

Auniana of Tarawa

by

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Nauoko of Tarawa.

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Notes

Auniana was the son of Tabakea and Nei Unikai was his mother. He was born in the ^{bush} bush on an islet called Nantabakea. When he grew up, he used to perform the ritual magic kauti ⁽¹⁾ on the ocean shore and, on one occasion, he saw a vision of a woman on Marakei called Nei Rei who was idling time away on a swing. He promptly crossed the sea to Marakei and approached Nei Rei who, when she saw him, invited him to join her games. As he drew nearer, she jumped down from her swing but Auniana turned away. 'Wait for me', she cried, 'I want to go with you'. They made love and then Auniana returned to Tarawa. On the way, he called at Abaiang where he met Nei Teareintarawa and at Betio where he found Nei Tiruabina. He took all three women to wife and set up home at Tabuarorae near Eita.

When he next performed his magic, Auniana saw Nei Teuenei on Maiana, crossed the sea and stayed with her for a long time. Now, Auniana had left a child behind him in Tarawa who used to ask questions about her father and Nei Rei, her mother, at last agreed they should go and find him. The two women set off in their canoe for Maiana and, as they approached land, Nei Rei began to sing:

The canoe is becalmed,
The sail is idly flapping,
I cannot see him yet.
Swift as a light the warrior flees,
Our song will follow him.
He is as slippery as a garfish
This son of Tabakea,
Nei Unikai and Nei Unimamao,
Back in Tarawa, his home,
We'll wait upon the shallow beach
Where small fish shoal,
There we'll wait — for he will come.

As the song died away, Nei Teuenei

asked Auniana if he had a wife in the north. 'Yes', he replied, 'Go, answer your sister'; and Anei Temea'i chanted:

'You have come to us, Burei,
That I might hear your song,
You have come, complaining
Rudely, calling us.
You have brought into this land
Disturbance and distress.
How sick I feel,
And overcome
By giddiness
And restlessness,
I'll take to my canoe,
Fill it full with blood,
My victims' blood.
For I command the thunder
And the lightning in the heavens.'

When she finished her song, the visitors embarked in their canoe and returned to Tarawa where the child grew up.

There came a time when the child asked Auniana for a canoe so he sounded his conch shell and summoned all the auri to build it. Some of them brought string, some wood for the ribs, some pieces for the sail; and they built the canoe except for the outrigger float. A few days later, Auniana set off for Nabanaba to cut wood for the float and he called at Banaba on the way. It is said there were folk in the maneaba when he arrived — Ngkoangkoa, Nabawe, Uka, Kanitero, Terontea'a, Teikawai, Taburimai and Riki. They hailed him and fed him, and they gave him as presents a young clam, a puffer fish and a crab.

Auniana continued his voyage but did not reach Nabanaba (Nilanutu). He turned back to Tarawa and, on his second attempt, picked up his wives and took them with him. As they drew near his grandchildren in the west, Anei Aromangati and Anei Nomanati, his wives sailed ahead of him. Auniana followed in

the guise of an old man with white hair and the grandchildren did not recognize him. One of the women danced the moia, the takutaku riri, for them and when it was finished they all went on to Nibanutu in Nabaraba.

Now, Auniana had charged the people in these words, 'You must prepare a float for me so that my child's canoe can be launched. If it is not ready, I shall punish you all'. Tanaba and Nakeka had called their people together to fell a tree that stood there but they could not do so. In desperation, they sought the help of Nabana, a man who lived on the farthest tip of the land. He was small with frizzy hair but he had a powerful voice and he stood beside the tree and shouted as loud as he could. But the tree did not move. When they saw Auniana approaching, they put a magic spell on Mei Ribanikai, daughter of Tanaba. They cut a fringe in her hair with a nikrokro shell and chanted:

'I have washed the fringe-cut hair
of Mei Ribanikai

And made her ready.

Where is she now? She is here.

Where is she now? She is here.

That, in his heart,

Auniana might say

'You are charming, you are lovely'

She was bathed again and the chant continued:

'I have washed the fringe-cut hair
of Mei Ribanikai.

Let her name soar high

From Auniana's lips:

"You are so charming and so lovely."

Then, they put a garland of flowers around her and sent her to meet Auniana.

