

TA'AROA IN THE CREATION MYTHS OF THE SOCIETY ISLANDS

By TORBEN MONBERG.

[The subject of this paper is how Ta'aroa came to be the god of creation in the Society Islands. The texts give only limited guidance and it would be wrong to draw far-reaching conclusions from them, as was often mistakenly attempted by early writers. But it is possible to extract from the texts themes which may throw light on the emergence of Ta'aroa as the god of creation. Comparative myths from other parts of Polynesia are considered for the light they throw on the central problem.]

POLYNESIAN MYTHS OF CREATION.

According to legend on the Society Islands, the world is created by the god Ta'aroa.¹ Ta'aroa proceeds from an egg (or seed) which is in the midst of chaos. When Ta'aroa comes out of the egg (or seed) the shell splits in two and becomes heaven and earth. These two are then united and beget a succession of god-like creatures; this is the beginning of creation. Such is the main theme of the myth, but it occurs in many variations in the different versions in which it has been handed down.

Thus we find that there is a supreme "god of creation" in the mythology of the Society Islands: Ta'aroa creates the world out of himself and by himself. Thereby we have indicated the problem which we are going to deal with in this paper, namely: is a "god of creation" a general phenomenon in Polynesian mythology, or is it one that is peculiar to the Society Islands? How has this supreme "god of creation" arisen? Is he the result of Christian influence, or is his appearance due to totally different circumstances?

In order to get to grips with this question, we shall first of all have to consider some of the legends about the creation that we know from the Polynesian islands.

Gill reports a creation myth from Mangaia,² the southernmost of the Cook Islands, but this has later been corrected and also supplemented amongst other things by the original text and by a translation by Buck.³ Gill's text is based on material supplied by one of his informants, Mamae, whom Gill unfortunately seems to have misunderstood on several essential points.

¹ The following are dialectal variations of the name: Maori—Tangaroa; Hawaii—Kanaloa; Samoa and Tonga—Tagaloa; Tuamotu—Takaroa; Mangaia—Tangaroa; Marquesas—Tanaoa.

² Gill 1876:1 ff.

³ Buck 1934:9 ff.

On Mangaia the world and its creation are conceived of as being like a growing plant. Gill refers to it as the hollow of a vast coconut, which was divided up into six layers of floors. In the light of present-day knowledge this conception definitely seems to be rather too schematic, and it has indeed been refuted by Buck,⁴ who also proves that on certain points it is in direct contradiction to mythological data. This world,⁵ which is called Hawaiki, and out of which everything is apparently created, can hardly be described in terms of space. We can merely conjure up a vague picture of what it is like. Among other things, Hawaiki includes four spiritual beings (*vaerua*). Furthest away from the earth, where human beings dwell, is *Te Aka-ia-roe*, which would appear to be the roots of the "plant," the end of Hawaiki. Above that is *Te Tangaengae*, which interpreted means breathing, or the movement of the ribs during the act of breathing. Next comes *Te Manava-roa*, meaning continuity of breathing. The fourth of these spiritual beings is the supreme one, that is to say, the one nearest to the world of human beings. Whilst in Gill's version the first three spiritual beings are outside of the coconut which we have mentioned previously, the fourth one, namely *Vari-ma-te-takere*, is to be found sitting inside the coconut.⁶ Gill translates its name as "The Very Beginning," whereas Buck points out that it probably actually means something more like "The Mud and the Bottom," referring to the fact that *Vari* is conceived of as the fertile mud at the bottom of the coconut.⁷ *Vari* is also the name for the mud or slime in marshy areas where the *taro* plant is cultivated, and it very often connotes potential plant growth. When used in connection with female beings, the word means menstruation and indicates things connected with the womb and the origin of human growth. Gill relates that *Vari* was sitting within the confined space of the coconut with her legs bent up to her chin⁸—a position which would seem to indicate a condition of germination or the embryo stage.

The first six human beings grew out of *Vari*. They sprang forth from out of her right and left sides and grew up in the world of human beings, where they were then "picked" (*'aki'akia*) like fruit from a tree. In other words *Vari* did not have any husband, and neither did her children have any father. The six offspring were:—

Name	Sex	Side of Vari
Avatea (Vatea)	m.	right
Tumu-te-ana-ao	f.	left
Tinirau	m.	right
Raka	m.	left
Tango	m.	left
Tu-metua	f.	right

Each of these children occupied their own country or area of the earth.

⁴ *op. cit.*:15.

⁵ *op. cit.*:9-11; Gill 1876:1-3.

⁶ Gill 1876:3.

⁷ Buck 1934:10.

⁸ Gill 1876:3.

The main interest is centred around the further destiny of Vatea, the first-born. Mamae does not mention anything further about the other five children, but relates the following about Vatea:—

The first man was Vatea.

His land was the Thin-stratum-of-earth, (which) was drawn up above as a net float.

His wife was Papa, a daughter of Timate-kore. Tamaiti-ngavari-vari was her mother.

(Papa) was a woman embraced by Vatea in his sleep.

They two slept together.⁹

Out of this union several children were born: Tangaroa, Rongo, Tongaiti, Tane-papa-kai, Tangiia, and Te Ra-kura-iti.¹⁰

From the above it will be seen that the myth of creation on Mangaia is a genealogical myth in which the conception of growth and fertility is the recurrent theme.

We have seen how Vari-ma-te-takere is the ancestress of all created beings. Her eldest son, the next link in the genealogical line, is Vatea, which Buck interprets as meaning the light of day. Vatea is joined in union with Papa (the earth crust or stratum) and begets six children, out of which the oldest and most important are Tangaroa and Rongo.

In New Zealand we find several variants of the myth of creation, in all of which the essential characteristics are the same as in the Mangaia myth. Grey tells us the myth of how the world proceeds from the union of the male being Rangi (heaven) and the female being Papa (earth).¹¹ They lie close to each other, and out of their union several children are created; however, as Rangi and Papa were not separated, it was still dark where the children were, and they therefore tried in every possible way to separate the night from the day.

“ So they thought: Well, we shall try to find a way in which either to kill or to separate Rangi and Papa. Tu-matauenga (one of the children) said: ‘ Yes, we will kill them.’ Tane-mahuta (one of the children) said: ‘ We should not do that, but let us separate them so that one is above and the other below; in this way one will become like a stranger for us and the other like a mother for us.’ Then all of them answered yes (except) one of them, whom it pained very much because of his love for them, if they should become separated. Five were in favour of separating them, one took compassion on them.”¹²

The children agree to try to separate their parents so that the light can penetrate the world:—

“ The first took hold (of them), but could not do anything, the second one took hold but could not do anything, then the third, the

⁹ Buck 1934:14.

¹⁰ *op cit.*:15-16.

¹¹ Grey 1853:iii-iv.

¹² This and the following quotation are from Johansen, n.d.:50 f.

fourth and the fifth, and the fifth was successful. In vain Rangi and Papa complained, they complained in vain, what did Tane-mahuta care? He stretched (the heaven) out with poles, he put his head down and his legs up and behold: heaven was high above, earth far below. That is why they have this saying: 'It was Tane who put up the poles so that Rangi and Papa were separated; it was he who separated them, and Night and Day were set free'."

But one of the brothers, Tawhirimatea, was enraged at this treatment of his parents. Filled with anger, he sent the raging forces of the storm against his brothers. First he directed it against Tane, who took on the shape of trees, and he tore them down by their roots. Tangaroa fled down to the sea with his children, the fishes, but some of them escaped into the woods in the form of reptiles. Rongomatane and Haumiatiketike hid themselves in mother earth in the form of wild and cultivated plants respectively. Only one of the brothers made a stand. This was Tu-matauenga, the warrior. He alone showed no fear but stood firm on the breast of his mother, the earth. He turned against his brothers who had deserted him in the struggle. Tane's children, the birds, he caught in snares, and Tangaroa's children, the fishes, in nets. It was of no great avail to Rongo and Haumia that they hid themselves in the earth, as their hair stuck out and gave them away; Tu-matauenga pursued them with his pointed digging stick, extricated them and dried them in the sun. Tu-matauenga ate up his brothers in revenge because they had deserted him in the struggle against Tawhirimatea.

