

## CHAPTER I

### MYTHS OF CREATION

#### PRELIMINARY

THE Polynesian myths of creation were varied in character, great differences appearing, not only as between the traditions of the several islands or island groups, but in some cases as between those found in the same island or group. Some of them were of what I may call broadly an evolutionary character, by which I mean that they referred to the successive comings into being of a number of things or conceptions, and in some cases pointed to developments which possessed features of a more or less evolutionary type. Some were stories of acts of creation by gods or other mythical beings; and of these some were expressed in the form of acts of deliberate constructive creation, whilst others, and some of the evolutionary myths, recorded a series of marriages and consequent births of the objects or beings created or evolved. Fornander appears to regard the Polynesian conceptions of supernatural acts of creation and those of parentage as having been distinct<sup>1</sup>; but I do not know whether, and if so to what extent, the distinction is regarded by ethnologists as important. I think that it would be important if we were able to point clearly, and with some degree of confidence, to two distinct conceptions of creation and procreation, and say where respectively they were found; but I doubt whether this is possible. I think it is probable that in many cases a Polynesian who narrated a legend to a white inquirer was not himself very clear as to the difference, or at all events that those who had in the past, perhaps during a long period, been transmitting the story down from generation to generation, or some of them, had not been so. Then again, even if the Polynesian instructor of the white man was clear as to his meaning, can we be confident that the latter understood that meaning and translated the story into his own language correctly? The Polynesian might express himself by means of words that could be interpreted as pointing to either

<sup>1</sup> Fornander, vol. 1, pp. 64 *sq.*

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creation or procreation, and the white man might misunderstand his meaning in this respect. Von Bülow, speaking of Samoa, suggests that the idea of creation was contrary to the views of the natives, and thinks, apparently, that what a missionary has called creation was in the native mind rather a process of evolution<sup>1</sup>; but the Polynesians knew, of course, that a man could construct something with his hands, or cause something to take place, and so, as the gods were commonly supposed to have attributes, and to engage in practices, similar to those of men, and were credited with supernatural powers, I see no clear reason why the people should not have been able to conceive of acts of creation such as are disclosed in some of the myths. In view of these elements of uncertainty, and of the difficulty that would arise in arranging the various myths, if I tried to do so, on a basis distinguishing between conceptions of creation and procreation, I have decided not to attempt this.

Some of the traditions were probably ancient myths; others, perhaps, had their origin in records of actual events, or traditions as to events; others may have been merely efforts to account for and explain, and perhaps to justify, such things as, say, existing beliefs or conceptions or customs or practices of the people; and again, others may have been inventions or partly so, these probably including, in part at all events, some of the genealogies tracing the ancestries of the great chiefs back to the major gods. There is also the possibility that in some cases objects, or natural phenomena, or even attributes, abstract ideas or conceptions, were personified.

In arranging the myths I have collected them in groups under certain headings. I have begun with what I have called general evolutionary myths, after which I have introduced a few traditions as to evolution from rocks and stones, and from an egg; these are followed by myths collected under the headings of "Light, Sound and Stability," "Fishing up Islands," and "Lifting up the Sky"; and the last group consists of myths of creation (including procreation) by gods and other supernatural beings. It must be understood that some of the myths are in character mixed up and confused and overlapping, some of them introducing several distinct ideas, so that any exact and systematic classification of them is impossible, ideas indicated by myths which I have placed under one heading also bearing upon those of another. This is seen in the case,

<sup>1</sup> Von Bülow, *Globus*, vol. LXXI, p. 375.

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among others, of the beliefs as to evolution or birth from rocks and stones, which will be found in a number of the myths, those introduced separately under that heading being only a few examples which I have not included under any of the other headings. My method of arrangement under specific headings is therefore neither exact nor wholly systematic, and the headings must be regarded as having been adopted solely as a matter of practical convenience.

## GENERAL EVOLUTIONARY MYTHS

*Samoa*

According to a cosmogony, given by Turner, there was first of all Nothing (*leai*) [I am omitting the subsequent Samoan words]. Thence sprang Fragrance; then Dust; then Perceivable; then Obtainable; then Earth; then High rocks; then Small stones; then Mountains. Mountains married Changeable meeting-place and had, as a daughter, Piece of dust, who married the down of the sugar-cane flower, and had three sons and a daughter, apparently regarded as having been human<sup>1</sup>.

