

DISK 7:

Song of Moiva

In Migrations, Myth and Magic from the Gilbert Islands, Rosemary Grimble, quoting her father, attributes this song to a Beruan composer who lived in the 18th century; and gives a ~~partial~~ translation of it. I have used an original text narrated by Ten Arebaco of Beru, a transcription of it by Grimble and the ~~partial~~ <sup>printed</sup> translation. <sup>(p. 11) at the beginning of chapter 11.</sup>

2. While the song does not tell the story in a strictly logical order, it is not just a random collection of thoughts each with its own value within the whole. That this should be so, indicates it is indeed an old tale refined by many tellings but still subject to the imprecision of oral tradition. Because of its age and importance to the Gilbertese story, I have tried to make the translation <sup>that is</sup> readily comprehensible in English, <sup>but the text is difficult</sup> without departing <sup>and, in places, quite obscure and</sup> too far from the difficult text. Since the poem in its original and in stanza form and my notes on translation are preserved, perhaps someone else will be encouraged to test the text and translation in association with Gilbertese traditional story-tellers.

3. The poem is about the conflict that took place when the descendants of Taburimai, Auriarua and Nei Tituabine returned from Tamoia to re-conquer <sup>Kiribati</sup> the Gilberts. They are the Southern Race from ~~Abatoa~~ <sup>Abatoa</sup> and are represented by the Porpoise, Whale and Tropic Bird. The narrator, who identifies himself with the Bonito in stanza <sup>16</sup>, speaks for ~~the~~ <sup>Kiribati</sup> invaded Gilberts and the original descendants of Noreau's universal creation whose ancient customs were challenged and subverted in a series of attacks over a period of time. Eventually, the invaders triumph and the narrator and his people seek spiritual rest in the homeland of the past (Manra) and the land of <sup>spirits</sup> the dead (Bouru and Neineaba). The poem is completed in three repetitive and gloomy stanzas.

4. The significance of the Maneaba as a symbol of the Gilbertese way of life is made in at least two stanzas. In the first, the catastrophe of invasion is symbolized by the shattering of the ridge-pole of the Maneaba which also represents the zenith in Gilbertese navigation; and, in stanza 8 the Crane <sup>(Peet Heron)</sup> is both the name and totem of the highest pitch of roof used in Maneaba construction.

2. The <sup>two</sup> texts <sup>are</sup> <sup>a little</sup> ~~different~~ <sup>different</sup> in places and I have ~~prepared~~ <sup>prepared</sup> a composite one with a commentary attached as a base for my translation. In places, the composite text still remains difficult and obscure and I was uncertain how close I have managed to get to the poet's meaning. On the assumption that Grimble was able to consult traditional Gilbertese story-tellers when he made his translation, I first prepared a text (A) in which I <sup>have generously</sup> ~~accepted~~ his interpretation when I was less than sure of the poet's. The second translation (B) is <sup>partly</sup> derived from (A) but I have taken greater liberties in the interests of presenting the Song <sup>in a more literary form.</sup> ~~in a more literary form.~~ <sup>to English readers.</sup>

from stanza 3, it seems that the first landing on the island was in the maneaba - an attribution by a Beruan poet that is intriguing & unexplained.

meaning of the + presence of



A mighty whirlwind gathered force and shook  
 From end to end the ridge-pole of the sky;  
 Wakened the deep-sea fish and offspring of  
 The gods Tobu~~timoi~~ and Aurawai.

2. For in the east, <sup>landed</sup> beyond the rising sun,  
 The ocean surged; and from the depths there came  
 Not fish but warrior sons of those great gods,  
 Whose glory burst forth like a brilliant flame.

3. And who was conquered, what did they destroy?  
 They beat their <sup>way</sup> ~~course~~ to Aemama's shore;  
<sup>The</sup> And landed there, and by a cunning ploy  
 They ~~won~~ the day and made themselves secure.

4. But I'll arise and hurl my spear at them,  
 I'll pierce and split the jagged reef in two,  
 I'll ~~watch~~ the stricken Whale and Porpoise soar  
 And, dying, fall behind the swift canoe  
 Of Bué and Rirongo whom they bore.

5. For in the west, great Nareáu sadly sits,  
~~His wife beside him,~~ weeping bitter tears;  
 Watching while sorrows flood upon our youth  
 As they submit, defeated by the spears  
 And magic powers of the rampant South.