This Maori myth is definitely a piece of genealogical creation mythology in the same way as the text from Mangaia. It is true that the genealogical element is not particularly obvious in the first instance, but it can clearly be made out when we study this text in conjunction with the many Maori genealogies which have been handed down in writing in which Rangi and Papa are the primal link, the first human couple, out of which everything is created.¹³

The mythological pattern of the marriage between Rangi and Papa, heaven and earth, is an integral part of practically all the Polynesian creation myths. For instance, we also find it in the previously-mentioned myth from Mangaia as the marriage between Vatea and Papa. In the latter case, this couple does not constitute the very first link in the creation of the world or in its pattern of development—the primal originator there being Vari-ma-te-takere. This figure does not appear in the legend as related by Grey, where everything apparently begins with the marriage between Rangi and Papa.

Nevertheless we do find among the Maoris a creation myth which reflects the conception that the world originated from, or was created by, one single being.

In this particular legend it is the god Io who is the Supreme Being, the originator of all things, Io-taketake. Io was—as may be known—the

¹³ In a few exceptional cases, however, Ao and Po, Day and Night, are mentioned in genealogies as the primeval couple, with Rangi and Papa figuring as a later generation. See White 1890:164.

subject of an esoteric cult, the chief exponent of which were the priests from the sacred school of Whare wananga, and his name was so sacred that for a considerable period of time it was not revealed to any European. It was not until 1913 that any really detailed information was available concerning the Io cult,¹⁴ but as far back as White there have been some texts in which Io has figured.¹⁵

Gudgeon collected a text about the creation myth in which Io is referred to as the primal ancestor.¹⁶ The present version is taken from Johansen's translation,¹⁷ which would appear to be more in conformity with the original text than that made by Hare Hongi:¹⁸

"Io dwelt in the open space of the world,
The world was dark, water was everywhere.
There was no day, no light, no place of light,
Only darkness and water everywhere.
And it was he who first pronounced this word
.
'Night! Become Day-possessing Night!'
Behold! The Day broke forth.
Then he spake in the same way as those words these words
.
'Day! Become Night-possessing Day!'
Behold! The great period of darkness returned.
Then came the third of his words:
'Let there be one Night above
And another Night below.
Night! Night of Tupua (the magician),
Night! Night of Tawhito (the priest),
Subjected Night.
Let there be one Day above
And another Day below.
Day! Day of Tupua (the magician),
Day! Day of Tawhito (the priest),
Resplendent Day,
Bright Day.'
Behold! It became radiantly light!
First then his gaze fell upon the waters surrounding him.
Then came his fourth word, it was this word:
'Te Wai-ki-tai-tama! Divide the waters.
Become heaven by this. Heaven is lifted up,
Give birth to Te Tupua-horo-nuku.'
Behold! Stretched out and rooted firmly lay the Earth."

This conception of Io is not the same as the Mangaia conception of Vari-ma-te-takere. Io is a god who dwells in the highest heaven; by his

¹⁴ Smith 1913:12-16.

¹⁵ White 1887:4.

¹⁶ Hongi 1907:109-112.

¹⁷ Johansen n.d.:18 ff.

¹⁸ Hongi 1907:113-117.

word he creates the world. The world does not proceed from his very being.

The Io myth must be approached with a certain amount of caution. In the above text there are certain features which are reminiscent of Genesis, but on the other hand one cannot exclude the possibility that the myth is of pure Maori origin and that it has arisen completely independently of European ideas, or, alternatively, that there are certain passages only which have been influenced by Christianity. If this is the case, we undoubtedly have a highly interesting mythological being appearing in Polynesian religion.

If we now turn to the Samoa Islands we find an abundant amount of material which gives us the impression that the Samoans did not have a common conception about the creation, but that on the contrary there has been a variety of different legends, each of which was shaped and determined by local geographical and genealogical conditions. Tagaloa seems undoubtedly to have been one of the important figures in the myth of creation, but his position in it varies considerably in the different versions.¹⁹ It is not our intention to enter into the details of these different versions, but merely to give a brief account of one or two of them in order to give an impression of the main features in the Samoan creation myth.

Like all other creation myths in Polynesia, the Samoan myth is based on a genealogical background. Turner relates a myth according to which the High Rocks enter into union with the Earth Rocks and thus beget children. In the seventh generation Tagaloa is born, the creator of human beings, the primeval ancestor of the human race.²⁰

This seems to be the main thread in the Samoan creation myth—namely that the world was created out of a primal marriage—though this is told in many different forms in the various versions.

In the Manua group of islands in the eastern part of Samoa there are, however, some myths which are an exception to the general pattern. Here Tagaloa appears as a kind of god of creation. Fraser mentions a *solo*²¹ written down about 1870 by the Rev. T. Powell.²² This describes how Tagaloa in the form of a Tuli-bird wishes to descend to the earth, but when he arrives he finds only ocean everywhere. In order to have a place to land on he creates a whole lot of islands, among which are primarily Manua, but also the other Samoan islands, in addition to Fiji and Tonga. Tagaloa also creates man. From his heaven he sends down a vine which begets a lot of maggots; he then turns these maggots into human form, and they people the earth.

This myth is also built on a genealogical basis. The idea of dualism—the male and the female element—is also to be found in this myth, but it is interesting to note that although Tagaloa is the originator of men he does not create by means of copulation (i.e., in the way the creation is usually described in Polynesia) but by commands.

¹⁹ See Kraemer 1902:394; Mead 1930:157.

²⁰ Turner 1884:3 f.

²¹ The *solo* is a loose poetical form embodying a myth or portion of a myth. See Mead 1930:148 ff.

²² Fraser 1890:207-211.

From the Tonga Islands we only find rare and inadequate descriptions of the creation. Nevertheless Caillot reports a myth about "the origin of all things."²³ This myth has the characteristic of a genealogy in the Polynesian sense of the word: the Seaweed (m) entered into union with Slime (f) and begot a child called Touiafutuna, which was a large metallic stone. Every now and again this stone rumbled and opened up, each time producing twins, one male and one female form, which were both gods.

Although in many respects this legend differs from the creation myths that we have already been considering, nevertheless it contains many features in common with Polynesian mythology, and Caillot accepts it as genuinely Polynesian.

In the text from Hawaii called *Kumulipo* we also find the creation of the world interpreted as a genealogy or as growth. Out of chaos, through the union of a male and a female element, all things are created:—

"At the time when the earth became hot
 At the time when the heavens turned about,
 At the time when the sun was darkened
 To cause the moon to shine
 The time of the rise of the Pleiades
 The slime, this was the source of the earth
 The source of the darkness that made darkness
 The source of the night that made night
 The intense darkness, the deep darkness
 Darkness of the sun, darkness of the night
 Nothing but night.
 The night gave birth
 Born was Kumulipo in the night, a male
 Born was Po'ele in the night, a female
 Born was the coral polyp, born was the coral came forth
 Born was the grub that digs and heaps up the earth, came forth
 Born was his (child) an earthworm, came forth."
 etc., etc.

In this manner the life in the ocean, the birds, the creatures that crawl upon the earth, the gods and human beings are all born.²⁴

In line 6 of the above it will be seen that slime was said to be the origin of the earth. In this instance there is no question of a union of two beings. Later on in *Kumulipo* the figures of Wakea and Papa appear as procreators (Great-Papa-giving-birth-to-islands).²⁵ These two beings, who are identical with Rangi and Papa of the Maoris and Vatea and Papa of the Mangaians, appear in several Hawaiian chiefly genealogies as the primal procreators—in fact practically everywhere in the Hawaiian creation myths (with the exception of *Kumulipo*) they

²³ Caillot 1914:239 ff.

²⁴ Beckwith 1951:58.

²⁵ *op. cit.*:124, line 1792.

appear to be the originators of all things. Altogether the Hawaiian creation mythology is constructed out of the same elements as the texts from the other Polynesian groups of islands: the male and the female elements become united and give birth to new forms of life, which again in their turn give rise to new life, etc. In the *Kumulipo* text this sense of genealogy is strongly emphasized—in fact it is really legend about the creation belonging to one particular family, and this is what gives it its special character.