He came towards her and she sang:

'Go back, Auniana, back to the east!

In Tiri you are glorified,

In Tonga are you praised;

You tread the highest heavens.

5.

And haunt the hills of Tamoa;

The starry sky is gloomy

In places where you strike;

You come upon us from the east

With storming winds and rains:

Angar reaches within you,

Calm yourself, you tree in loth to fall!

No matter how we tried

He could not hew it down;

No matter how we tried

He could not topple it.

Go back, O Auniana, go!

Go back, I beg of you,

I, Mei Ribanikai.

When Auniana heard her song, he stood in silent thought and his wives spoke up, 'You must take pity on this woman, she's so sad and miserable'. He listened but took little notice of their plea:

'Who is this woman calling out my name,
Who comes to meet me,
Whom I cannot see

Among the swirling mists and shadows?

I shall rampage through the land
With sword, and lay it waste.'

Mei Ribanikai heard him and was even more distressed. She broke the garland hanging round her neck and sang another song. This time she pleaded that her homeland should be spared and Auniana, taking pity on her at last, took her to wife.

At Nabanaba (Nibanaba), Auniana picked up the adze, Taburitokia, and started to cut down the tree. He chanted while he worked:

'I am cutting down the tree,

Hewing down the tree

Of the kings of Rotima.

Where shall I let it drop?

I'll let it fall right here.

Now its roots are nearly severed,

And its sap is oozing out,

Keeping for its strength departing.

Now it's heaving, now it's falling

Nei Ribanikai, it's shattered
Broken into many pieces
Into pieces all around.

56.

There is weeping through your homeland
It is blasted, scattered far
Like the reefs of Tarawa.

The tree lay in the dust and Auniana and his wives sailed away on it. They came to Banaba which Auniana turned upside down with the tip of his spear and then continued on their way. Suddenly, Auniana was attracted by a brilliant light which flashed beneath him and, standing up, told his women, 'Wait here for me. I am going to find out where this light down below comes from'. He dived into the sea and, not very far down, landed in the house of Nei Rabaraba which stood on the island of Matang. Nei Rabaraba was the wife of Tangarua, Lord of Mone, whose father was Taubaneroa and, when he saw her, Auniana sang this song:

'The light is bursting out from here,
Flashing brightly, flashing far.
The mighty young of Rabaraba
Rule o'er Matang in the south.
But the end is drawing near
I have come, fly off with me.'

Nei Rabaraba replied:

'I am charmed, intrigued, excited,
And my heart is beating fast;
How my legs grow weak beneath me
As I feel his manly touch.
O, how fast our two hearts, beating,
Leap within our heaving breasts.'

As her song died away, she got up and went off with Auniana to his home.

When Tangarua learned about this, he was very angry indeed. He assembled a fleet of canoes and, accompanied by Taubaneroa, sailed into the ocean passage off Betio. There, they split the fleet;

Tangaroa took the northern flank and Taubanerua the southern. One of Auniana's sisters who lived in Betio saw them and asked what they intended to do. They replied that they had come to engage Auniana in battle so she returned to warn him. Auniana took up arms and went north to Buariki from where he launched his canoes and defeated Tangaroa. As daylight dawned some of the enemy canoes were left afloat except that of Taubanerua who called out to Auniana, 'we have been defeated, all my men are dead. Now, send my children back to me'. Auniana agreed and sent Nei Kai back to Marakei, Nei Riburikai to Nabanaba, Nei Teuwei to Maiana, Nei Rotaraba to Matang and Nei Teareintarawa to Abaiang.

NOTES by Reid Cowell.

1. Kauti, probably te kauti n aine, a magic ritual to win a woman performed on ocean beach early in the morning.
2. See Appendix to this story below.
3. Nikorokoro, an unidentified, bi-valvular shell-fish.
4. The text reads, Ko nebonebo itiri, ko nebonebo i Tonga...
The syntax indicates that Tiri is a place-name.
5. The text reads, E akai n nem ni wene n Tirioro Karawa
uatao. I have read as E a kai ... n
tirioro where itirioro is a compound of tiri and oro, a word not in the dictionaries.
6. The text reads, E akai n nem ni wene n tirioro
na ni bakaraerae ba nukan Tarawa. See note 5. I have treated bakaraeraeba as one word. Nukan Tarawa, lit. middle of Tarawa where the land is considerably broken by passages.