The following is the first part of a genealogy of the Malietoa [the head chiefs or kings of one of the three main divisions of the island of Upolu] as given by Turner:

<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Progeny</i>
1. The high rocks	The earth rocks	The earth
2. The earth	High winds	Solid clouds
3. Solid clouds	Flying clouds	(1) Confused winds
		(2) Quiet winds
		(3) Boisterous winds
		(4) Land-beating wind
		(5) Dew of life
4. Dew of life	Clouds clinging to the heavens	Clouds flying about
5. Clouds flying about	Clear heavens	(1) Shadow
		(2) Twilight
		(3) Daylight
		(4) Noonday
		(5) Afternoon
		(6) Sunset
6. Quiet winds	Beautiful clouds	Cloudless heavens
7. Cloudless heavens	Spread-out heavens	Tangaroa-[the god]-the- originator-of-men

<sup>1</sup> Turner, p. 3.

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Tangaroa-the-originator-of-men married Great heavens, and his son was Tangaroa-of-the-heavens, who married the Keeper of the heavens. His son was the god Pili, who married Sina-the-tropic-bird, and had five children [the names of three of whom are associated (see *Systems*, vol. 1, pp. 47–8, 58–9) with the traditional history of the division of the island of Upolu into three main areas]. Then, after a number of marriages and births, apparently of human beings, was born Savea, the first Malietoa<sup>1</sup>.

Cloudless heavens (mentioned above) also married the Eighth heavens, and had a son Tangaroa-the-dweller-in-lands. He married Cloudy heavens, and had a son Tangaroa-the-explorer-of-lands. He married the queen of the earth and had a son Valevalenoa or Space. At another birth Cloudy heavens brought forth a head, which was said to have fallen from the heavens. Space addressed the head, asking it to be a son to him, and second to him on earth. Thereupon the body of a man-child was added to the head. From this boy sprang the four divisions, east, west, north and south. He grew to manhood, and travelled north, south, east and west, marrying and having children in each of the four quarters. Then he went up to the heavens, and told his children to follow him<sup>2</sup>.

According to another myth told by Turner, the sons of Ilu (worm) and Mamao (distant) were (1) Papa tu, or Great rocks; (2) Papa one, or Sandy rocks; (3) Papa ele, or Earthy rocks; (4) Masina, or the Moon; (5) La, or the Sun; (6) Sami, or the Sea; and (7) Vai, or Fresh water; and they had two daughters, called respectively the Great wind and the Gentle wind. They all separated and lived apart, but the sea was shut up; the sea was afterwards liberated by the order of the children, and the three kinds of rocks were flooded and died; but the sun and moon fled to the heavens and lived<sup>3</sup>.

Another myth told by Turner attributed the earth, rocks, trees and everything to the marriage of fire and water. Then the cuttle-fish fought with the fire, and the fire conquered; the fire fought with the rocks, and the rocks conquered; the large stones fought with the small stones, and the latter conquered; the small stones fought with the grass, and the grass conquered; the grass fought with the trees, and the trees conquered; the trees fought with the creepers, and the creepers conquered; the

<sup>1</sup> Turner, pp. 3 *sqq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 5 *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6. According to Pratt's Dictionary *ilo* means "worm" but *ilu* means "innumerable." Probably this has been a printer's error.

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creepers rotted, swarmed with maggots, and the maggots grew to be men<sup>1</sup>.

Turner also records a belief that man was formed from a species of mussel. If made from a hard mussel he lived long; but if made from the poisonous mussel he was fragile, easily upset, and did not live long<sup>2</sup>.

Then again, according to Turner, there was a belief that the ants and small coral made the small stones. The small and large stones caused the loose rocks; and from the loose rocks and the fire sprang a man called Ariari ("To appear"), and from him and a woman sprang the cuttle-fish and the race of men<sup>3</sup>.

Another story, repeated by Turner, says that the rocks married the earth, and the earth became pregnant. Salevao, the god of the rocks [he was a Savai'ian god, supposed to be the brother of Savea Si'uleo, a god of the dead], observed motion in the *moa* or centre of the earth. A child was born and named Moa, from the place where it was seen moving<sup>4</sup>. It is not stated that this child was the ancestor of mankind.

