Rangi above/Papa below, Tangaroa ascendant, water all around us: Austronesian creation myths

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Embedded deep within humanity’s blood and bones lies the need to explain *how* we came to exist, how the world originated and functions as it does. While some basic rhythms express themselves time and again, they may not necessarily do so in the same fashion. While one culture values the power of an almighty male creator god, another may place just as much, or greater, emphasis on a female creatrix, or yet again, focus on creation evolving in an ordered manner, with little if any interference from a deity at all. Creation accounts may contain elements of humor, such as the appearance of a trickster making a grand mess of the forming of the first human beings, while others are somber accounts taking on the tone of material found in history books. Within the corpus of Austronesian creation mythology, all of these variations, and many more besides, make an appearance.
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Embedded deep within humanity’s blood and bones lies the need to explain *how*: how we came to exist, how the world originated and functions as it does. Perhaps such an inquiry supersedes that of *why*, as the gods often provide brief explanations concerning their reasons for fashioning the universe. Indeed, every society attempts to provide an account for the origins of humanity, and oftentimes the creation of the universe or the earth as well. On the surface of this one basic theme, this one basic need, dwell myriad patterns of arrangement, nearly limitless ways in which origin can be explained. While some basic rhythms express themselves time and again, they may not necessarily do so in the same fashion. While one culture values the power of an almighty male creator god, another may place just as much, or greater, emphasis on a female creatrix, or yet again, focus on creation evolving in an ordered manner, with little if any interference from a deity at all. Creation accounts may contain elements of humor, such as the appearance of a trickster making a grand mess of the forming of the first human beings, while others are somber accounts taking on the tone of material found in history books. Within the corpus of Austronesian creation mythology, all of these variations, and many more besides, make an appearance.

The term “Austronesia” describes a vast geographic region, comprised mainly of several groupings of island chains, within the Pacific Ocean, bordered on the west by the...
Asian mainland, the Philippine Islands, and Indonesia, and on the east by North America. The region further subdivides as follows. Melanesia is comprised of many smaller islands and island chains, and is bordered on the west by the southern islands of the Philippines and Indonesia, and on the west by Polynesia, specifically by the Ellice Islands and Tonga. Micronesia, comprised of a smaller number of islands, lies directly above Melanesia and is bordered by the Philippine Islands and Polynesia. The Polynesian area extends from the Hawaiian Islands to the north, through New Zealand at its southernmost boundary. The final component of Austronesia, Australia, lies within close proximity to both Indonesia, and to the southern border of Melanesia. Within the collections of myths belonging to Austronesia, variety appears in abundance, and not just within material relating strictly to creation. The region is ripe with myths describing the origin stories of everything from human beings down to the first canoes. Selecting only those myths specifically concerned with the origin of the universe and/or the earth (cosmogonies), the gods (theogonies) and human beings (anthropogenies) allows for a concentrated study of common and divergent themes, but it is with the knowledge that the stories excluded from this study are no less vibrant, resonating with the worldview and life of the people it represents. The area extending from Hawaii down through Australia, and inclusive of Micronesia and Melanesia, is sometimes still referred to as Oceania, but this term creates a certain degree of confusion as to its meaning. Not only does the term remain vague in a general sense, the areas covered by this term are not always consistent (Dixon xi). Therefore, this collection of creation myths utilizes the term “Austronesia,” which came into use in the mid-twentieth century, to describe the geographic region described above.
Although the focus of this edition remains with Austronesian creation stories, instances of influence from other cultures, such as China or Japan, provide tantalizing glimpses into possible migration patterns into the area. The likely origination point for these first settlers into the Austronesian area was the Asian mainland, supported by the close thematic ties between Hawaii’s creation myth cycle and that of Indonesia (Dixon 96-97). Joseph Campbell states that the migration into the Austronesian region moved through Asia, including China, then on through Indonesia, Madagascar, New Zealand and eastern Polynesia (Masks 442). The peoples moving into Polynesia were driven from the coasts of Asia by the Malays (Westervelt vi-vii), forcing them to search for new homes. Such a pattern of movement moves these peoples through Melanesia and Micronesia, and holds with other theories of migration as well.

Roland Dixon posits that the Polynesian area experienced two main immigration waves, one which moved eastward through Melanesia and then north into Hawaii in the first phase, with a second wave which remained in Melanesia for a longer period of time before spreading into the remaining areas, and a second wave which went through Melanesia into western and central Polynesia, then to New Zealand. In 1855, when the Church Missionary Society began conversion efforts in the area, New Zealanders spoke of their ancient history and that “they came from a distant land” due to population pressures in their original homeland. Language studies further support this pattern of settlement, as the Maori language bears striking resemblance to those of the Society and Sandwich Island groups, as well as Easter Island, on the far eastern reaches of Polynesia (Taylor 7, 169). A second migratory group moved from central Polynesia into up into Hawaii.
Melanesian mythological influences in Hawaii may have arrived with a wave of immigrants reaching the area in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries (Dixon 96, 98), while other sources set the date of Polynesian population by seafarers moving from Asia then through Melanesia approximately two to three thousand years ago. Despite the disputed time frame for migration into Polynesia, archaeological evidence in the form of boat fragments place people in the Melanesian island system quite early, some 33,000 years ago. Despite the initial movement of people populating the Hawaii and the surrounding islands, the Melanesian material did not remain static as an embedded part of these new settlements. The corpus of creation material from the Melanesian area holds little in common with Hawaii, and the Society and Cook Island groups (McKenzie 95, 142, 148), at first seemingly in defiance of settlement patterns. With regards to Hawaii, the god Kane, sometimes in conjunction with his brothers Ku and Lono, plays a role in a majority of the accounts of creation, while Tahiti features the god Tangaloa as the all-powerful deity. Conversely, Melanesian myths tend to lack a deity of any sort in the primary role of creator. Upon closer inspection, however, the variation in material between these two regions begins to make sense. Following Dixon’s proposed pattern of settlement, the peoples moving into Hawaii in the first phase moved fairly quickly through the Melanesian area before moving elsewhere. Thus, the creation stories carried in their collective memory would have had less time to integrate with those of any indigenous peoples, allowing for a high degree of preservation by the time the voyagers reached the Hawaiian Islands. The remaining migration waves populate other areas in the Austronesian region, allowing for the older, original traditions brought by the first phase
of immigrants to take hold in Hawaiian culture, solidifying the place of primacy held by these stories.

