

The Story of Bue and Rirongo

I (89)

~~island~~
 Island and informant not known
~~name~~

Notes

~~Noubabari was a Tamoan and Nei Tifualine was his wife. They had a child called Nakkaumai who wed Monamona-n-Tai and their sons were Bue and Rirongo. Rirongo was the elder and his wife was Nei Bareaka. Bue married Teiamanaba. The brothers did not live in the maneaba but ^{on} their ^{Buakomifai} land, ~~island~~ ~~land~~. Then Tanentoa sent Tabana to summon them to take their place in the maneaba.~~

4. Bue and Rirongo

Informant not known

Matamona was a woman from Tebongiroro and her husband was the ~~Appropriate~~ Sun. Their children were Tongea, Tangoa, Nakianga, Maukinikin, Bue and Nei Teraiti. The first four sons died and the Sun took Nei Teraiti away to make a curtain for him in the east. Bue was left on Tebongiroro alone.

1. When Bue decided it was time to travel, he built a canoe which he named Te Kuonaine. He put aboard it two pieces of smooth, red coral rock, a non fruit, an ^{old} coconut-shell bowl, a rotting coconut and a leaf-switch of a young coconut palm. He went to visit Nei Teraiti, his sister, first:

'Are you there?' he called out.

'I am, and who may you be?'

'I am Bue and I'm going to visit my father.'

'What are you taking with you?'

'Two pieces of red coral, a non fruit, a coconut-shell bowl, a rotting coconut and a switch of young palm fronds,' replied Bue.

'Come back for me when you have seen your father' Nei Teraiti pleaded.

So Bue went on his way to challenge the Sun at the six stations of its daily course — at the

three as it rises up to the horizon and at the three when it shines above the surface of the sea. He struck at the first ray of sunshine and it dropped back into the ocean. Another ray burst forth and Bue struck it down too. He threw his coconut-shell bowl at the third ray without success so he hurled the rotting coconut at it, hit it and it sank from sight. The next time the Sun's ray shone out it was very weak and Bue went up to it and bound it fast with his coconut switch. The imprisoned Sun cried out:

'Who are you?'

'You are my father', Bue replied.

'Who, then, is your mother?'

'Nai Matamma'

'And what do you want of me?' growled the Sun.

'I have come to ask you to teach me all your skills', said Bue firmly.

2. And the Sun taught Bue how to build the maneaba of kings called Namakaina and the square maneaba called Tabarin; how to take measurements; how to construct racing canoes; how to call up the wind and calm the storm; how to perform the magic ritual for the initiation of warriors; and how to bury the dead according to the rites for kings and commoners and to the special rite named after Bue himself. All this knowledge was learnt by Bue in the east.

Bue returns from visiting his father and goes to see Nai Bairaro.

3. When Bue left his father, he returned to his sister, Nai Teraiti, and took her away with him on his canoe, Te Kuonaine. He made love to her on the canoe. The Sun watched them and commanded the fish... Ika-auriana; 'Go, overturn their canoe'. Everyone was thrown out and they sank down below the waves into Mone where they met four ancestors. Nai Teraiti was taken away to the north and Bue went with the ancestor of the west to the closet of Nai Bairaro where he hid himself. While he waited there, the Sun came out and spoke to

Nei Bairaro, 'Recite the magic of your winds for me'. She recited the chants for the first, second and third winds and the Sun went away. Bue, having committed the chants to memory, came out of hiding and Nei Bairaro saw him and exclaimed, 'You must wait for your father to return'. But Bue was afraid to wait and fled outside into the darkness where he found Nei Teraing, the rainmaker, from whom he stole the magic of the rain-winds in this fashion:

4 'Take away her stormy rain-wind,
Tear it from its lair.
Let it blow steadily
For me, Tabuariki,
For me, Taturimai.
Let it blow steadily
For me, Kao-bunnang,
I make her wind blow,
I make her wind blow,
I make her wind blow.'

Bue goes to Tarawa.

5 As Bue was getting ready to leave, he said to Nei Teraing, 'wouldn't you like to come with me?' and, when she refused, added 'well, then, would you please let me have that uri tree you use for making fire so that I may sail away on it?' 'No', replied Nei Teraing 'you can go on your own canoe'. Then Bue called on the three winds of the Sun, and Nei Bairaro to uproot the tree but they were of no help. But the tree was torn down by the force of the winds of Nei Teraing. Pieces of coral, broken up in the sea, embedded themselves around the base of the uri tree and shook it loose until the ocean surge was able to wash under it.