Then again, according to Turner, there was a belief that the god Fe'e of the lower regions [the cuttle-fish god of the dead] was beaten by the deep underground rocks:

The low rocks	were beaten by	the high rocks
The high rocks	" "	the hollow (volcanic, cavernous) rocks
The hollow rocks	" "	the rocks level with the ground
The ground rocks	" "	the earth
The earth	was beaten by	the small stones
The small stones	were beaten by	the small grass
The small grass	was beaten by	the strong weedy grass
The strong grass	" "	the long grass of the bush
The bush grass	" "	the trees
The trees	were beaten by	the creepers

And then began the wars of men.

Turner's comment on this is that the principle seems to have been that, whenever one thing prevailed in excess above another thing, were it rock, stone, earth, grass, or tree, there would be some tradition about its having fought and had a victory. He says that there were accounts of battles between birds and fish in which the birds conquered, and that it was said that, ever since, the birds had the right of going to the sea to pick up any fish they could<sup>5</sup>. This story mentions human beings though

<sup>1</sup> Turner, pp. 6 *sq.* There is apparently a break in the sequence, unless we may identify the large stones with the rocks.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Turner, 19 *years*, p. 250. Cf. Turner, pp. 212 *sq.*

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it says nothing about their *evolution*; but it is partly similar to one of those given above, which finishes with the well-known Samoan myth as to rotting creepers, from which came maggots that turned into men, who were the ancestors of the Samoans or of some of them.

Brown refers to a belief that Standing rock married Earth rock, and their son, Loose stone, married Mud, and had a son Grown-from-nothing, who became the first man. He married the daughter of [the god] Tangaroa-of-the-skies, and their son [the god] Lu married the Eighth heavens, and had a son who became the king of Atua [one of the three main divisions of the island of Upolu]<sup>1</sup>.

Reinecke says that *moa*, the centre of the earth, was supposed to have been the origin of all the islands; and from its union with the rock Salevao was derived Samoa, i.e. “consecrated [sacred] to Moa<sup>2</sup>.” It will be noticed that this is apparently a version of one of Turner’s stories.

An account by von Bülow, obtained from an orator of the island of Savai’i, begins with a belief that Tangaroa and his son being engaged in fishing, the son drew up the earth. Then commenced fighting between the cuttle-fish and fire in which the cuttle-fish conquered. The cuttle-fish then fought with the great rock and the rock conquered. This was followed by a long list, in which it is impossible to detect any natural sequence, of successive battles between different sorts of rocky formation, the conqueror in each being one of the combatants in the next. After this shattered rock—the last victor—fought the world and the world conquered. Then the world was defeated in a battle with the loose stones, which were afterwards defeated by grass. After this there were battles between different sorts of grasses and grass-like plants, the last winner of which was defeated by wood, and again wood was defeated by the creepers. Wood then married the creepers, and from this union arose a human being<sup>3</sup>. The bulk of this story is somewhat similar in parts to two of those told by Turner already given.

According to another story told by von Bülow, “the fire-which-burns-in-the-east” married “the-fire-flaring-up,” and had a boy Papele (a soft red earth like stone). Then followed some marriages and consequent births of different rocks and

<sup>1</sup> Brown, pp. 357 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Reinecke, *Globus*, vol. LXXVI, p. 8 note 6.

<sup>3</sup> Von Bülow, *I.A.E.* vol. XII, pp. 58–62.

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stones, from the last of which (which had been hollowed out like a dish by the action of the sea) moss was born. Moss married grass, and this event was followed by a series of marriages and consequent births in succession, first of different named species of grass, then of a plant about a metre high, then of different named species of trees; and the last of these married a parasitical plant (*Loranthus insularum*), and their issue was the forest. After this came the evolution from the creepers of maggots which were made into men by Ngaio, who with *tuli* was sent down for the purpose by Tangaroa. There is a reference to the bending down of the tree-tops under the weight of the *fue*<sup>1</sup>. This story was obtained from an orator of Lufilufi<sup>2</sup>, the governmental seat of Atua, one of the three main divisions of Upolu.