Although the overall migratory pattern discussed here seems fairly straightforward, in practice, the relationships among various myth cycles in the region end up complicated at best, yet more often than not, hopelessly entangled. The presentation of individual myths to follow provides commentary where necessary on similarities with other material in the region. However, the following serves as an overall picture of the relationships among Austronesian mythic material while illustrating the complexity found when trying to determine points of origin of given myths, and how they then migrated from one area to another. The myths from Hawaii and New Zealand share a majority of similar features. Additionally, New Zealand’s material shares close thematic ties with that of the Cook Islands, whose inhabitants emigrated into the area (Dixon 93). J. Frank Stimson describes the Polynesian’s use of the Society Islands as “the sacred starting place of many of the voyages” (xlii), in reference to the colonization of other islands within the region. Edward Gifford discovered strong similarities among Tongan stories of various types, both creation myths and other lore with those found in Polynesia, Indonesia and Micronesia, with less shared traits with those of Melanesia and Australia. Therefore, Indonesian influence filters into Tonga via Micronesia, and not Melanesia. Tongan myths sometimes make mention of Samoa, but never Fiji, thus eliminating the possibility of Fijian influence on Tongan myths. Interestingly, Tongans later migrated into Fiji, where they shaped some of the Fijian tales (Gifford 8, 11-12). Rather than a chain of influence flowing like points along a straight line, the myths
instead form an intricate spider web, with different peoples traveling back and forth along its sinews.

Within the corpus of Austronesian creation mythology, two main patterns emerge. Mythologists often comment upon two main categories of creation stories, those that are of an “evolutionary” type, and those that feature a patriarchal god, a god/goddess pair, or a goddess in charge of the act of creation. Those myths categorized as being evolutionary in nature feature creation evolving in logical, ordered stages from one to the next, usually without the interference of any deity, or perhaps with the deity only setting forth the initial act of creation. As an example, a Samoan creation account provided in full detail later features the pairing of natural elements, beginning with the coupling of ants and stones, from which further life issues forth. These myths are most characteristic of central and eastern Polynesia, although they do occur elsewhere in Austronesia. The motif of evolutionary creation extends outside of the Austronesian region, and into the Asian mainland, supporting a pattern of migration moving through Asia before crossing into the Pacific. The Chinese creation story delineating the progression of creation from Yin and Yang, for example, does not describe the pair as god and goddess, but rather as the opposites light and dark, femaleness and maleness. Following along these lines, all creation thus results from the combination of opposite forces, such as light and dark, or dry and wet (Colum 237). Widespread throughout Austronesia are myths depicting the means by which different natural forces combine and recombine to form new life which bear striking resemblance to the myth of Yin and Yang. Additionally, these myths provide all life with a genealogical record, a clear path of emergence all the way back to the beginning of the world. Given that both chiefs and their people alike kept meticulous
genealogical lists of their own, this cycle of myths serve as a reaffirmation of social structure. Within this grouping, the myths further subdivide into those which provide an account of the evolution of all life, from plants to humans, while others describe the evolution of life up until a main creator deity emerges, at which point the concern for the origins of other life forms ceases (Dixon 10-11, 22). While this division exists prominently, a second major division must be delineated as well, separating those stories featuring a sole creator god from those that feature a god/goddess pair as the focal and emanation points for creation. These motifs are discussed further on in greater detail, but it is critical to note that even when a god or goddess performs acts of creation, he or she may only set the initial chain in motion, before retreating into the background or exiting the story altogether.

Not all creation myths focus on the creation of the earth, assuming instead that the earth was pre-existing (Dixon 105). Furthermore, Austronesian myths do not often concern themselves with the creation of the universe at large, including the heavens or other celestial bodies, instead describing these elements as already existing from some undefined point in the past. Rather, the myths generally focus on the origin of specific clans of people, evidenced by the Australian myth featuring the bandicoot, provided in full later. In Australian myths especially, ancestors play an important role in the creation material, focusing on how the ancient ancestors left their original homeland to populate and create on the earth. Overall, instead of concentrating on the means by which the entire earth came into being, the Austronesian accounts often center on the creation of a given island or island chain, again concerning only one specific group of people and the land in their immediate possession or vicinity.
The title of this edition draws its name from several of the most prominent, impactful features of the Austronesian body of creation myths. The tale of the separation of Rangi and Papa, the sky god and earth goddess respectively, which culminates in the agony the pair feel in the aftermath, resonates even in a modern world prone to scoffing at any sort of mythological tale as irrelevant, or the remnant of a time long past. Despite the suffering felt by the pair, the separation is clearly inevitable; the pair become a part of the evolutionary process of life. As they bring forth offspring, who end up initially trapped between their bodies, they must assume new forms in order that their children may have a chance at survival. Myths of Rangi and Papa occur throughout the region, but most especially in New Zealand. However, the tradition of the entwined sky god and earth mother extends all the way into Micronesia, and Indonesia also has a tradition of a joined creator/creatrix pair named Makarom Manouwe and Makarom Mawakhu, representing the sky father and the earth mother respectively (Eliade, Patterns 51). Given the likely migratory routes into the area, the conjoined god/goddess travelled with the original settlers from the eastern coasts of Asia, including Indonesia, before dropping down into New Zealand, among other destinations.

