

Precedence and Privileges of the Clans in the Moneaba.

Many clans had hereditary privileges or duties connected with the ceremonial of the Moneaba, which they most jealously prized and guarded. Among these, the group of Karongoa n Uea (Karongoa - of Kings), as its name suggests, was *faule pinceho*. Karongoa n Uea was King of the Moneaba; at all ceremonial gatherings within the ~~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 very-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 *bunnam tai* 'the amulet of the sun'. It rendered the wearer *kamarara*, which means that he would cause to be *marara*, (accused 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 bunmani kamarara*' (the amulet of making - accused), merely enhanced the sacredness which was already inherent in the individual as a consequence of his birth and function.

* E lamna te noava taeku na te motin taeku.

He uses the first word with the judgement of words.

Having taken his seat in his boat 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 toematao, 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 lowered² 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, 'Anai, la N ro orgo' (Take it up, for I will hear). The debate or 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 at 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

* Kaitiaka main and taaka.

make clean front of his words.

² The head was possibly bowed only to prevent those around from hearing the words of the formula, which in this position would be muttered into the chest.

ommission, even though it may be glaringly patent to all present. To dispute such a matter in the past was considered to render a man marua, and liable to mortal sickness; and this applied whether the discussion took place in the maraba 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 Maori, 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 forebears 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 mouna

tiba), which it then shared with the groups of Karogoa raereke, Katanake, and on Beru. ~~As seen~~
~~another section~~, These clans had the same totems and ancestors as Karogoa 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 native 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 Karogoa 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 pile of thatches to be laid on the roof was that covering the middle rafters of the eastern side, whereunder the people of Karogoa n uea were grouped.

a native explanation of the pre-eminence of this clan in the ceremonial of the maneaba is that 'it is Samoa';^x that is to say, it represents the victorious immigration from Samoa into the Gilbert Islands. It is not asserted that Karogoa 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 Karogoa n uea were kings on Upolu before the immigration, & 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

^x Ban Tamoā Karogoa - indeed Samoa Karogoa.

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 Kinga 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 their 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 régime 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 Marara, 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 clans sitting-space is named Sun; and that an inhibition upon one who behaves in an unbecomingly manner within the edifice is the expression, Iai Taa i raron te maneaba - The Sun is in the maneaba.

In the native mind of Marakei and Marara 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 Fijitee himself does not methodically distinguish between the elemental parts of any given compound of beliefs but regards them, however conflicting and contradicting 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 ~~the~~ 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 maraola; 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 ~~it~~ in his mind with the other. Similarly, in his use of the expression, 'the Sun is in the maraola', 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 realizing this do we obtain a true view of the significance of the sun-title bestowed upon Karongoa nua.

On Marakei and Maiana, though the kingly ancestry of the clan connotes ~~its~~ in its appellation of 'Samoa' contributes towards its pre-eminence in the ceremonial of the maraola, its title to precedence is considered to rest chiefly upon its identification with the sun. On Abauang and Tarawa this is still apparent, though not so generally known; on Tabiteuea and Bevu it is claimed by a few very old men

who are themselves members of the clan; on other islands it seems to be the Samoan connection that now entitles Karongoa nua to its privileges, both in the estimation of its own members and that of the general ~~island~~ public.

Though there can be no doubt that the people of Karongoa nua came as conquerors and chiefs to the Group, their prestige in the *mareaba* 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 Kabunara, the insolently despotic Binoku 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, Kabunara has performed on Abemama all the offices in the *mareaba*, that used to be in the hands of Karongoa nua. 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 Aronuka 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. *

* ^{For} owing to the disruptive influence of the same High Chief, he would also have come to the conclusion that the clan system was very weakly developed, and exogamy almost non-existent. See section on the clan and Karongoa.

The deliberate stroke of disorganization which Buroka was obliged to effect on Abemara, in order to rob Karogoa 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, Karogoa remained supreme in the maneaba from the time of the Samoan immigration right up to the coming of the British Flag in 1892. A Karogean 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 marasa. This was recognized on every island, (except Abemara and its tributaries) where the chiefly system prevailed*. Furthermore, a chief could not save his face by excluding a Karogean 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 marasa.

Neither did the accidents of war affect the internal organization of the clan. It happened several times during the last two centuries of Tarawa political history that a younger branch of Karogoa was on the victorious side, while the senior branch had joined the conquered faction, and consequently became the 'eaten 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

* Marakei, Alarong, Tarawa, Raiara, and Renute. Butaritari had the chiefly and high-chiefly system, but as shown elsewhere, did not possess the same clan-organization as the other islands.

the mameaba. 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 Karogoa 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 Karogoa only through an ancestress of ten generations back. It is true, however, that on Alaiang the Uea Karea, the fourth of his dynasty, is one of the Karogoa-u 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 Karea is now now ninth in succession, are known to be descended in the male line from the ancient Karogoa King of Tarawa. Certainly when temporal power is added to the ceremonial prestige of Karogoa, as in Alaiang, the respect paid to the clan is most patent; and this is natural, since its functions are no longer confined to the mameaba 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 Alaiang, the High Chief's membership of the Karogoa Clan seems in the past to have endowed his person with a sacredness not enjoyed by the infinitely more despotic Kaburara King of Abemama. Not only within but outside the mameaba it was an offence to discuss the lightest word of the Uea, and a man was considered to be marua 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 Alaiang extended to political and mundane life the scope of those sanctions by which Karogoa 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 Kumanou and Bera-na-Tekai. ~~These~~ Bera-na-Tekai were Kings and at the same time members of Karogoa; therefore, according to the tradition, they were Kamarao both ^{inside} and outside the maneaba; and when Tabutoa or Nononti 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 Karogoa clans on the Group trace their descent from Bera-na-Tekai through one or another of the Berman conquerors, who settled upon their islands 9 or 10 generations ago.