6. Drive their canoes off, drive them far away  
 Across the water, let them pass from sight!  
 Is that a farewell song they sing, as they  
 Among the shoals of mullet, in delight  
 Swim, twist and dart? That school of Porpoises  
 Will choose a time to strike again at us  
 Hungry for flesh and blood -- and merciless.

7. I'll face the menace though I fear to fail,  
 I'll aim ~~and cast~~ <sup>my magic</sup> my spear straight, and run  
 It through the braggart Porpoise and the Whale  
 Streaming upon me from the rising sun.

8. Let things on high be as they were again,  
 That I might change the destiny we dread!  
 I'd spy on them and I would chide the Crane  
 Because it <sup>screeches</sup> ~~cries~~ so shrilly overhead,  
 A piercing, pining cry so loud and clear. I'd call on it to turn and, flying back,  
 O let it plunge into the ocean here! Sweep down into the ocean, to attack.

9. But I must hurry off, although I know  
 My journey ends on Manua's timeless sands



I would not wish to die, nor lie below  
The shingled gravestones of <sup>our</sup> wasted lands.  
And I will prove my mettle, brave and true,  
That my last breath, with honour, may be borne  
To Manra, Neineaba and Bouru.

10 We tend the Tree of Custom without fail --  
Its branches spread out far to shade us all;  
But, when the roving Porpoise and the Whale  
Raise high their fins, like dying leaves we fall.  
Whence come the mighty ones of Abatoa?  
~~Wave upon wave, to drown upon our shore?~~  
*Raiders, appearing off our ocean shore.*

11 I call upon the howling wind to bring  
To me the music of our ancient gods  
In inspiration; so that I may sing  
A song of passion to these poignant words.

12 <sup>The</sup> A wind sweeps through the empty space which lies  
Between our homes. I hear it rush and bear  
A warning. They would take us by surprise  
And trample on the customs we revere!

13 A boom reverberates throughout the sky --  
It is the time for deep-sea voyaging,  
Time of <sup>the west hand</sup> ~~Hei-Auti~~ <sup>the</sup> when ocean waves pile high  
Upon the reef and echo, thundering.  
Wait! See this season through and pause lest we  
Doomed victims of the Tropic Bird shall be.

14 'Drive off the Bird' That is the heavens' command;  
My rigging's set, canoe prepared for sea,  
So I shall deck my cheeks with magic sand  
And make a spell to trick the enemy.  
My cheeks are almost covered. See, they've gone!  
The Bird has gone! Give <sup>And so</sup> thanks, my <sup>spell</sup> work is done!

15 ~~The fierce Bird takes wing and flies away,  
Into the sky, its plaintive cry recedes;  
The far horizon's clear look where you may!  
It's flown away - towards the clouds it speeds.~~  
*The fierce fish turn round and  
Sister away,  
Into the east their plaintive cries  
recede;  
The far horizon where the clouds  
hang low  
is clear, than as on their way  
(they speed).*

16 Then, we put out to sea in our canoes,  
The 'Seeker' and the 'Zenith', filled with grief,  
And leave behind our homes, laid waste and bare.  
New faces through the <sup>beach and</sup> passage through the reef  
We, the Bonito, <sup>sail</sup> go to meet them there.



17. ~~The night is dark, the ocean surge is strong.  
 Thick seaweed smothers the lagoon in green.  
 Sound ~~out~~ the <sup>conch</sup> horn, blow now and blow it long!  
 The thunder roars and lightning cleaves the scene.~~

18. ~~The ocean surge is strong, the night forlorn.  
 The dark lagoon is filled with tangled wrack.  
 Blow now, blow loud, blow on the conch - shell horn!  
 The lightning forks and thunder rumbles back.~~

19. ~~The ocean rolls on through the starless night  
 As dark as deeds back in our history.  
 The green lagoon, caught in the tempest's light  
 Is like my tale --- a fitful memory.~~

17. The night is black, the ocean surge is strong,  
 And everywhere green seaweed meets the eye.  
 Enough! Blow on the conch-shell loud and long,  
 The thunder rolls, forked lightning cleaves the sky.

18. (As for 17)

19. The night is black, the ocean surge is strong  
 And everywhere green seaweed meets the eye  
 So <sup>be it,</sup> that is all there is to tell!