Von Bülow commences his *tuiiana* genealogy (obtained from Safotu in Savai'i) with a few marriages and births, most of the names beginning with *papa* (rock)<sup>3</sup>. The *tuiiana* were the kings of Aana, one of the three main divisions of the island of Upolu.

Stuebel gives a version which begins with references to the sons of different types of rock, namely, flat rock, far-extending reef rock, lying rock, low sitting rock, upright-standing rock, friable rock, rough boulders on the shore, and projecting rocky ledge. Then comes in the son of the inkfish [cuttle-fish] who (the son) was conceived as having been a high-flaring fire. Salt water and fresh water were also children of the inkfish, and there were children of the high-flaring fire. War raged between the children of the inkfish and the children of fire, in which the latter were subjugated by the squirting of the inkfish fluid. In consequence, the earth, which had been dry, was flooded, and became a deep sea. Then Tangaroa-of-the-skies (Tangaloa-a-langi) told the lightning and the rain to fetch the stone [we are not told what this stone was, or whence it came]; and when it was brought to him, he ordered the *aitu* [god or spirit] Ngaio to shape the stone into a body, which he did. Tangaroa then sent Ngaio to fetch a *mauli* (the organ of life in the body, the heart); and the soul, with which the stone body, regarded as having been feminine, was supposed to be endowed, was quickened; and Tangaroa married it. From this marriage the *tuli* bird was

<sup>1</sup> Von Bülow, *Globus*, vol. LXVIII, p. 139.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* I.A.E. vol. XII, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* vol. XI, p. 105. I think "rock" is the meaning with which he uses the word *papa*.

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born, and sent down to earth to live in a house formed from a stone thrown down by Tangaroa. The bird found the sun an annoyance, so Tangaroa threw down a creeping plant as a shady protection, and the *tuli* bird lived there. The bird annoyed Tangaroa in some way, so he sent down a worm or maggot to devour the creeper, which it did, and the bird told Tangaroa that its roof was gone. Then the bird, by order of Tangaroa, shaped the worm into a man<sup>1</sup>.

Wegener refers to another story, which says that at the beginning was *leai* (nothing). Then arose smell, which was not yet palpable but was felt as something material. The smell became smoke, which again became clouds, and finally condensed into solidity or land. The sea too arose, and in a stupendous catastrophe of nature the land sank into the sea. With this fire arose, and fire married water, and their offspring was the new earth—i.e. the Samoan Islands—which arose out of the womb of the last earth<sup>2</sup>. I draw attention to the similarity between the beginning of this myth, referring to “nothing” and “smell,” and that, commencing with “nothing” and “fragrance,” of one of the others.

The following is the commencement of the genealogy of the *tuiavana* [kings of Aana], as given by Krämer, the explanations of the names being those inserted (in German) by him:

Malamanganga'e (Light eastwards) married Malamangangaifo (Light westwards), and had issue Lupe (the Dove; also the bluish, shining, smooth lava, which at Aopo in Savai'i was held to be transformed doves);

Lupe married Papatu (Upright rock), and had issue A'alua (*a'a* = “family relations”; *lua* = “two,” more probably from *a'alu* = “sediment,” “dregs”);

A'alua married Papamau (Firm rock), and had issue Papafoangia (Broken or crushed rock);

Papafoangia married Ma'ata'anoa (Little scattered stones), and had issue Papa'ele (Rock dust);

Papa'ele married Palapala (Marsh, Swamp), and had issue Papamavae teine (The-rock-that-opens-up; probably in the sense of being able to conceive, as *mavae* also means the vagina) [I may say that in Samoa the word *teine* means “a girl” (see Pratt's Dictionary and Turner, p. 364)];

Papamavae married 'Imoa (the Rat, the Mouse), and had issue Salasala teine (Cut-off);

Salasala married Tangaroa-nimonimo (*nimo* = “infinite”, so this name means Tangaroa-the-infinite) and had issue Tupufua (Derived-from-nothing; the first man);

and two generations later came the first alleged *tuiavana*<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Stuebel, pp. 59 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Wegener, *Z.G.E.* 1902, p. 415.

<sup>3</sup> Krämer, *S.I.* vol. I, pp. 167 sq.