On the Marquesas Islands there are two kinds of ancient records relating to the myth of the creation, namely *pu'e* and *vavana*, each tribe or family unit having its own special variations. The last part of the *pu'e* texts were varied in accordance with the particular cult in connection with which they were being used. The recurrent theme throughout these variations in the myth of creation is that of the intercourse between the male being Atea and the female being One-u'i (red earth or dark sand), and the way in which the world was created out of this union. The *vavana* texts contain a description of the conception of the child, its birth and growth. This is connected with the mystic birth of the many and various gods out of the world above and the world below (*papa una* and *papa a'o*). At special festivals these texts were recited in close connection with the recital of the genealogies.

It is not our intention at this point to go into the many interesting details provided by Handy regarding the construction and ritual function of the texts; we shall content ourselves with drawing attention to the fact that on the Marquesas Islands too the world is created as the result of the conjugal union that takes place between two beings, which thus beget life, and which in its turn again begets new life, etc. In this way the myths of creation are a kind of commentated genealogy, intimately bound up with the family genealogies, and indeed in a certain sense identical with the beginning of those genealogies.

In other words there is no real god of creation in the Marquesas mythology. The legend which Fornander quotes in his "Polynesian Race"—in which Tanaoa appears as the Lord of Darkness out of which Atea, the God of Light, arises²⁶—is branded by Handy as being false. He is no doubt right when he says: "It is obvious to one acquainted with the idiom of the native chants and the native religious thought that the original translation of this so-called *vavana* was from the English into Marquesan and not the other way."²⁷

Henry provides us with an account from the Tuamotu Islands which contains the same fundamental idea of the myth of creation.²⁸ He relates that in the beginning the universe existed in the form of an egg containing Te-Tumu and Te-Papa. The egg broke and formed three layers on top of each other. In the bottom layer were Te-Tumu and Te-Papa, who created human beings, animals and plants. The first human being was Matata, who was born without arms and died soon

²⁶ Fornander 1878:214 ff.

²⁷ Handy 1923:328-329.

²⁸ Handy 1928:377.

after he was born. The second was Aitu, who was born with only one arm and no legs, and he died in the same way as his brother. The last man to be created was Hoatea, and he was perfect. The next to be created was a woman by the name of Hoatu. She became the wife of Hoatea, and out of these two the human race was born.

However, hardly had the creation been completed when Takaroa—who always delighted in doing evil—set fire to the highest part of heaven in an attempt to destroy everything.

The world was created from the union between Te-Tumu and Te-Papa. In other words we do not find a supreme god of creation in the Tuamotu group of islands. Takaroa himself is also an offspring of the union between Te-Tumu and Te-Papa—that is to say he was a child of the human beings Aito and Fenua, who again were children of Hoatu and Hoatea. The conception of the world arising from an egg has already been met with elsewhere in Polynesia (Mangaia).

The Tuamotu myth also contains typical features that are common to Polynesia, namely that generation after generation of the world is created and re-created through the union of the male and female elements. Out of chaos a cosmos grows forth that is constructed and arranged in genealogical order. Genealogy is the original form, the tree of life out of which everything proceeds and in which everything finds its common root, in the common origin of Tumu and Papa. Such is the common basic theme, but throughout the various islands and groups of islands there are many different melodies which are difficult to distinguish and which are often mixed with and spoilt by Christian themes.

THE MYTH OF CREATION IN THE SOCIETY ISLANDS.

Although we find many references to the creation and many stories about it in literature concerning the Society Islands,²⁹ there are only a very few authors who have original texts or translations of these to offer. Moerenhout provides us with both, but unfortunately his manuscripts are so fragmentary and erratic that one can only gather the merest outline of the meaning, and then only with the help of other and better texts. Henry provides us with two variations,³⁰ and Emory has published a text³¹ which, when studied in conjunction with the notes attached, also gives us two variations.

The two versions handed down by Henry vary both in length and content. The first of them (which I shall refer to as Henry I) reads as follows³²:—

“Ta'aroa was the ancestor of all the gods; he made all things. From time immemorial was the great Ta'aroa, Tahi-tumu.

Ta'aroa proceeded out of himself, entirely alone. He was his own parent, and he had neither father nor mother.

²⁹ Thus Ellis 1831:111 ff.; Forster 1777:152 ff.

³⁰ Henry 1928:336 ff.

³¹ Emory 1938.

³² Henry 1928:336-338.

Ta'aroa appeared in countless shapes: Ta'aroa above, Ta'aroa below, Ta'aroa-in-stone.

Ta'aroa was a god's house. His backbone was the ridge-pole, his ribs the supporters.

These were Ta'aroa's attributes: Great Ta'aroa, Truth, Renewer of the Earth (? Hurifenua), Great Ta'aroa Who Puts an End to All Sin and Evil, Great Ta'aroa The Origin, Great Shining Eternal Ta'aroa, Ta'aroa with the Fixed Cult Formula,³³ Ta'aroa and His People Who are in Heaven, Ta'aroa The Disperser, Ta'aroa Who stands at the Entrance to the Reef, Ta'aroa Who Tramples Down the Earth, Great Ta'aroa Whose Curse is Death.³⁴

When he cursed the earth there was sickness; when he turned the earth it was sick unto death; when he turned the ocean it dried up; when he cursed the trees they bent down. Ta'aroa had countless shapes, but there was only one Ta'aroa above, below and in the underworld.

Ta'aroa sat in his shell in darkness for an endless period of time.

The shell was like a seed (or egg) in chaos;³⁵ everything was misty; there was no heaven, no earth, no sea, no moon, no sun, no stars.

It was utterly dark, and the darkness was constant and impenetrable. Ta'aroa's shell was called Rumia.

Ta'aroa was all alone in his shell. He had no father and no mother, no younger brother and no sister. There were no people, no pigs, no dogs; there was Ta'aroa and he was alone.

Chaos was the chaos of heaven; chaos was the chaos of the earth; chaos was the chaos of the ocean; chaos was the chaos of the fresh waters.

One day Ta'aroa pricked a hole in his shell, and there was an opening in the shape of an ant-hole. Ta'aroa crept outside and stood on top of his shell and discovered that he was alone. There was no sound, and outside was dark night.

Then (Ta'aroa) called out: 'Who is above?' No voice (replied). 'Who is below?' No voice (replied). 'Who is seaward?' No voice (replied). 'Who is landward?' No voice (replied). There was the echo of his own voice, that was all.

Ta'aroa then said: 'Chaos of heaven, endless chaos, chaos of the earth, stretching from high above to far below.' Ta'aroa swam around in the landless chaos. He swam higher and higher up and further and further down; then he returned to Tumu-iti in

³³ *upu tu*: the translation of these attributes is very uncertain. Henry has "of sure bidding."

³⁴ In some respects my translations of these attributes vary from Henry's. I do not necessarily maintain that my version is correct. It is merely offered as a reasonable alternative.

³⁵ The word *aere* seems to imply everything that is beyond human control, i.e., in this case the non-created or non-shaped world, or chaos, as against the cosmos.

Fa'aiti in his shell, and remained in Fa'aiti in his shell in the confined space and in utter darkness. Ta'aroa got tired of being in his shell and was lured out of (?) a new one and stood outside on top of the old shell Rumia.

He then took his new shell as Tumu-nui (the great foundation) for the earth, as the papa (the rock stratum) of the earth, and as earth (or penis) for the land. And the shell Rumia, which first became loose, became his house and the dome of the heaven of the gods; it was a confined heaven, surrounding the world while it was growing forth.

Ta'aroa was within the confined heaven. It was completely dark in there, and he did not notice that it was quite light outside, and Ta'aroa became a young man. These were the beings that were inside himself: Memory, Thought, Steadfast Gaze, Observation. These beings became aware of the land. Who gave the youth the name Ta'aroa? He gave himself the name of Ta'aroa. He grew up and became mature. What a *mana* Ta'aroa had! What were all the other gods? They were little dependent gods who roamed around.

There were many things within Ta'aroa: the storm, the rain and the sea were in the hollow of his hand.