APPENDIX

Notes:

Additions to above story from notes taken while listening to Maiana version as told by Ten Toakai. In Grinble's handwriting, English except for 2.

1. When Auniana was poisoned at Banaba, he visited his tibu, an old woman of the sea between Banaba and Tarawa, whose name was Tinantoro. She cured him of his sickness.
2. On the second leg of his journey, Auniana collected his wives and they all went off to Natunaba where they met his two grand-daughters. They were fearsome women called Mei Anomangati and Mei Noumangati, and they did not recognize him from a distance. One of them cried out, 'He's a big fellow. He's got red skin. But he looks friendly enough'. The other one agreed and Auniana, who overheard their chatter, turned himself into an ugly old man with white hair and went on ahead of his wives. When the grandchildren saw the women who were with them, one of them ran to the top of the beach and the other one ran along it. Mei Tituabine gave Auniana the words of a ruia and he stumbled ashore on two sticks, just like an old man:

Te taku ke takuriri, ke taku ke takurara
Tamaa, Tamaa i abana Matang: i abana
Matang mei Nanomea, i Nanomea.

Ai ngaia ao ai ngaia ao ke.

O e kenika e kenika kea Nakauti mei
antano.

Ani kenna ao ani kenna;

Ao ai ngaia ao ai ngaia ao ke.

O e bakara matai kere au ma ke
katati i abana i Nanomea i Nanomea.

Ao ai ngaia ao ai ngaia ao ke.

Ai ko birimaia ko rakomaia? Ko ti
keithei i Natunaba?

Mani Nienua mani Nienua - o - o.

Katanga te mani, Katanga te mani
 ba Nang a tibu Korosa, Korosa,
 Korosa riki - e - e.

The grandchildren were enchanted by the music and when Auniana changed back into a huge young man with a smooth red skin and a fine head of curly hair, they recognized him. Then Auniana and his wives continued ashore.

3. Inhabitants of Nabanaba:

Te Kai ni mane and Te Kai n aine; Tauaba and Mei Ranikai his wife, and Mei Ribanikai his daughter and Nakakea his brother; Natabwe; Nabana, a small black man with curly hair standing straight from his head, a flat nose, and an immense voice; and, when he breathed, the dust and leaves scattered beneath his nose; (his body stank); he lived on the south-west point of the land watching the sea for sailors.

4. There was a village in Nabanaba called Nibanguku populated by skulls, skeletons and armless, headless and footless people.

5. Matang, the home of Tituabine, was by Samoa. Sometimes it floated, sometimes it sank and sometimes flew in the air. Its inhabitants were Tangara, Tambanava, Rabaraba, Bwebwevenga, Teborata (twins). When Tituabine appeared, it was as lightning.

6. Auniana's father Tabakea, mother Unikai, sister Rokora, wives Rei, Teveneri, Teaveintarawa, Ribanikai, Tituabine of Tarawa, Rabaraba of Matang.

7. Father of Tabakea was Tei-bi.

Notes on Appendix

1. The poisoning is likely to refer to the present of a puffer-fish given to Auniana in Bānaba in the Tarawa story, part of the incestuous of which is deadly. The visit to Aei Tinantoro explains why Auniana made two attempts to return to Tarawa.

2. (a) There is always doubt whether the word tibu means grandparent or grandchild. It seems to me, from the rest of the Tarawa story, that Aei Aromangati and Aei Noumangati (Nomanati) were grandchildren.
 - (b) I am not recording a translation of the noia: it needs the attention of someone better versed in its poetical language and allusions. I do, however, note my reservations on the transcription which, if recalled from notes taken down from an oral version as Grimble states, may not be quite accurate. I particularly doubt the words Nanomea and Nieu. The former may be rendered nano-me-a where nano means below and me-a is a tonal ending without meaning. The phrases Mani Nieuae and Mani Nieu-a-o-o may rather be something like mani ni wa-a-e(o) relating to custom (behaviour) or (canoe) crest or flag or even a dance as in Te wa n Tarawa. In short, words that appear to represent kanua place names need to be very carefully authenticated.