Tangaroa, one of the names ascribed to a powerful male creator deity found throughout the region generally assumes the mantle of the paternal, omnipotent deity. This edition utilizes the name “Tangaroa” when referring to or describing the god in general terms as this is his most widespread designation, but will name him within the creation myths themselves according to how he was known in each area. While he often starts out heavily involved in the creation process and with the life he fashions, Tangaroa usually retreats to the heavens, transforming into a benevolent but remote god. Tangaroa
appears across much of the Austronesian region, found in some manifestation in nearly
every subdivision of the area, and especially widespread throughout the Society Islands
(Dixon 15). Samoan creation myths center almost exclusively on Tangaroa and his
exploits as the creator. His name varies depending on the region, and he is thus known as
Tangaroa in areas such as New Zealand, Tangaloa in Tonga, Ta’aroa in Tahiti and
Taroroa or Kanaloa in Hawaii. Despite the shift in name from region to region, the god’s
basic characteristics endure. Whether he works alone or in conjunction with other gods,
creation power centralizes in Tangaroa. Sometimes he actively creates, forming human
beings out of clay, while in other myths, he starts the creation process going, perhaps via
the willing sacrifice of his physical body, but does not actively intervene from that point
forward. He is commonly known as the god of the ocean, and occasionally as the god of
all fish. The changing characteristics of Tangaroa provide evidence of Christian
missionary influence on his role in the various pantheons of Austronesia, especially when
he becomes an angry paternal figure who punishes the first man and woman over an
undisclosed transgression. The interaction of missionaries and indigenous Austronesians
will be covered in more detail shortly.

In some cases, Tangaroa, Rangi and Papa may be extant within the same myth,
yet they do not form the cooperative triumvirates found in accounts of Tane and his
brothers, or Kane and his siblings. Conversely, this trio forms a complicated relationship
when existing side-by-side within the same creation story. Some Maori myths containing
Tangaroa place him as a child of Rangi and Papa, as well as the father of Maui the
trickster god (Leeming 183). A fragile balance forms a divide between Tangaroa as lead
or sole god, and Rangi and Papa as the creator/creatrix pair. When the two are combined,
conflict may result, evident in a New Zealand myth describing a battle between Tangaroa and Rangi over who will marry and mate with Papa. On the other hand, attempts may be made to blend the two traditions together, as is the case in describing Tangaroa as the son of Rangi and Papa. Finally, some myths depict Tangaroa displacing Rangi as the venerated, worshipped deity, possibly due to the sky deity being characterized as “exalted, but passive and remote”, where the newer god, who may be the son of the sky god, proves more “dynamic and dramatic” (Eliade 51).

The final reference in the title underscores the importance of water to the stories of creation found in this region. Specifically, these peoples often envisioned a vast world ocean, sometimes in place from time immemorial, in other instances depicted as having swallowed up the world of the original creation, leaving behind only a never-ending blue canvas upon which the gods could attempt to build anew. This theme extends into Japan as well, in an account of the descent of the god and goddess pair Izangi and Izanami. The myth describes the rainbow as the Floating Bridge of Heaven. This bridge divides the earth, named the Central Land of the Reed Plain from the High Plain of Heaven, where the sky deities make their home. The creator pair Izanagi and Izanami descend and build a home beneath the Floating Bridge of Heaven on the primordial ocean (Stookey 158). Even when the water does not exist as a memorial to the destruction of a previously created world, it is nonetheless ever present, with only the island or islands featured in the myth standing alone on the ocean.

For many of the island nations described here, their geographic placement may well have led to the notion that all else was water. Alternatively, Mircea Eliade provides this explanation for the primacy of the waters found in myths throughout the world,
“They precede every form and support every creation” (The Sacred 130). Without the existence of water, the furtherance of life of any kind cannot proceed. Although water does not ultimately play a lasting and significant role in the biblical accounts of creation, it is still presented as the most crucial element to human life. After the creation of light, the biblical god’s next act is first to separate the fresh water from salt water, then to form dry land and the sea. While Genesis provides a peaceful separation of the waters, tucked away in the Book of Job is an account of the biblical god having to first subdue the primal waters, evidenced in the following line spoken by God to Job: “Who supported the sea at its birth, when it burst in flood from the womb...when I established its bounds, set its barred doors in place, and said “Thus far may you come but no farther; here your surging waves must halt?” (38.8-11). These lines testify to the strength of the waters as an image of power and timelessness, in that they precede the biblical god and must be forced to submit to his will.

The Austronesian corpus of creation mythology provides two diverging explanations for the great flood, whether the event happens within a given myth, or is described as having taken place at some previous point. The first presents the flood as a cycle of nature, and while the results are devastating, no malignant intent lies behind the surging of the floodwaters. Joseph Campbell describes this type of explanation for the flood as typical of Eastern, non-European tradition, whereby the flood becomes a process lying beyond the anger and whims of the gods (Myths 74). Furthermore, the destruction wrought by the flood transcends definition solely as a cataclysm. Rather, the destruction of land sets up a period of “temporary reintegration” (Eliade, Patterns 22) wherein lies the promise of rebirth once more.
The second type of myth recounting the great deluge depicts it as a punishment wrought upon the world for the transgressions of its human inhabitants. Austronesian creation mythology features both traditions. In some instances, the god Tangaroa brings forth a worldwide flood as punishment for a transgression not specifically described. Given the migration pattern into Polynesia and the surrounding areas from the Asian mainland, the eastern variation would be the expected norm. The appearance of the flood as an instrument of punishment, characteristic of Western mythology, is most likely the influence of Christian missionaries, rather than being indigenous to the region. The predominant appearance of the world ocean falls within the context of relative peace and calm; the flood waters swallowed the original world, but without indication of strife or pain. Furthermore, the myths featuring the flood as punishment share striking similarities to the account found in Genesis, especially within the Hawaiian material. Several versions of this type of myth appear within the upcoming pages.

As was touched on briefly in the section dealing with the recurrence of the flood motif, a study of Austronesian creation material must include a discussion of the impact of contact with the Western world, especially missionaries, and the impact such encounters had on indigenous stories. The period from the 1760s to the 1840s saw explorers making their way into the Pacific island system (Moorehead xiii), bringing with them Christianity coupled with a frequent sense that the islanders they encountered were both savage and unintelligent. Furthermore, the pagan beliefs of indigenous peoples were banned entirely by missionaries, making the recovery of native myths all the more problematical. Before this point, contact with Europeans occurred, but for limited periods of time, as opposed to a sustained integration. As an example, James Cook visited Tahiti
in 1769, but stayed only three months (Stimson xxxviii, 3). However, excursions such as this one paved the way for more protracted contact, including an influx of missionaries into the region.