Ta'aroa created the Tumu-nui (Great Foundation) of the earth in the shape of a man, and the papa of the earth as woman for Tumu-nui. Tumu's name was Haruru-papa. Ta'aroa filled it with his own spirit. This was his own essence and that was why it was called Ta'aroa-nui-tumu-tahi. Ta'aroa greeted Ta'aroa-tumu-nui as Chieftain, and Tumu-iti greeted Tumu-nui without land. Ta'aroa said: 'Tumu-nui, slip over here and be man to the woman Papa-raharaha.' Tumu-nui had a human voice when he answered: 'I will not slip away, I am the Tumu of the earth.' Ta'aroa then said: 'Papa-raharaha, thou shalt slip over here and be woman to the man Tumu-nui.' Papa had a human voice when she replied: 'I will not slip over there, for I am the papa of the earth.' One did not come, and the other did not come.

Ta'aroa remained for a long time in the enclosing shell Rumia. He called forth gods, and they were born of Ta'aroa in darkness. That was why this heaven was called the heaven of the gods.

Ta'aroa was in heaven and turned over to claim the nights and to create gods. It was much later than human beings were created. It was Tu and Ta'aroa together that created the human being.

Ta'aroa shook his feathers. They became tree trunks and climbing plants and banana groves. They became fertility on earth.

When the land became land and matured, the big octopus Tumu-ra'i-fenua held on. One arm in the North, one in the South, one in the East and one in the West. They held the land and the heaven fastened down.

Everything belonged to Ta'aroa."

The other version of the myth of creation³⁶ (Henry II) is considerably shorter (73 lines, as against the 127 lines in his first version). The story of Ta'aroa's life while he dwelt in the egg (or seed) in the midst of chaos, how he broke out of the egg, his commands to Papa and Tumu (in Henry II Tumu becomes One, meaning sand), how he created heaven and earth out of the shells, and how he created the gods is told very briefly. On the other hand this version contains the story of how the world is created out of the various parts of the body of Ta'aroa, and at the end there are some lines forming a kind of "philosophy of the shell": "Everything has (or is) a shell, heaven and earth, man—whose shell is woman—and woman, whose shell is also woman, for both were born out of her."

The third variation was published by Emory, to whom we owe the translation and commentary.³⁷ The text had been written down by the Pomare family's genealogist Mare (to whom we shall be referring again later) and by Emory woven together with another variation which also originated from the Pomare family and which only differed from Mare's version in a few points. This third variant is as follows:—

"Ta'aroa-nui, whose curse is death, is the origin of the earth. Ta'aroa was alone. He had no father and indeed no mother. Ta'aroa simply was in the void. There was no land, no heaven, no sea (or: no earth, no sky, no ocean). The earth was chaos, it was without firmness.³⁸ Ta'aroa said: 'Chaos³⁹ of the earth, chaos of the sky. The (evil) earth below is chaos, extending beyond eternal time; (evil) earth below, extend!'

Ta'aroa's face appeared outside (the shell). Ta'aroa's shell fell apart and became land. Ta'aroa observed: the land became land, the sea became sea, the heaven became heaven. Ta'aroa lived god-like and contemplated his work. More land was conjured forth.

Ta'aroa said: 'Te Tumu! Creep over here!'

Te Tumu answered: 'No, I will not creep over there (to you), for I am the foundation of the earth.'

'Te Papa, creep over here!'

'No, I will not creep over there (to you), for I am the *papa* (rock stratum) of the earth.'

'Te Tireo, creep over here!'

'No, I will not creep over here (to you), for I am the root-suckers (*tireo*) of the earth'."

And so forth for the *a'a* (roots), the *pai-a'a* (long rootlets) and the *roherohe* (fine rootlets).⁴⁰ This is Ta'aroa's chant of the laying-out of the land Havai'i:

³⁶ Henry 1928:339-340.

³⁷ Emory 1938:53-58.

³⁸ *tumu*: firmness, basis, foundation.

³⁹ See note 35.

⁴⁰ The résumé is Emory's.

" 'Spread out, spread out,
The crimson sands, the red sands.
.⁴¹
Make haste, make haste!
There is a cradling by the seaside,
By the shore of the great Tane,
Mana-less in the spreading out here.
Spread out sand for⁴² my little canoe.
Spread out sand for⁴² my big canoe.
Let the big canoe stand forth.
Spread out sand for⁴² my little canoe.
Lay out, lay out until it is finished.
It is Tumu who is laying out Havai'i.
Lay it out.'

Ta'aroa shook the land. It did not move. Ta'aroa then cried out:
'Who is there inland?' Ta'aroa's voice echoed in the valleys; it
answered back:

'It is I, Tu of the earth, Tu of the mountains, Tu of the plains,
Tu's sand,
Set up, set up outside by Ta'aroa himself.
.⁴³
.⁴⁴
.⁴⁵
Thou, whom the clouds encircle
.⁴⁶
Pepe extending (himself) here,
Stretching himself out⁴⁷ like the dog Maitu-ra'i,
A warrior, a god, a nobleman.'
'Who is seaward there?'
'It is I, Te-fatu-moana,
The Lord who by sorcery overturned the rocks,
Who grew in the ocean, became rock in the ocean,
Sharp pinnacles in the ocean, upright stones in the ocean.
You, who brought about life in the ocean,
Ro'o and Ruahatu.'
'Who is above there?'
'It is I, Vatea.
The rafter⁴⁸ of the earth, the rafter⁴⁸ of heaven,
The fertility of the earth, the fertility of heaven.

⁴¹ *Huniu ha'a ma.*

⁴² Emory translates this as "from," but if Beckwith is right, as I believe, in her assumption that the canoe appears as a phallic symbol in Polynesia (Beckwith 1951:182), this is probably a case of the use of this symbol. "For" would then be a better translation.

⁴³ *Ta-maomao-vi.*

⁴⁴ *Ta-maomao-va.*

⁴⁵ *Puna-heuheu.*

⁴⁶ *Pepe-tu, Pepe-hau.*

⁴⁷ *faro = ?.*

⁴⁸ A possible translation of *te'a*.

The earth is turned over
 Like the bewitching eye of Ro'o.⁴⁹
 'Who is below there?'
 'It is I, Rua.
 Rua-i-te-tumu,
 Rua-i-te-papa,
 (Rua-to'a-nu'u, Rua-to'a-ra'i)⁵⁰
 Rua-i-te-muhumuhu,
 Rua-i-te-rearea of the deep;
 The way below becomes visible.'
 Ta'aroa's spirit dwelt there as a god.
 Its name was Te Haruru-papa.

Ta'aroa saw that there were no human beings on the earth.
 Ta'aroa looked down and there he saw Te-papa-raharaha. Her eyes
 gazed back and laughed at Ta'aroa.

This is Ta'aroa's song (?)⁵¹:
 'Look, Te Tumu,
 Look, turn your head and look,
 Turn your head and look and insert, Te Tumu;
 Insert and let the penis of Ta'aroa thrust.
 The penis, Te Apo'i-ra'i.
 Reach down to Te Papa-raharaha,
 A shoulder-bone (mistress) for Te'aroa.'

One name of the woman was Te-Fai-mai-raro. She was underneath. One of Ta'aroa's names was Te-Fai-mai-nia, because as the husband he was above.

Out of their union One-ura was born. Then followed One-mea. They became the sands of the earth. Then Ora was born; he became a god. He dwelt in the uppermost part of heaven.

Then came Te-Iri, then came Te Fatu, and so on for Moe, Rua-nu'u, Tu, To'a-hiti, Te Mehara, Punua-te-fatu-tiri.⁵²

These were all born gods.

Then a woman by the name of Hina-tutu-po was born. She fulfilled the task of beating *tapa* for the gods.

Ta'aroa drank 'ava, and when he had drunk his fill he spoke to Pani, who was a friend of Ta'aroa. Pani answered: 'Oh, wonder-working spirit, what is this fire that is burning the heavens? Put it out!'

The fowls at Raro-ata,
 The dogs at Arava,
 The pigs at Fetuna—
 Their mouths have been shut.
 They are seaward of Avahoa,
 Have been covered over by Pani.

⁴⁹ *Tupai o Ro'o a?*

⁵⁰ This line is in the Pomare version.