Bue continued on his way and landed on Tarawa where he was met by Rirongo. 'Who is your father?' Bue asked him. 'Kirata', replied Rirongo, 'and Nei Tetauti is my mother'. Then Rirongo went off towards the east, to his Kainga, I-Ababou, while he was there, all the coconuts and pandanus palms went up in

flames and Kivata summoned Mei Tevaiti, 'You have a companion here, don't you?' 'Yes', she replied, 'He is my brother, Bue'. She went to Bue and asked him to bring down the rains and, when a lot had fallen, Kivata sent her back again to ask him to stop the storm.

Some time later, Kivata ordered Bue to build a manaba for him and Bue built two — one in the style called Tabarin and one in the style called Namakaina.

Bue then said to his sister, 'Bring me a little food and make me some string'. She made the string and he fastened a large scoop-net with a small handle to it and walked off through the rain to find Rirongo whom he caught in the net. He took Rirongo back to land and they lived together at Taratai or Tebomomo and then at Tabukina-Tarawa.

6.

The Voyage of Kotua to Bem and Nukurau

Kotua set out for Bem in his canoe but he could not get there for Bue and Rirongo blew him off course. He tried three times and, by divination, he found them on the third attempt and Bue and Rirongo agreed to guide him. They did not sail in company with Kotua but made their canoe, Te Kawimikamata, invisible. Mei Tevaiti, Rirongo's mother, travelled with them suspended under the keel of the canoe on the stringy bark of the midrib of a coconut frond. As they were travelling along, Rirongo suggested, 'Let us stop a while and announce our decisions'. Bue replied, 'I'm ready to do so. I shall take the heavens, you shall have the sea and Mei Tevaiti may have Mame'.

As they approached Bem, Kotua's crew asked him, 'Where's the canoe of those other people?' Bue's companions overheard the question and urged him, 'Call upon the rain to fall so that we'll all be wet together'. Bue commanded the rain to pour down and it drenched Kotua's canoe whereupon his crew roared with laughter.

and joked, 'look at Kotua, he's caught a wet head aboard his canoe, Tebakakai'.

Closer in to shore, the winds changed and took Kotua's canoe away to Nikurau. Bue and Rirongo landed on Benu but Nei Te Rauti was stranded in a fish-trap on Onofoa where she married a man called Kukurake.

NOTES

1. The Gilbertese text includes:

Atinom, translated by Grumble 'smooth red coral stone'

Matannon, translated by Grumble 'fruit of the non tree (*Norinda citrifolia*)'

Ba rorongongo, a binobino (coconut-shell container) according to Grumble

Ba ni kimaimai, undeveloped leaves of a young coconut tree.

2. The Gilbertese text lists:

Namakaina (ke) Tabarin. Namakaina is described as 'maueaba of kings'. Tabarin = square and refers to such style of maueaba. If the ke was originally bracketted, the two names could have been synonyms.

Nanoan te Raurau. May be another style of maueaba but I have translated on the analogy of nanoan te bai = a measure of back or length of the hand.

Koetoa. Grumble translates as a 'style of maueaba broader than it is long'. In the modern form ketoa, Sabatier gives (1) a method of constructing racing canoes (Nei Ketoa) or (2) a lean-to, mostly as a shelter for canoes. In the light of the next two words, I have followed Sabatier.

Kakeiang, method (magic) of raising the wind.

Taoang, stilling the wind (Grumble), see taobara (Sabatier)

Kabueari, magic performed at new moon for protection of children, health and maueaba and for skill in composing dance chants (Grumble). In the light of the following.

words, I have used Sabatier's translation of 'magical rite for initiation of warriors'.

Tauria mate ... ruia uia ... ruia aomata ... ruia i
Bue. I have translated as funeral according to appropriate rites.

3. Ika-aunana (ke) ikaurawata. Again, I am not sure whether (ke) was bracketted originally or later. Grimble identifies ika-aunana as a porpoise, Sabatier as a fish caught by incantation. I have treated ikaurawata as a large aunana.

4. A literal translation.

5. uri, Guettarda speciosa, used in fine-making.

6. It seems that the story of Kotua is not an integral part of the preceding saga.

The Story of Bue and Rirongo

The first, very brief account of Bue and Rirongo does not agree with other versions and seems to be of little consequence.

The second story is not, in the essential details, very different from that which is given in 'Migrations, Myth and Magic from the Gilbert Islands' (Rosemary Grimble, pp 132-6. The Grimble account, which reads like an edited version, may have drawn on several sources and it gives more detail about Bue's confrontation with his father, the Sun, including the acquisition of the canoe chest of the Abatru and Maema clans — the Kai-ni-kawata which, in this story, is the name of the canoe in which Bue and Rirongo sailed from Tarawa to Berru. It also contains the chant which Bue used to extract control of the rain-winds from Auei Temaing and an incident in the Tarawa-Berru voyage.

In some instances, the text I have used displays possible differences in detail from the Grimble version and I have appended notes when this occurs.