The purpose in outlining the actions of missionaries throughout the region lies not in simply vilifying the group as a whole. Certainly, many missionaries came to the area with the best of intentions, and indeed, some of the myths recounted here were preserved only by the diligent work of these men and women. As an example, the Wesleyan Methodist and Roman Catholic churches working in Tonga published old stories in the Tongan language in magazines, thereby preserving them (Gifford 5). Richard Taylor sought to preserve the myths of the Maori in much the same way, publishing his book *Te Ika A Maui* while in the New Zealand area for the Church Missionary Society. Ironically, in certain instances the missionaries preserving the original creation myths of these peoples showed utter contempt for the material recorded, commenting on the "savage" and unenlightened nature of the stories, while at the same time acting as agents of preservation.

However, despite the best of intentions on the part of some missionaries, they nonetheless brought differing systems of values and theological ideals to the region, in many cases forever altering the patterns of original myths. In the worst of cases, indigenous peoples of the Pacific found their cultures entirely sublimated to Christian teachings to the point where they not only lost the legacy of their own stories, but tragically, came to believe that their previous lives were shameful and sinful. The Christianization of Tahiti provides a prime example of such a calamity. In 1795, just prior to James Cook’s visit to the island, the London Missionary Society formed, and
immediately honed in on both Tahiti and the Polynesian area in general to begin conversion efforts. At the onset of their mission, the London Missionary Society claimed their aim was to “reclaim the pagans for Christianity.” Furthermore, they displayed little interest in native Tahitian rites and customs, and in fact sought to eliminate them altogether in favor of Christian ones. Within two decades, they fulfilled their goals, and by 1820, Russian navigator Baron Thaddeus Bellingshausen commented that Bibles printed in Tahitian were distributed on the island (Moorehead 79, 80-83).

Whether ill-intentioned or not, the missionary influence began to dominate and transform the creation stories of Austronesia. Furthermore, missionary activities sometimes led to the emergence of entirely new myth cycles centered on a Christ-like messianic figure acting as a liberator, coupled with a belief that ships would appear, providing food and eliminating the need for labor. Those peoples who adopted this belief system often stopped producing their own goods entirely (McKenzie 146), leaving them in a state of suspension, waiting for divine intervention to free them from Western encroachment, while at the same time rendered utterly dependent upon the goods they brought with them. Frank Stimson eloquently states one final negative fallout of the introduction of Christianity: “It is lucky we have any of these stories at all—in the aftermath of Christianization, little was left, save for fragments of the creation chants, robbed sometimes of full understanding by those who still memorize them” (xv). Although he refers to the Polynesian region, his statement applies to all areas visited by missionaries.

The final difficulty when approaching the relationship between missionaries and indigenous peoples lies in trying to separate what material may be original to a given
region, and what changed as a result of contact. Given the appearance of nearly world-
wide mythic motifs, the flood or world ocean serving as a prime example, not every
similarity between Austronesian myth and the Bible can immediately be decried as
missionary infiltration, or instances where native peoples borrowed aspects of Christian
teaching relevant to and easily assimilated into their pre-existing stories. Other parallels
prove harder to explain as mere coincidences. A number of Hawaiian myths feature an
Eden-like garden inhabited by the first male and female. After either an undisclosed
transgression, or the consumption of a forbidden fruit one or more gods expel them from
this paradise. The question becomes one of how to best approach those creation myths
which appear to be undeniably influenced by biblical stories. As evidenced especially by
the fragmentary myths of Easter Island, old beliefs end up systematically lost, with
significant details missing, or with Christian material hopelessly conflated with native
myth. Alan Dundes suggests that “the religious amalgam commonly reflects the native
wish that the dominant ruling Europeans be eliminated, leaving the desirable foreign
materials...solely in the natives’ possession” (241). Simply put, he posits that indigenous
peoples wish to benefit from the advantages brought by European travelers, namely new
technologies and access to supplies, without oppression, religious or otherwise.
Additionally, the blending of native myths with Christian material may serve as an act of
defiance through the refusal to give up completely native beliefs. This becomes
problematical, though, in that especially in Polynesia, the native religions were
successfully usurped, with the islanders coming to believe their original systems of
worship were every bit as ungodly and “savage” as the missionaries often proclaimed.
Further missionary reactions to indigenous religions and culture are located in the

15
sections covering Hawaii and Australia. At the very least, the reader should acknowledge those places where the Austronesian myths appear influenced by Christianity, thereby gaining a sense of how myths change with the coming of outsiders, as well as observing which elements were original to the given island, and which resonate with themes widespread throughout the region.

Before moving forward to a presentation of the creation myths themselves, a few words should be said regarding the composition of this edition of Austronesian creation mythology, which provides as many versions of stories for each region as possible, rather than simply one or two, allowing for a fuller picture of the richness and depth of the material. Although some stories are nearly identical to one other, others are either completely different in tone and theme, or provide shades of detail omitted in others. Variation and oral tradition are thus intrinsically bound to one another. For those myths which retain a core of similarity, but vary as to the inclusion and exclusion of various details, Elizabeth and Paul Barber point out, “When important cultural information is being transmitted, one is not allowed to tamper with the key information” (11). Instead, liberty is taken with non-critical details, which can then be expanded or contracted to fit the inclinations of the storyteller. With regards to the transmission of Austronesian stories, including not just creation myths, but also folk stories, legends, and other tales, Frank Stimson points out that islanders passed them down through the generations, and also from island to island, where the stories evolved over time, and “so could differing themes be given a familiar local twist” (xv).

Although the myths found herein are marked by a similarity of themes pointing to stories carried by settlers as they moved through the region, a note of caution must be
given regarding actual influence of one culture over another versus more general similarities which do not result from contact, or from migration from one area to another. For example, Australians and Egyptians both mummified their dead, but clearly not as a result of direct contact but rather, flesh inevitably rots, and the process of mummification provides one way of dealing with this unpleasant, and potentially unsanitary, fact (Barber 163). Another instance of shared cultural similarities which may not result from direct influence concerns two deities centered around volcanoes. In the Philippines, the Aeta people call Mount Pinatubo Apo Mamalyari, which translates to Father Creator. The volcano’s capability to erupt punishes the people when they anger the god (Stookey 161). The Hawaiian goddess Pele also wields the power of the volcano, causing it to rain down fire and lava when the people anger her. Although both gods utilize the power of the volcano in similar manners, the reasons behind the similarities relate to the need to explain the incredible and destructive nature of the volcano at a time when there was no way to predict when an eruption was imminent, as opposed to cultural transmission.