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Krämer's tree of Lu and Pili may be compared with the myth last referred to, but according to it Lupe married Loose stones, and had issue Marsh; and Marsh married Land, and had issue the first man, Derived-from-nothing<sup>1</sup>.

Pratt commences a genealogy as follows:

Papatu (Standing rock) married Papaele (Earth rock), and had a son Ma'ataanoa (Loose stones);

Ma'ataanoa married Palapala (Mud), and had a son Tangata (Man) called Tupu-fua (Grown-from-nothing).

This Tupu-fua married the daughter of Tangaroa-of-the-skies, and their son was [the god] Lu, who married the daughter of the king of heaven, and their son was the king of Atua. This genealogy was obtained in Manu'a<sup>2</sup>.

*Tonga*

Sarah Farmer reports a Tongan belief that slime and seaweed gave birth to a rock, from which sprang many gods of various natures, including the serpent and wood pigeon<sup>3</sup>.

Both Reiter and Caillot tell a story, their versions of which are substantially the same, of a number of marriages and the children born of them<sup>4</sup>. I will reproduce this story in tabulated form, putting the names of parents in an outer column and those of children in an inner column, indicating sexes by letters, and adding in a third column the explanations given of the meanings of the names, but in some cases I will only indicate their effect broadly without giving details. The letters R and C in parentheses will show by which of the two writers the explanations have been given. Notes in square brackets will be my own.

Limu (m.)	{ Any inconsiderable sea plant (R.) { Seaweed (C.)
Kele (f.)	{ Mud; any deposit left by a liquid (R.) { Slime (C.)
Touiafutuna (?)	{ It was a ferruginous stone (R. and C.) { Something existing since long ago? (R.)

Touiafutuna, who must have been regarded as feminine, was a large metallic stone, which from time to time, being in labour, shook and rumbled like thunder and opened, producing each time a pair of twins, one male and the other female. There is no reference to any male element being connected with the parentage of these children.

<sup>1</sup> Krämer, *S.I.* vol. I, pp. 24 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Pratt, *A.A.A.S.* vol. II, p. 657.

<sup>3</sup> S. Farmer, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> Reiter, *Anthrop.* vol. II, pp. 230-8. Caillot, *Mythes*, pp. 239-44.

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Touiafutuna	Piki (m.)	Adhering to something (R.) (C.)
	Kele (f.)	{ Deposit left by a liquid; mud (R.). Slime (C.)
Touiafutuna	Atungaki (m.)	{ To give, or lance, throw with, offer (R.). Him of the lance (C.)
	Maimoa Alongona (f.)	{ Resounding, echoing, gulf (R.) Futility (C.)
Touiafutuna	Tonu-uta (m.)	The land turtle (R.) (C.)
	Tonu-tai (f.)	The sea turtle (R.) (C.)
Touiafutuna	Lupe (f.)	Pigeon (R.) (C.)
	Tukuhali (m.)	{ That which roams about in the sea—a large sea-worm [or sea- serpent] (R.). Sea-serpent (C.)
Piki and Kele (twins) [above]	Tau-fuli-fonua (m.)	{ He who upsets or unsettles the earth (R.). He who overthrows the lands (C.)
	Havea-lolo-fonua (f.)	{ One who breaks or crushes the interior of lands or the earth (R.) (C.)
Atungaki and Mai- moa Alongona (twins) [above]	Vele-lahi (f.)	{ Great passion or desire (R.) Great desire (C.)
Tonu-uta and Tonu-tai (twins) [above]	Vele-sii (f.)	{ Little passion or desire (R.) Little desire (C.)
Tau-fuli-fonua and Havea-lolo-fonua [above]	Hikuleo (m.)	[The Tongan god of the dead]
Tau-fuli-fonua and Vele-lahi [above]	Tangaroa (m.)	[The god]
Tau-fuli-fonua and Vele-sii [above]	Maui (m.)	[The god]

Hikuleo was sent by his parents to Tonga, and Tangaroa and Maui went there also, and they dwelt there together. They then agreed to divide the world, and this was arranged by Hikuleo as follows. Tangaroa and his mother were to go to the sky and govern there; Maui and his mother were to have *Lolofonua* and govern there; Hikuleo was to remain in paradise and govern