito
Taunnamo	Tabuariki	(Same as Karongoa-n-Uea etc.)		
Benuakura	A Man-eating) mythical bird) called Aromatang)	Teibow ^{a20} , the brother of the bird	Bird called) Aromatang)	Niuitawawa (a representation of the bird's ²¹ feathers.)
Kotirama	Buatara the stingray S	Buatara	Stingray called) Buatara)	Mataaaua
Bangauma	Te Mamaang	Te Mamaang	Stingray	?
Tekokoma	Kotua	Kotua	Porpoise	Kainikamata
Nei Ati	Kieunari	Kieunari	Octopus) Garfish)	Man-nei-ati
Namakaina	Taburimai	Taburimai	A Carangoid) Te Kun)	Namakaina
Katannaki	Nei Temaiti	Nei Temaiti	Stone: Nei Temaiti	Manintaiki