Finally, attention must focus on the issues of language and translation. This edition relies upon translations of the original source material, which varies depending on the source from firsthand transcriptions of myths as given by a member of the community, to transcriptions further removed as found in collections of world mythology. Yet even in those instances of direct translation, the problem of language remains. The chance always exists for errors in translation, whether from lack of full fluency in the original language, or the difficulty arising from translating into English those concepts and metaphors which may have no direct correlative. By providing variant versions of these myths wherever possible, this edition mitigates the problem of error in
translation by examining changes occurring from source to source. In those instances where the translation of the myths appears most problematical, the explication following the myth provides detail into potential problems. In most instances, such problems arise with regards to gendered word choice, as in selecting a phrase such as “man was created,” yet not specifying whether or not the referent is male, or includes males and females. The primary goal of this edition, then, even with acknowledgment of the problematic nature of working in translation is to both acquaint the reader with the various creation myths of Austronesia, and to provide analysis of the themes and events found therein, an area given little scholarly attention to the corpus of myths as a whole.

The myths are organized first by main region, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Australia, and then by specific island, island chain, or tribe in alphabetical order where relevant. Double-spacing separates the myths of each island or chain within the larger region. In those instances where island groups are subdivided into smaller groupings within the larger headings, the name of the main grouping is provided first, followed by individual islands. The Table of Contents provides these hierarchical relationships to provide ease of accessibility. The myths are given brief titles describing their main motifs, or the means of creation depicted therein, but such titles are not part of the initial myths. In those few instances where the creation myths are so fragmentary as to not warrant a separate heading, they are nonetheless detailed under the appropriate regional heading. The myths themselves have been collected from a wide variety of sources, from the brilliant study of the region completed by Roland Dixon, to accounts of the first missionaries into various parts of Austronesia, to a multitude of compendiums of mythological material, and great care has been taken to ensure that the critical details of
the myths did not end up altered in the retelling process, as each collection already features a retelling of a myth from its original language into English. Rather than taking many disparate accounts of a myth and conflating them together, the versions are presented separately. In this way, the idea of variation as it relates to myth plays out in these pages. The myths are recounted in the present tense to retain their sense of immediacy and relevance. Commentary is interspersed throughout the text, providing explanations and insights where necessary into the events of a given creation myth, as well as any relevant historical detail.

Readers encountering these stories for the first time will discover a richness of vision and eloquence in how the various people of Austronesia conceived of the creation of the world, and of their place in it. Admittedly, some of the myths are difficult to follow, resulting from their survival only in small fragments devoid of a larger context. Although only those myths dealing with themes of origin are included here, the remaining body of Austronesian stories, from folk tales, to legends, to other types of myths, proves every bit as vivid and varied, displaying an exquisite storytelling ability which often goes unappreciated. Nonetheless, this edition concerns itself with beginnings, with in turn shape worldview, providing insight into the values, hopes, and fears of the Austronesian peoples. The myths recounted in the following pages may be funny, strange, fragmentary, tragic, or powerful, yet all are critical in gaining a better understanding of these islands and the intriguing people who call them home.
CHAPTER 2

MELANESIA

This island group lies south of the Micronesian islands, inclusive of New Guinea and its surrounding islands, the Admiralty Group, New Caledonia and Fiji. Melanesia is bordered on the east by Indonesia and the southern Philippine Islands, and on the west by Polynesia.

Common themes found in this region's creation mythology related to water are the releasing of the sea or the setting of land upon the great world ocean, usually through the act of fishing. Further, these myth focus almost exclusively on the clan, narrowing in on localized knowledge rather than larger concerns. The Trobrianders\(^1\) express this focus on the clan eloquently in their story of the Ancestress. Each clan has its own Ancestress, who emerges along with her brother at a given sacred site, such as a grove or a rock. She serves as the origination point for the clan, without addressing how other groups in the region came to be. For those myths which do not involve the fishing as the means by which land is placed on the surface of the water, the stories center on the first beings descending down to this earth from an identical world in the sky. The Massim, inhabiting the northern region, are unique in that their creation mythology focuses on

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\(^1\) Bronislaw Malinowski wrote extensively about the Trobrianders in his book *Argonauts of the West Pacific* from 1922.

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humans emerging into our world from an identical one underground (Poignant 87, 90),
without the interference or assistance of a deity.

The First Beings

Across the Melanesian island chain, a common theme expressed in the creation
mythology is the idea that the world always existed, populated at first by ancient, first
beings who may play a role in creating other islands. Further, these beings may release
the waters of the sea, or move the sky upwards off of the earth, echoing patterns found
throughout Austronesia. The Dobuan people call these ancient beings Kasa Sona, and
describe them as being born at the same time as the sun, moon, and earth. The Keraki
Papuans refer to the first ones as Gainjin, or larger than life. There are varied accounts of
how the first beings create the islands. The Iatmul of the Sepik river tell of how the land
was created when one of the ancient beings set his foot in the mud. The Buka speak of a
male and a female being paddling in a boat. When he steers, the shoreline comes out
straight. When she steers, it is crooked, or pushed inwards. The Kiwai instead describe
how Nuga the crocodile created the rivers with the lashing of his tail (Poignant 88),
giving the first being an animal form, rather than either human, or unrecognizable,
unknowable forms.

ADMIRALITY ISLANDS

The Serpent

In the beginning, the sea covers everything. A giant serpent roams the waters,
desiring to have land so that it may have somewhere to rest. The serpent thus calls out for
the reef to rise above the waterline to become dry land (Dixon 105).
This account diverges from many others found in Austronesia describing a bird, usually the sacred bird of Tangaroa, searching for dry land upon which to rest. Given that the serpent’s voice contains the power of creation, it may well be an expression of the idea of the first being taking animal form.

The Receding Waters

A man and a woman float on the great world ocean on a piece of driftwood, wondering to each other if the waters will ever recede. Eventually, the waters do recede, revealing land devoid of all other life. The couple plant trees, and create foods of different types.