The precedence and the privileges enjoyed by Karogoa na nea appear to have been the same in 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 the Naungatabu 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 Naungatabu maneaba as the basis of my description, and noting in the text any divergence noticed in the Tabiang building. The Tabantebike style I shall treat separately, as the organization of the ceremonial therein was markedly different in detail, although similar in general character.

Naungatabu and Tabiang maneaba.

Space → The clan of Karogoa nieke was considered the companion (rao) and the acolyte (tabonebai) of Karogoa na nea in the ceremonial of both these maneaba; its members carried messages, generally in whistles, from the sacred clan to the other groups, and in the northern islands its elder often 'lifted the word' from the lips of the Karogoa na nea.

spokesman; which is to say, the latter whispered his oration or his judgement into the ear of the Karongou raereke man who then published it to the mareaba at large. The privilege of this group was to 'partake of (katonga) the portion' of Karongou n'ua 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 vai (mats of green plaited coconut leaf) on the shingled floor of the mareaba. The 'first vai' 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~~ 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 Alouang 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 funicles had not yet separated (te luri kimaimai), and a kuo n'ane, or cup made of half a coconut shell when 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 vai; 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 his zenith.

The vai thus laid by Karongou raereke, were not furnished by members of the clan, but by the women of the settlement at large. After the first two files were laid, the rest

were introduced in any order by any clan.

The clan of Katamake shared with Karongoa n'ua the privilege of partaking of the portion allocated to Karongoa n'ua 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'ua. In payment for this office, it had the privilege of using the nikina (remnant) and the mange (waste) of the food, the nikina being any 'odd one out' left after counting round such things as puddings or babar-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. he spoke as soon as Karongoa n'ua had opened the discussion. With reference to these privileges of following hand on the heels of Karongoa n'ua, and to its position in the northern gable of the maneaba, Tabiang is sometimes called Uearri mang (King of the North).

The groups of Te Kiskiri 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 nikina and mange, exactly as Katamake 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 Taunono, the sixth ~~was~~ 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, ~~in the process~~ ~~described a little later~~ 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 humorous remarks during the performance of his duties. One of his chief methods of being funny was to make veiled 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 incoherence 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 recitations of humorous 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 munge left over from the general division.

The eighth share and 'word' belonged to Nukuruaea. This group had the very important function of covering the ridge of the maneaba with its coping of flatted 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 Karumaeoa was architect of the maneaba called Tabiang, its ancestor being the Towatu of Motang.

who built the first edifice of that type on the north end of Beu, twenty-odd generations ago. ~~For certain traditions~~ connected with the ~~ancestry~~; in its possession were all the magic formulae connected with the Tabiang style of construction.

Alabou and Naema shared between them the method and the magic of the Naungatabu architectural style. But although in theory it was admitted that a Karumaetou man was the best architect for Tabiang, and a member of Alabou or Naema for Naungatabu, a certain amount of confusion existed in practice. When the people of a settlement wished to build a new wareaba in a particular style, say that of Tabiang, a Karumaetou man might not be available; they might then obtain the services of a Naema or Alabou architect, who would copy the Tabiang style, but use the magic associated with Naungatabu.

This would be considered satisfactory, the magic and the ritual connected with it being the essential thing. Takenta of Marabei, ~~who built the Naungatabu wareaba of which~~ ~~he gave the ground-plan~~, was a Karogoa saereke man, and therefore strictly the architect only of the Tabontelike style. But his constructive ability was so great in the 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 wareaba of Tabontelike.

Te Niwi had the duty and the sole privilege of blowing the conch, at whose signal the people gathered in the wareaba. The order to sound it was sent by the elder of Karogoa ~~in use~~, who transmitted it first to the elder of Karogoa saereke, 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 Niwi, being the invention of the clan ancestor and god Te I-Mone, King of the Underworld.

Members of Keake had the right of prior entry into the

moneaba, 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.

seamarks, or betia

number once used for purposes of navigation. That list was compiled twelve years ago: so quickly is the old lore dying that it is doubtful whether one half of the names then recorded could be dredged from the collective memory of old men left alive today. As for details concerning the ~~practice~~ application of astronomic theory to seafaring practice, they are gone forever. It remains only to record what fragments can now be collected of the traditional seacraft and geography which, in addition to astronomy, helped the old voyager to make his landfalls.

← As Europeans use landmarks, so the Gilbertese ancestors relied upon seamarks (betia) to check their daily position. These sign-posts in mid-ocean consisted of swarms of fish, flocks of birds, groups of driftwood, or conditions of wave and sky, discovered - and once discovered never forgotten - to be peculiar to certain zones of the sea. Hundreds of such traditional betia were stored up in the race memory as a result of the cumulative experience of generations. It is difficult for us to appreciate how very concrete and significant to the native mariner were the signs of sea and sky which to us seem so precarious. The people had, in fact, a sea-sense which we do not possess in anything like the same degree, and it was obviously this gift more than any other agency which guided their migrant ancestors safe to land across a vast and strange ocean where their star-lore could no longer serve them.

The following tabulated list of betia bears mostly upon conditions of travel between island and island of the Gilbert Group, and should be read from the viewpoint of a navigator whose home port was Butaritari, in the extreme North Gilberts; but though thus local in their application they do serve to suggest the bold technique, the shrewd observation that enabled the ancestors to undertake voyages of immensely greater duration.

Bring out to margin