⁵¹ *hua*.

⁵² The résumé is Emory's.

There remains (the story of) the beating of *tapa* at Mari-oro. Hina-tutu-po was beating *tapa* for the god Ta'aroa. Ta'aroa grumbled: 'Pani, is that the sound of the beating of *tapa*?'

Pani replied: 'It is Hina beating fine *tapa*.'

'You go to her and tell her to stop. It is too noisy in the wonder-working spirit's harbour.'

Pani went and said to Hina: 'Stop! There is too much noise in the wonder-working spirit's harbour.' Hina replied: 'I will not stop. I am beating fine *tapa* as a wrapping for the gods, for Ta'aroa, Oro, Moe, Rua-nu'u, Tu, Toa-hiti, Tau-utu, Te-Meharo and Punua-te-fatu-tiri.'

Pani returned and told the wonder-working spirit that Hina would not stop. He (Ta'aroa) commanded once again: 'Go and tell Hina, etc.'

Three times he went, and he was angry with Hina because she would not obey his command. Pani took the mallet and hit Hina over the back of the head. She died, and Hina's spirit flew up to heaven. She was then given the name of Hina-nui-aiai-i-te-marama. After that Hina lived in the moon."

If we consider Henry's and Emory's statements regarding the origin of the above texts, we will find that Henry I and II were dictated by several informants during the years 1822-33, mostly by priests and chieftains from Borabora, and, as far as Henry II is concerned, by one particular priest on Tahiti. The two versions that are woven together in Emory's text originate partly from Mare, the genealogist of the Pomare family, who wrote it down in 1849, and partly from a manuscript which also originates from the Pomare family but the date of which is unknown. That is to say that Emory's texts originated from Tahiti, which was the headquarters of the Pomare family.

A study of these texts will show that they are uniform in the main lines. It is true that Emory's texts contain certain themes which are not to be found either in Henry I or II and which make them somewhat looser in construction than Henry's two texts, but the general development of the story is the same.⁵³ Nevertheless there is one difference in the two groups of texts which is immediately obvious. While in Emory's text Ta'aroa is identified with Te Tumu, and is therefore himself united in marriage with Te-papa-rahara, in Henry I and II he is not a part of the union out of which the world was created but merely commands forth the creation. Emory has himself drawn attention to this in his commentaries, and Ellis has also drawn attention to the fact that there are various versions of the myth of creation on the Society Islands:

"The tradition most generally received in the Windward Islands, ascribed the origin of the world and all that adorn and inhabit it,

⁵³ Some of the themes to be found in Emory's text, but not in Henry I or II, are in the section called "Chaotic Period," which can be more or less regarded as a continuation of Henry II, as the two texts were noted down from the same informant.

to the procreative power of Ta'aroa, who is said to have embraced a rock, the imagined foundation of all things, which afterwards brought forth the earth and sea . . .

"The most popular tradition in the Leeward Islands differed in several minor points from the above, which prevailed in the Windward group. According to one, for which I am indebted to my friend Mr. Barff, Ta'aroa, who was supreme here as well as in Tahiti, was said to be *toivi*, or without parents, and to have existed from eternity. He was supposed to have a body, but it was invisible to mortals. After innumerable seasons had passed away, he cast his *paa* (shell or body) as birds do their feathers, or serpents their skins; and by this means, after intervals of innumerable seasons his body was renewed. In the *reva* (or highest heavens) he dwelt alone. His first act was the creation of Hina, who is also called his daughter. Countless ages passed away, when Ta'aroa and his daughter made the heavens, the earth and the sea . . ."

In other words it would seem as if the difference is also a matter of geography—Ta'aroa's union with Te-papa-raharaha belongs to the Windward Islands, but this conception is not known on the Leeward Islands.

Putting this conclusion together with the knowledge we have of the origin of the Henry and Emory tests, we find that the assumption is probably correct.

Henry I and II are chiefly the result of information communicated by inhabitants on the Leeward Islands, whilst Emory's texts originated from the Windward Islands, which in this particular case most likely means Tahiti.

It is not the intention of the present paper to go into a detailed investigation of the individual points in the various creation myths, but merely to put forward some suggestions regarding the problem of how Ta'aroa appeared as a god of creation on the Society Islands.

If we compare the above two versions of the myth with those from some of the more important areas in Polynesia, we find many common characteristics. The creation of the world out of a seed or an egg is a myth that we are already familiar with from the Cook Islands⁵⁴ and the Tuamotu Islands⁵⁵. A story that is more usual, however—in fact one might say it is common for the whole of the Polynesian area—is that of the divine marriage between the first male and female beings, Rangi and Papa, or, as the case may be, Tumu and Papa, or Vatea and Papa, and of this union as being the origin of all life. Altogether the whole circle of gods is largely common for the whole Polynesian area, though there are countless local variations. In this connection we will now study Ta'aroa's position in the various myths of the different islands and island groups:

On Mangaia Tangaroa is the child of Vatea and Papa and brother of Rongo, with whom he fights for supremacy over the world.

⁵⁴ See p. 254 above.

⁵⁵ See p. 260 above.

In New Zealand Tangaroa is the child of Rangi and Papa and the divine progenitor of all fishes and reptiles on earth.

In both these cases, therefore, Tangaroa occupies a rather modest position, and in neither case does he seem to have been made the object of a religious cult.

In the Samoa Islands Tagaloa appears in several texts as the seventh generation in the genealogy of the creation, which starts with the marriage between the High Rocks and the Earth Rocks. In other texts he appears as a kind of god of creation who has, so to say, taken the initiative of creating the world and of giving rise to all things. The Samoan sources are, however, very uncertain on this point.

In the Tonga Islands Tagaloa also seems to be of a later generation in the genealogy of the creation, and only in a few texts does he appear as a god of creation.

In the Marquesas Tanaoa (Takaoa) was merely one of the gods of nature. His domain was—as in New Zealand—the sea and the winds, but he was also connected with fishing and the crafts. There is one single text, handed down by Fornander, in which he appears as a kind of god of creation, but as we have mentioned before, Handy has declared that this particular text is false.

It would therefore seem as if it is only on Samoa and Tonga (that is to say, outside of the Society Islands) that we find Ta'aroa mentioned as a real god of creation. But again these stories are only to be found in texts written down at fairly late dates, and there is consequently some reason to question their authenticity. Furthermore, we are aware that the stories brought by Cook, Ellis and Moerenhout from the Society Islands were known and studied in a wide circle among missionaries and other travellers, and it is not improbable that the great interest in the god of creation on the Society Islands may have created a secret desire among other people to find similar myths elsewhere—a form of wishful thinking which *might* have given rise to the results we have mentioned. Among other things it is rather remarkable that such a reliable and honest a traveller as Mariner should have stated that there were no stories on the Tonga Islands similar to those Cook relates from the Society Islands.⁵⁶

In the meantime there are certain other peculiar circumstances regarding this matter, which we shall merely mention briefly here but which will be dealt with at greater length at the end of this paper. It is known that many natives from Tahiti sailed around with the European travellers in Polynesia, which would therefore have provided them with plenty of opportunity of telling the inhabitants of other islands about any particular religious cult there might have been on Tahiti. There is ample reason for supposing that these travelling missionaries of the Tahitian religion helped towards spreading the conception of Ta'aroa as a god of creation throughout the Polynesian area.

The rather sweeping conclusions that several investigators, among

⁵⁶ Martin 1827:134.

them Handy, have drawn from the fact that Ta'aroa appears in different parts of Polynesia must anyway for the time being be regarded with a certain degree of reservation, namely that the Tangaroa cult indicates that at some relatively recent date a tribe whose supreme god was Tangaroa invaded the islands.⁵⁷ It is true that such an idea is not totally absurd; it is not impossible that such an invasion or immigration might have taken place. But such material as is available does not seem to be sufficiently reliable to be able to draw this conclusion with certainty.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TA'AROA CULT.