The island chain also has a myth recounting how Manuai shapes the first woman from a tree trunk, then makes her his wife (Dixon 105, 106). The nature of Manuai remains unclear, but given his ability to fashion life from inert matter, the logical deduction is that he is some sort of a deity. He does not appear elsewhere in any of the other creation myths, leading to the conclusion that Manuai developed as a figure worshipped only locally, who perhaps ceded primacy to other gods in the Melanesian area.

This is furthermore a fragmentary myth missing specific detail into how the man and woman create a wide variety of foodstuffs, as well as how they manage to plant the trees, thereby leaving unclear their true nature; they may be truly human, having come into existence in an account no longer in existence, or they may be first beings. The story also features an evolutionary depiction of creation. The waters recede, allowing for the male and female to commence agricultural activities, but they do not reveal land at the
behest or command of any deity, or the first pair. Instead, the recession of the waters happens as a result of a natural process, a cycle exempt from the will of any divine force.

Hi-asa

A woman named Hi-asa lives alone. One day, she cuts her finger while shaving wood into strips. She puts the blood into a mussel shell, which she covers and sets aside. She looks into the shell eleven days later, discovering two eggs. She covers them again, and after several more days, a man and a woman hatch from the eggs. This pair become the creators of the human race (Dixon 109).

The character Hi-asa featured here is emblematic of many of the Austronesian creation myths which feature the creating behavior of a being at once described as human, but through his or her actions, clearly represents a god, or demi-god. The myth explicitly differentiates between the woman Hi-asa, who has no mate of her own, and the resulting humans hatching from the eggs, who gain the designation of the parents of humanity.

Additionally, The Admiralty Islands have two versions of the creation of humans featuring animals as the impetus behind the act. In the first, a dove bears two offspring, one bird and one human. The human male has incestual relations with his mother, thus producing the human race. In the second, a tortoise lays ten eggs, which result in eight tortoises and two humans, one male and one female. They marry, creating both dark and light-skinned people (Dixon 109). The New Britain myths recounting the coconut wives also differentiate between those of dark skin, and those of lighter skin, emphasizing the class differences between them, with lighter skin being the favored coloring.
Maui and His Brothers

The world below is all ocean. The only land that exists lies above, where the gods dwell. Day and night do not exist, but everything is bathed in a constant state of light, like that produced by the moon’s rays diffused through the clouds. The gods name their dwelling Bulotu, where Maui is the greatest of them all. He lives with his three brothers, one of whom is Tangaloa, although there are many other gods living in Bulotu as well. They all drink the Water of Life, which prevents all illnesses and death.

Maui tires of this idyllic life, as none of them really do anything, so he grabs his canoe and sails far away from Bulotu. Once he covers some distance, he orders his crew to bring the ship to a halt. He takes a great fish hook and throws it out into the sea. He soon catches hold of something massive, and with the help of his crew, Maui eventually brings up the catch: a land comprised of seven mountains with valleys in between, and areas of flatlands. Those with Maui complain that the mountains are too high, so he stomps all but three flat. Maui names the new land Ata.

Maui and his crew sail away to a new place, and again Maui fishes. This time, he brings up Tonga. As he treads across the new land, it springs to life, bringing forth plants and foods. Next, Maui fishes up Haabai, Vauvau, Niua and their neighbors. No one knows for certain whether Maui brought up Samoa at this point, or after he first returns to Bulotu, and it may actually have been Tangaloa who fished up Papa-langi.

Unfortunately, one of Maui’s sons and some other renegade gods take Maui’s canoe and sail back toward Ata. This action will bring death into the world. The gods decide to stay on Tonga, reveling in its abundance. One day, however, two of the gods...
die. From that moment on, they realize they can sicken and die, and people die as well (Fison 139-141).

Lorimer Fison’s primary source for all of the material found in his book, as well as the creation myths here, was Taliai-tupuu, the King of Lakemba (v). This myth provides an example of Maui-as-Creator, rather than assuming his normal role of the trickster god. Given Fiji’s proximity to New Zealand, one of the centers for Maui tales, his appearance as a figure of importance follows. The Maui found here is devoid of any mischief making at all, which he generally finds the time for. He functions solely as a creator, and it is his fellow gods whose actions bring death into the world through their rebellion, although the reasoning behind their decision to return to Ata remains unclear. The manner in which their abandonment of Maui plays out suggests that any reasons they felt they had are irrelevant, and they had no right to commit such a transgression against Maui. As a commentary on the importance of the clan, the myth decries the actions of those who would abandon their leader, thus forsaking the cornerstone of their community.

Although this tale originates in Fiji, the first island it mentions as brought up from the deep is Tonga, providing further proof that Tongans settling into Fiji influenced the mythology. A delightful feature found here centers on the uncertainty on the part of the storyteller as to when Maui brought up Samoa, and whether or not Tangaloa stepped in to do some fishing of his own. Tangaloa’s brief mention speaks to his influence throughout the Austronesian region as a powerful deity, and for the Fijians, he eventually assumes the role of the sky father (Fison 160). Rather than setting forth an ironclad account of the creation of the islands, this myth instead acknowledges the limited range of human
experience; no humans existed back when the island fishing went on, so no one can be
relied upon to provide a completely accurate account.

The Creation of Human Beings

The gods living on Tonga had no slaves. One day, a sandpiper went searching for
food, and unearthed worms in the mud. They were repulsive, slimy, and foul-smelling.
The bird leaves them on the surface, where the sun beats down on them. After a few days,
they grow into men, becoming slaves to the gods living in Tonga. These slaves do not
have souls: they cease to exist after death. Tongans did not come about in this way, from
the earth, but are children of the gods. Thus, they are superior to everyone else, including
white men, who originated from the earth (Fison 161).

Tongan influence permeates this myth; it is nearly identical to a Tongan creation
myth dealing with the origin of human beings. The Fijians embellish the original story,
pointing out the difference between Tongans and everyone else, as well as equating
themselves with soulless slaves. That the Tongan influence infiltrated Fijian mythic
material suggests these newcomers presented a powerful new addition to the island,
further evidenced by the Fijians themselves assuming the roles of slaves.

The Heroes

The Heroes are responsible for the creation of the islands. They dropped
mountains, which became the islands. Then, they pushed the new lands apart to create
channels between them (Poignant 88).