It would seem as if it is only on the Society Islands that we can definitely speak of Ta'aroa as a god of creation. But why should there precisely be a god of creation there? And why Ta'aroa in particular? As the previous investigation has proved, a god of creation is by no means a usual phenomenon in Polynesian mythology. The beginning of creation is usually the uniting of two phenomena—heaven and earth, high cliffs and rock foundation, seaweed and mud, etc. It develops in genealogical order with one male and one female as the originators and procreators of life. On the other hand, the creation as the work of one single divine being has been seen in several examples in the legends of the Cook Islands and in the Io myth on New Zealand. But both these mythologies, apart from differing essentially from each other, are also quite different from the form of mythology on the Society Islands.

Altogether it seems as if we must look for the explanation of this within the borders of the Society Islands themselves.

It would no doubt be tempting to think that the god of creation might have appeared under the influence of Christian monotheism.⁵⁸ Nevertheless such versions as exist of the myth of creation seem to be completely void of Christian thought, the rare words that show any trace of Christianity⁵⁹ being probably due to the late recording of the texts in question. That the Ta'aroa cult antedated Christianity seems strongly indicated by the fact that we have one text dating from the time *before* Christianity reached the Society Islands, which would seem to confirm the assumption that this is really a genuine example of Polynesian mythology. The text was written down by no less a person than Cook himself during his second voyage:

“Creation origl. cause of things by many names: Tarroutahitoomoo Tarroa origl. stock—most commonly Tarroa or Tetoomoo—existed before everything except of a rock (Te papa) which he compressed and begat a daughter (Aone) that is Vegetable Mole. After he begot the earth, the sea, fresh water, sun, moon, stars, etc., and at

⁵⁷ Handy 1927:312 ff.; 1930b:115-118, 324-325.

⁵⁸ See Beckwith 1951:167 f. for the influence of the doctrine of the Trinity on Hawaiian religion.

⁵⁹ For example *ino* used in one place in the ethical sense of “evil.” Emory 1938:61, note 33.

last Eatuas beings between himself and man and who afterwards begot mankind and went to heaven and left the world to his posterity . . ."⁶⁰

In other words Tarroa (Ta'aroa) or Tarroutahitoomoo (Ta'aroa-tahi-tumu) or Tetoomoo (Te Tumu) was already known as a god of creation as early as in 1775, and it highly unlikely that the influence of Christianity was great enough at that time to be able to make any alterations in the local religion.⁶¹

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE TA'AROA MYTH.

If we really wish to get a full perspective of the significance of our texts, it is not sufficient merely to study them on their own; they should also be considered in relation to their position and function in the community in which they developed. After all, there is not much interest attached to a myth or legend that has become separated out from its human context.

As far as we know there is only one place where there is any reference to the function of the creation myth in the Society Islands. Henry informs us that "portions of the Creation Chant and mythology, according to taste" were recited during the course of the great *pa'i-atua* ceremony.⁶² *Pa'i-atua* was one of the most important national ritual celebrations of the Society Islands. The culmination was the meeting on the *marae*, the ritual meeting place, where all the gods were invoked, and joined beings all together in one great ceremony. This *pa'i-atua* ritual was conducted on special occasions, such as for instance the dedication of a new ritual meeting place, or in cases of severe drought or poor harvests or other big national catastrophes. The object of the cult was obviously to strengthen the community in collaboration with the gods and to re-establish normal conditions in the universe. In this connection it was natural that the creation myths or chants should also form a part of the ritual. It is interesting and illuminating to observe also, particularly in relation to what follows, that the *pa'i-atua* cult, and thereby also the creation myth, was used at the installation of a new chieftain or *ra'i'i*.

From this information we gather, therefore, that the creation myth has been used in connection with a religious cult, and this information is confirmed by a close study of the texts themselves. Note for instance the relatively large proportion of direct speech (dialogues), the "stage directions" ("Spread out the sand . . .," etc.), the reference to Ta'aroa's body as the dwelling place of the gods, and maybe also the "Chant of the Propping of the Sky of Havai'i" as quoted by Mare and in which the heavens are placed on two posts, Hotu-o-te-ra'i and 'Anaia-i-te-ra'i, which are the names of two stars. The vertical planks on the ritual altar also have similar star names, although the two stars

⁶⁰ Carrington 1939:30-31.

⁶¹ It was not until the arrival of the *Duff* missionaries in 1797 that Christianity began to make itself felt.

⁶² Henry 1928:171.

mentione dhere are not among them. This would again seem to point to a connection between the cult and the creation myths.

Certain information from other islands and island groups confirm that the Polynesian myths of creation were used for ritual purposes.

Handy, for instance, relates that on the Marquesas Islands great singing festivals were held, where the songs were closely connected with various rites.⁶³ Such ritual festivals were held by family groups, or, in the case of a chieftain's family, by the whole tribe. A typical occasion would for instance be on the birth of a child to a reigning chieftain, i.e., an heir to his chieftaincy. The main focus in the ritual ceremony was the recitation of the creation chant and of the family genealogies. The particular myth, *pu'e*, which was recited on these occasions tells the story of the marriage between One-u'i (the sand woman) and Atea (the canopy of the heavens), out of which union the world is created. This *pu'e* was also recited at memorial festivals for the dead.⁶⁴

Percy Smith has handed down to us two songs "sung at the birth of a high chief" from the Tuamotu Islands.⁶⁵ These songs have many features in common with the Polynesian creation mythology.

One of the songs⁶⁶ starts with the marriage between Tane and Hina, the first living beings and the origin of all things (*tumu*). It praises the rainbow which appears when a chieftain is born, and it expresses the wish that the child, which in this case goes by the name of Rongo, will have a long life. It is clear from the text of the song that Rongo has sprung from the seed which originated from Atea.

The other song⁶⁷ contains a description of the family genealogy, pictured as a tree with red and yellow flowers (the sign of a chieftain is marked by red and yellow colours). Here we see how all created things, including also the chiefly families, are described as having originated as plants which grow and spread out their roots all over the earth. Again this is a similar idea to those we have met in other Polynesian creation myths, the most clear example probably being the myth from Mangaia, where all life is said to begin from a seed planted in the earth. The word *tumu*, which is found again and again in nearly all the texts of these myths in the sense of "the origin of all things," also means the foot or the trunk of a tree, while the word *tupu* means "unfolding" and "growing," both in relation to plants and to the growth and development of the world and the human race.

We have seen that the Polynesian creation chant is in fact a kind of commentated genealogy with an introduction. This is also true of the myths of the Society Islands, even though this might not be so evident from the texts quoted above. This is because the latter only deal with the beginning of the creation. If we study the latter parts of the texts, including the previously mentioned section called the "Chaotic Period," we will find that the creation is later developed

⁶³ Handy 1923:314 ff.

⁶⁴ Handy 1930a:89.

⁶⁵ Smith 1903.

⁶⁶ *op. cit.*:231-235.

⁶⁷ *op. cit.*:236-242.

genealogically. Furthermore, there seems to have been some connection between the birth of a chieftain and the creation of the world. These creation chants were recited at festivals in honour of the birth of a child. We do not know whether this was the case on the Society Islands, but there are several things that would point to this being the case here also. In any case there was also definitely a connection between the chiefly genealogies and the creation mythologies, apart from which we know that the chiefly genealogies were used for ritualistic purposes and were bound up with the ritual meeting places.⁶⁸ This was also the case among the Maoris.⁶⁹

In order to be rightly understood these facts must be seen in the light of the dominating role played by family relationships in the community life of the Society Islands. The very fact of "being related" had a much more profound significance and carried with it many more responsibilities than in European society. Family relationship meant community living and unbreakable solidarity, implying among other things that every unit of the family was co-responsible for such things as, for instance, carrying out acts of vengeance against outsiders. This strong family tie meant that it was essential to keep count of who belonged to the family and who did not. These threads are unravelled in the genealogies, on the subject of which Arii Taimai writes: "Every family kept its genealogy secret to protect itself from imposters and every member of the family united to keep it pure."⁷⁰ Through these genealogies the various members of the family were bound together to form one unit.

The Society Islands are divided up into several districts, within each of which the ruling class is bound together in a genealogical unity, each of the members being descended from the same progenitor, who is an *atua*, a god. It is often one of the most important gods that is the primal ancestor. Beckwith, for Hawaii, goes on the assumption that in each new generation the god is reborn to a new life on earth through the person of the chieftain.⁷¹ The train of thought is logical enough, but as far as I know there is no written text nor any original statement from the Society Islands which confirms this assumption. One thing is certain, however, namely that the genealogies bestow certain powers on the chieftain. The fact that he is looked upon as being personally related to the gods makes him a sacred being, and this consecration, apart from bestowing on him many responsibilities towards his god and towards his tribe, also gives him a certain authority over the people to whom he is related. This authority is obviously founded on the ritual act whereby the god becomes a part of the life of the family by being declared the progenitor of the tribe.

It would therefore only be a logical outcome of the divine quality of the chieftain's family if precisely the creation chant and the chieftain's genealogy were recited, and also enacted as ritual, at the birth

⁶⁸ Henry 1928:139, 141.

⁶⁹ Johansen 1954:123 f.

⁷⁰ Adams 1901:17.

⁷¹ Beckwith 1951:180.

of a new chieftain and at his installation ceremony, as the god manifests his presence at these ceremonies through the ritual act. These chanted myths are in fact the very root of the well-being of the family, and its continued growth and development is dependent on the constant use of the ritual connected with them.

Handy informs us that on the Marquesas Islands each family had its own version of the creation chant, which seems to have been preserved as a family treasure in the same way as the genealogies.⁷² The information we have from the Society Islands indicates that the myths or chants may possibly have been regarded in the same light there.

From the previous investigation we will have seen how the various versions certainly seem to have originated in different parts of the group of islands, although it does not appear to be possible to classify them into definite districts. Nevertheless if we endeavour to investigate whether in fact there is not a certain connection between certain chieftain families and the various versions of the creation myth, we find that although Henry I and II do not on the surface of it indicate any such connection, on the other hand the Emory texts have definitely originated from one particular chiefly family on Tahiti, namely the family which during the European era was called Pomare. One of these texts was written down in 1849 by Mare, who was the historian, orator and genealogist of that famous family.⁷³ The other text has become known from a copy of a manuscript which was in the possession of the Pomare family.⁷⁴

A good deal of evidence goes to show that these two texts are the particular version of the creation myth of the Pomare family. From Mare we have several copies of genealogies, among which is a list of the ancestors of the Pomare family.⁷⁵ From this list it appears that Ta'aroa is the original ancestor of the family and that Te-Meharo was the goddess of wisdom. Both these gods appear in the texts of the creation chant, Te-Meharo among the gods and Ta'aroa as the god of creation. Also the other gods that are mentioned in the creation myth appear in Mare's genealogies of the Pomare family and its branches, though with the exception of Punua-te-fatu-titi. It is indeed most interesting and significant that Ta'aroa and Te-Meharo should appear here—incidentally Emory provides us with the same information in his commentaries to the creation myth—but we must be rather careful in attaching too much importance to the appearance of the other gods. The persons in the genealogies need not be the same as in the stories of the creation. In fact we know that several people often had the same name.

The fact that Ta'aroa is the progenitor of the Pomare family may possibly explain why he is identified with Tumu (the male creative element) in that family's story of the creation, but it does not explain why Ta'aroa is also the god of creation in other versions of the myth

⁷² Handy 1923:332.

⁷³ Emory 1938.45.

⁷⁴ *op. cit.*:52.

⁷⁵ Henry 1928:265.

with which we are familiar. We have no information as to whether Henry I and II also originated with the Pomare family. On the contrary we have previously seen that precisely these texts originated in the Leeward Islands—that is to say in districts outside of Tahiti, where that family resided.

However, we get nearer to the trail of what I consider to be a probable solution to these circumstances if in addition to these investigations we study the political history of the Society Islands from about the year 1769 onwards.⁷⁶

In December, 1768—five months before Cook arrived at Tahiti on his first voyage—a war broke out between the large district of Papara (in the south part of the Northern Peninsular) on the one side, and on the other the two districts of Pare and Arue (in the north part of the Northern Peninsular), the district of Tautira (on the Southern Peninsular) and Papara's western neighbouring district Paea. Armies from Pare, Arue, Tautira and Paea forced their way into Papara and destroyed the land, killing a large part of the population and capturing the sacred symbols, among which was the girdle with the red feathers, the symbol of chieftainship. Papara's two chieftains, Amo and Purea, succeeded in escaping with their lives, but some of their power, which hitherto had been great, was transferred to the chieftain of Pare, called Tu. This seems to have been the beginning of the remarkable struggle for power which resulted in Tu, who later became Pomare I, gaining absolute power over all the Society Islands and also a part of the Tuamotu Islands.

There were several remarkable circumstances which contributed towards Tu acquiring this power. One of the most important of these was that on account of some kind of misunderstanding he became the object of special protection by English travellers.⁷⁷

When Cook came to Tahiti on his second voyage in 1773 he anchored, among other places, in the Bay of Matavai in the Haapape district on the north of the island. Some time before, this district had fallen under the jurisdiction of Tu, and as Cook and his people assumed that it was only natural that a country should have a king, they took it for granted that Tu ruled over the whole of Tahiti and therefore supported him both by word and action, giving him gifts, etc., etc. Obviously this aroused the jealousy and anger of the other chiefs, and when Cook left Tahiti Tu very nearly lost the strong position which he had acquired partly with European assistance. As it was, however, luck came his way once more with the arrival at Tahiti of Lieutenant William Bligh on the famous ship *Bounty* in 1788. Bligh had been with Captain Cook on his second voyage and shared his notion about Tu being the ruler of Tahiti, but when he arrived in 1788 he found Tu in a sorry plight. He decided to help him, his help among other things consisting in supplying him with weapons. Bligh left Tahiti in 1879 in April, but in June the same year the *Bounty* returned, this time under

⁷⁶ For what follows see Adams 1901:74 f.

⁷⁷ *op. cit.*:91, 108.

the command of a group of sailors who had mutinied. These sailors joined up with Tu, whom they assumed to be the king, and it was largely thanks to their assistance that Tu was finally able to gain complete command over the whole of Tahiti. In 1791 he was declared ruler of the whole island.

As to what position Tu (or Pomare, as he was called from that time on) had in the Leeward Islands it is difficult to say with any certainty. We do know, however, that after many struggles Moorea became a part of his kingdom, and we also know that there were members of the Pomare family (which had many branches) in this part of the Society Islands.⁷⁸ In other words, Pomare did not really have to conquer these islands as his own family reigned over these parts.⁷⁹

There were also eight islands in the Tuamotu group which belonged to the Pomare family,⁸⁰ and it would not have been necessary to "annex" them officially if a Tuamotu chief called Tu-fariua had not tried to conquer them. Pomare (Tu) then came to a friendly agreement with the chief of the islands whereby these came under his supreme command.

There would, therefore, seem to be some connection between these events and the fact that Ta'aroa appears as the god of creation in the Society Islands' group. It would not have been possible for any single chieftain to gain command over a whole district such as this merely by military operations, as we understand them. It was not sufficient for a chieftain merely to occupy a district by "military" occupation; he would also have to establish social, and thereby also religious, relations with the gods of the district and with their earthly representatives, i.e., with the local chief himself and his family. We have already seen the great importance attached to genealogies, and the same thing applied in this case. If the conquering chieftain could prove that he was related to the local gods of the district he would automatically be entitled to a part of the human ownership of the district in question and consequently also have the possibility of claiming the inherent right to rule over it.

As far as Tu was concerned, he doubtless quite naturally thought that it was necessary to have some kind of family relationship if one desired to conquer the whole "world." In fact the mere idea of trying to conquer the world would probably have been totally alien to a Polynesian, for although these peoples indulged in small conquests within their own particular district among these islands, they did not seem to have any knowledge of conquering warfare on a larger scale. The idea probably came to Tu as the result of the mistaken idea that the Europeans had of his original position of power.

In any case the fact was that Tu *did* come to conquer the whole of the Society Islands group. As his progenitor was the god Ta'aroa, the world which he conquered also belonged to Ta'aroa, and Tu only

⁷⁸ Henry 1928:138.

⁷⁹ Adams 1901:86.

⁸⁰ Henry 1928:110 f.

wielded his power on condition that Ta'aroa was recognised as the creator of all things.