The Heroes serve much the same function as the first beings found in other parts
of the Melanesian chain. Their true essence remains obscured, yet their designation as
heroes separates them from human beings. Instead of utilizing their will or voices to shape the lands, they create through the work of their hands, a more natural process.

A brief Fijian myth describes a bird laying two eggs, which are hatched by the serpent Ndengei. A boy hatches from one egg, a girl from the other (Dixon 109). Humans hatching from eggs and a serpent playing some role in creation both appear elsewhere in Melanesia, conflated here into one account.

NEW BRITAIN

The Coconut Wives

A being draws figures of two men on the ground. He then cuts himself and sprinkles the images with blood, then covers them with leaves. The figures come to life, To-Kabinana and To-Karvuvu. To-Kabinana climbs a coconut tree and flings two of its unripe, light yellow nuts to the ground. The nuts burst open, changing into two women. He takes both as his wives. To-Karvuvu asks his brother how he made the women, and To-Kabinana shares the story. To-Karvuvu goes up into the coconut tree and flings down two nuts, but their undersides struck the ground. The women emerging from the nuts thus had ugly, smashed in noses. To-Karvuvu becomes jealous of his brother, and takes one of To-Kabinana’s own wives, abandoning both of his own (Dixon 107).

A detailed description of the initial creator god does not figure at all here. He follows the pattern of the retreating sky god, leaving behind as primary characters the colorful brothers, who assume the mantle of creator gods. Further, To-Karvuvu assumes the role of the trickster, mirroring other accounts where the trickster figure attempts to create, but some how ends up bungling the task. A Philippine account resonates strongly...
with this myth, as both trickster figures specifically disfigure the noses of their new creations. The focus on the abandonment of To-Karvuvu’s original, disfigured wives demarcates the point at which the trickster oversteps the proper bounds of society, as he fails to live up to the duty to family, instead acting out of reckless selfishness.

The Coconut Wives (b)

To-Kabinana asks To-Karvuvu to fetch two light-colored coconuts, hide one, and bring the other back to him. Instead, To-Karvuvu fetches one light one and one dark one, hides the dark and brings the light one back to his brother. To-Kabinana ties the coconut to the stem of his canoe and paddles out to sea, ignoring the coconut. After a time, it turns into a lovely woman who steers the canoe while To-Kabinana paddles.

To Karvuvu wants this woman as his own wife, but his brother will not agree. Rather, he tells To-Karvuvu to fetch the hidden coconut so they may make another woman. He is upset over the dark coconut, which becomes a dark-skinned woman.

To-Kabinana tells his brother that this act brought death into the world. If everyone were light-skinned, there would be immortality for all. (Dixon 108).

The story makes no mention of the creation of the brothers. Additionally, the powers of creation given to them here increased over those found in the first version. Rather than simply dropping coconuts from which women then emerged, in this instance, the coconuts transform into women while in the presence of To-Kabinana. To-Karvuvu’s role as the trickster darkens, for here his actions involve more than the accidental disfiguring of his wives and stealing one of his brother’s women. The fallout of To-Karvuvu’s inability to follow his brother’s directions results in the introduction of death.
into the world. The myth provides a disturbing glimpse into social strata as well, in the depiction of fairer skin as an ideal appearance.

Sugarcane

Two men fish at night. A piece of sugar cane gets entangled in their netting. They untangle and discard it, but it gets caught again. They again untangle it and rid themselves of it, but it comes back a third time. At this point, the pair decide to plant the troublesome piece of sugar cane. The sugar cane grows, swelling until it bursts open and a woman emerges. The men were out when this happened, so they did not see the woman come out and are thus surprised to find their food prepared. The woman, meanwhile, returns to the stalk. This happens again and again over the next few days, so the men decide to see what has been going on. They see the woman leave the sugar cane stalk, and grab hold of her (Dixon 110).

One fascinating aspect of Austronesian creation material lies in how the stories change either over large areas, or even within relatively small areas or tribes. The details of particular stories meld, forming and reforming and in the process, adding new dimensions with each variant telling. Depending on the area, the two human fisher men featured here may be the brothers To-Kobinana and To-Karvuvu, both of whom appear to be more divine than human. Additionally, the woman who emerges from either a coconut or sugarcane stalk sometimes marries one of the brothers and through this union, humans are created.
NEW HEBRIDES

Takaro

Takaro makes ten men out of mud. He breathes life onto every part of them, from their eyes to their feet. Takaro is not happy, so he sends the men to light a fire and cook. Afterwards, Takaro orders the men to stand still, then throws a fruit at one of the men, who then transforms into a woman. Takaro orders the woman to wait alone in the house. He sends in one of the remaining men into the house to ask the woman for fire. The woman greets this first man as an elder-brother. Takaro sends another man to ask for water, who the woman greets as a younger brother. The woman greets each of the men Takaro sends in this fashion, as male members of her family, save for the last one, who she welcomes as husband. Takaro declares they are to be husband and wife (Dixon 107).

This myth reinforces the importance of genealogy, and establishes the rite of marriage. By naming her male relatives one by one, the first female stresses the importance of the extended family, especially the men. Furthermore, Takaro pronounces the woman and the man she welcomes as husband to be married, thereby providing the social institution of marriage with divine approval.

Similar to the tradition of Rangi and Papa as the entwined god and goddess, the people of the New Hebrides have a myth depicting the sky resting upon the earth. However, the myth does not specifically describe the sky and earth as a god and goddess (Dixon 36). This matches with accounts of Maui pushing the sky up off of the earth, either as a result of the former falling down, or to finally allow people room to stand up. Furthermore, an evolutionary pattern of creation, whereby everything comes to being in
ordered stages, does not require the presence of any deity at all, thus making the separation of earth from sky yet one more link in the logical progression of life.