It is no doubt in these circumstances that we must look for an explanation of Ta'aroa's appearance as the primal ancestor of all created things. He would be the "king" in the political game of chess, and it is from this fact that the above-mentioned versions of the story of the creation may therefore have gained their particular characteristics. For instance it would only be a natural consequence that Ta'aroa would become the creator in the texts of the chants associated with the ritual used on the birth and installation of a chieftain. Obviously these ritual chants would serve to strengthen Tu's, or Pomare's, position, making him the rightful ruler over all things because it was his ancestors that had created the world. If we read the texts with this in mind they acquire their proper perspective. Ta'aroa is the creator, and among the things which he creates there are also several gods, at least one of which can safely be placed in the genealogy of the Pomare family.

In other words, if this assumption is correct, Ta'aroa only appeared as the god of creation on Tahiti at a fairly late date. The first intimation we have is from Banks, who was with Cook on his first voyage. He writes that Tetoomoo (Te-tumu) and Tepapa were the originators of all things, but that at the same time Tarroatietoomoo was "father of all things."⁸¹ Banks may quite well have obtained this information from members of what later on became the Pomare family, with whom Cook associated a great deal during his first visit to these islands. In fact it is just possible that this might have been the very first beginning of the Pomare version of the story of the creation (as previously mentioned) which later became so widespread.

The next reference we have to this subject is that made by Cook himself, i.e., the quotation which we have already mentioned from his second voyage. We know that on this occasion Cook and his people chiefly associated with Tu and his family,⁸² and it is therefore only natural that it would be his particular version of the creation myth that Cook would have got to know.

The question now is how to judge these various versions in relation to each other. We have already attempted to classify them into geographical categories, i.e., Henry I and II as being derived from the Leeward Islands and Emory's texts as originating from the Windward Islands. The short references handed down by Cook mostly resemble Mare's texts. In his version, too, Ta'aroa is identified with the male partner in the union or marriage out of which the whole of the creation comes forth. To a certain degree this confirms our supposition that the Mare text reflects the specifically Tahitian aspect of the myth; it was there that Cook obtained his information.

It seems as if the Polynesian myth of creation—in accordance with which the world is created out of the union of a male and a female being—has become so to say "specialised" on the Society Islands.

⁸¹ Hooker 1896:173.

⁸² Henry 1928:20 f.

One particular family succeeded in gaining supremacy over the whole of the group of islands, and the result was that its particular version of the myth became the one in common usage in this whole area, although there are of course several minor variations of the same text.

This fact also has its origin in internal political circumstances. The Mare text reflects the private creation myth of the Pomare family—in the form in which it is now known, possibly as the result of the European provocation to gain supremacy, but again possibly not. On the other hand Henry's texts show a version that was used in those parts of the group of islands which were connected with the ruling tribe or family unit but which had also been influenced by the new religion from the outside world. For instance in Henry's texts we find Ta'aroa as the "commander," who stands apart from the actual creation and who does not himself take part in the procreation. In this instance Ta'aroa would appear to be a divine being, though only a kind of outsider who has usurped his way into an ancient cult (the marriage of Tumu and Papa as the origin of all things) and who, in his attempt to present himself as a god of creation, has not been able to become completely assimilated.

Quite how this is to be interpreted in relation to the position of the Pomare family on the Leeward Islands is not very easy to say. In this matter the various sources are not of much help. We know that some sort of alliance existed between the Ra'iatea chieftain and Pomare.⁸³ In any case the alliance was probably partly based on the Oro cult which they had in common and which originated from the Raiatea family. We know that the god Oro was regarded as being a son of Ta'aroa, but it is impossible to discover whether this was a part of the ancient legend or whether it appeared as the result of the Ta'aroa mythology.

We also find that there are several points of similarity between the texts from the Tuamotu Islands and the Society Islands,⁸⁴ but they can hardly have originated from the family ties between the Pomare family and the Tuamotu chieftain. It would rather seem as if they indicate that there was a common Polynesian conception of the myth of creation which existed before the spreading of the Pomare-Ta'aroa cult.

As to whether the conception outlined here regarding Ta'aroa's position in the cult of the Society Islands is correct, this can only be proved by future and more thorough investigation. A good deal will depend on the results of a more profound study of Ta'aroa's position on those Polynesian islands where he is said to have had more or less the same position as on the Society Islands. Samoa and Tonga would appear to be important in this respect.

In this connection we shall indicate a few points which may perhaps serve to throw some light on the problem.

We have previously mentioned the hypothesis put forward among others by Handy, namely that at some period in the history of Polynesia

⁸³ *op. cit.*:138. Arii Taimai says that the families were related, Adams 1901:86.

⁸⁴ Emory 1938:49 ff., 61 ff.

there was an invasion of a tribe or people whose supreme god was Ta'aroa and that this was therefore the origin of Ta'aroa's appearance as the god of creation on several of the Polynesian islands.

On the face of it this hypothesis sounds quite plausible. However, I do not think that it is necessary to concern ourselves with such a broad conception as migration in order to find an explanation as to how Ta'aroa also appeared as a god of creation in other places than in the Society Islands. For one thing we know that in company with early voyages like Cook and others following after him, many of the inhabitants of Tahiti were transferred to other islands in the Polynesian group. When Cook left Tahiti on his first expedition he took with him a native priest by the name of Tupaia. Banks relates that when the ship came to New Zealand this priest had long conversations with the Maori priests and "they seemed to agree very well in their notions of religion, only Tupia was much more learned than the other(s), and all his discourse was received with much attention."⁸⁵ Moreover, it was quite usual for Maoris to join in with European whaling expeditions,⁸⁶ in which case they would also quite naturally have contacted Tahiti.

We know, too, that since time immemorial the Society Islands have been recognised by the Polynesian peoples as the home of the most noble form of Polynesian culture (in particular, of course, Ra'iatea), and it is therefore highly probable that travellers from these islands were looked upon with respect and admiration wherever they appeared and that a good deal of importance was attached to their pronouncements, particularly in matters of religion. What could therefore be more natural than that this "missionary" activity should promote the general spreading of the knowledge of Ta'aroa as the god of creation?

This assumption gains more weight when we remember how the name of Pomare appears in several places in Polynesia outside of the Society Islands. For instance Best informs us that the chieftain of Nga-Puhi, Whitoi, called himself Pomare,⁸⁷ and Smith recalls a similar case.⁸⁸ Again if we study the genealogies of the chiefly family on Samoa in Kraemer we also find a reference to a Pomare who lived about the middle of the 19th century and who was moreover a link in the family tree claiming descent from Tagaloa.⁸⁹

As we have mentioned before, Pomare is the name assumed by Tu after he was declared supreme chieftain of the Society Islands (1791), and it is such an unusual name that it could only have come to New Zealand and Samoa by word of mouth from travellers from Tahiti.

In other words I feel it is not improbable that the conception of Ta'aroa as the supreme god of creation in Polynesia did not arise as

⁸⁵ Hooker 1896:193. Best (1925:716) informs us that in modern times Polynesian immigrants have had a certain amount of influence on Maori traditions.

⁸⁶ Smith 1910:420.

⁸⁷ Best 1925:532.

⁸⁸ Smith 1910:130 note.

⁸⁹ Kraemer 1902:189.

the result of the settlement of a "Ta'aroa people," but that it was a new cult which arose on the Society Islands at a fairly late date and which since then—by means of travelling Polynesian natives—became spread out to several other Polynesian islands where Ta'aroa was already recognised as a god (as part of an ancient form of mythology common to the Polynesian area), though only figuring as a much more modest conception in most places.

Possibly some more light may be thrown on the matter by an even closer study of the other creation stories and legends throughout the Polynesian area. For instance, in this connection it would be most interesting to learn more about the other so-called gods of creation such as the Maori Io and also Vari-ma-te-takere on Mangaia.

If the circumstances connected with the Ta'aroa cult on the Society Islands are in fact as I have outlined in this paper, we would indeed have an extremely interesting and clear-cut example of the intimate connection existing between the community life, the religion and the politics of these people, a relationship which seems so very characteristic of the Polynesian way of life.

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