NEW BRITAIN AND NEW HEBRIDES

One creation myth in this region deals with recounts the tale of the brothers To-Kabinana and To-Karvuvu, who fish up land from the bottom of the ocean (Dixon 105). Details are few beyond this broad account of the emergence of land, but the brothers gain more power here as they actively set lands in place, where previous stories kept their actions limited to the emergence of the first woman. Again, the nature of the pair remains murky, yet they are likely divine. Variants of this myth characterize the fisher as being a god, usually Maui or Tangaroa working alone.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The Mirror World

A mirror to this world existed in the sky first. No one inhabited the earth we know. The being Tumbrenjak climbed down to our earth to hunt and fish. He cannot return to the mirror world because the rope he used to climb down was cut. This separates him from his wife, and the pair grieves the loss. Tumbrenjak sees no choice but to start over again, and builds a house. His wife tosses down fire, then vegetables, including four cucumbers. These cucumbers turn into four women, who Tumbrenjak takes as wives. Their offspring are the origin of the different tribes.

The ancient pair grieving over their separation is more pronounced here than in other versions of this story, making it more reminiscent of the grief endured by Rangi and
Papa (Poignant 89). As with tales of Rangi and Papa, the separation serves as a necessary step in the ordered progression of creation. Tumbrenjak’s exile from the mirror world allows for the population of our own.

KERAKI and KUKUKUKU PAPUANS

These peoples inhabit the southwestern coast of Papua New Guinea.

The Keraki Papuans describe the Gaijin as possibly descending from a mirror world as well. At the very least, these first beings return to that world after creating this earth. Two Gaijin remain behind by choice: Bugal the snake and Warger the Crocodile. They also have a story of Kambel, one of the Gaijin who dwell in the sky. One day, he hears sounds emanating from a palm tree, but cannot understand them. He cuts down the tree, and people emerge.

The Kukukuku tell of two brothers who kill a possum, tossing its bones into a stream. Over time, the bones grow into a man, then the man turns into a tree. A bird takes up residence in the tree and sings. The brothers return, this time cutting down the tree from which all the different clans emerge singing (Poignant 89-90).

SOLOMON ISLANDS

A stalk of sugar cane begins to sprout two knots. Eventually, the sugar cane stalk bursts open below the two knots. A man emerges from one knot, a woman from the other. This pair brings forth the human race (Dixon 110).

This story is analogous to other myths of hatching, and of the emergence of the first humans from plants like the Peopling Vine.
VANUATU

The Vanuatu island system includes the Banks and Torres Islands. Specifically, the region lies to the northeast of New Caldonia, and to the northwest of Fiji. The material associated with this region often focuses on the creator god Barkulkul and his two brothers, who came down to earth by sliding down a coconut palm tree. Upon arriving on earth, they create the sea (McKenzie 150). This myth diverges from much of the Austronesian material in that it specifies the creation of the ocean, as opposed to the majority of myths which presuppose an all-encompassing world ocean, either always in existence or resulting from the great deluge.

BANKS ISLANDS

Qat creates three men and three women from the wood of the dracaena tree. After completing them, he hides the figures for three days. After this period of time expires, he dances before the figures, and they begin to move as well. He beats his drum for them, and their movements increase. Eventually, they all come to life. Qat then divides them into three pairs of husbands and wives.

Marawa, jealous and mean-spirited, makes his own figures out of another type of wood, as he wants to do as Qat was able to do. When Marawa’s figures move, he buries them in a pit lined with coconut tree fronds, and leaves them for seven days. When he finally digs them back up again, they are all dead and rotted. This is how death comes into the world.
A second version of this myth describes Qat creating man out of red clay, but the first woman out of twigs covered by sago palm (Dixon 106, 107). This myth bears striking similarities to the following creation myth of Melu, from Mindanao Island, the southernmost island of the Philippines. Although the Philippines lies outside of the Melanesian boundaries, the following myth shares similarities too similar to the preceding to be ignored.

Melu the Creator

Melu exists at the beginning of all things, and he is indescribably huge, to the extent that he takes up all the available space above the clouds. He has gold teeth, and a body of pure white. Concerned with retaining his white color, Melu constantly rubs his skin. The earth is created from the sloughed off skin. In addition, Melu makes humans in his likeness from more of this discarded skin.

While Melu busies himself with shaping human beings from his skin, Tau Dalom Tana interrupts and asks permission to form the noses. Melu agrees, as he had not yet finished the noses. It is also said that there was one more part on either the male or female which was also not complete. In any event, Tau Dalom Tana forms the noses, but places them upside down on the new human beings, causing them to nearly die out from drowning: rainwater pours down their heads directly into their nasal cavities. Melu steps in and fixes this problem (Von Over 390-391).

Tau Dalom Tana plays the role of the trickster here, meddling in the act of creation, and fouling it up in the process. The account of his misdeeds bears similarities to the unsatisfactory creation of the dark coconut wives, as well as Marawa’s actions. In each case, the trickster figure fails to follow directions, or displays an appalling lack of
common sense with regards to anatomy. Although the actions of the trickster may result simply in an error fixed by a more powerful deity, they may also have darker consequences, as evidenced by Marawa’s introduction of death into the world.

Given the migratory patterns of peoples into the Melanesian areas as having originated along the Asian mainland, it follows that influence from the Philippines travelled with these people as well, given its close proximity to the region. Both stories feature the intervention of a trickster in the matters of creation, where he clearly does not belong. The trickster botches the formation of man. Finally, this myth ties back in to the Melanesian myths depicting the coconut wives.

TORRES STRAITS – EASTERN ISLANDERS

A brief myth describes how a bird lays an egg from which a maggot hatches. The maggot then transforms into a human being (Dixon 109). The similarities to the myths of Tuli and the Peopling Vine are too strong to ignore, both of which are common thematic elements of Samoan myth. Emigrants moving through Melanesia could travel in nearly a straight line from the Torres Straits into Samoa, suggesting that the elements of both a sacred bird and humans evolving from maggots had their start here.

Apparently, only men emerge from the tree. Women are described as journeying up from the lower valley to investigate the source of the singing, whereupon they become brides of the newly emerged males. The brothers name all of the pairs.

Although brief, these myths provide a wider understanding of the variation in material found on one island. Further, both are variants on the theme of humans emerging

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in some way from a tree. The brothers are akin to the first beings found throughout this region.
CHAPTER 3

MICRONESIA

EASTERN ISLANDS, INCLUDING THE GILBERT ISLANDS, OCEAN
ISLAND AND NAURU ISLAND

Creation by Ancient Spider and Young Spider

Ancient spider shapes the earth out of a Tridacna shell, or by climbing into a hollow rock stuck to the earth. Once creation ends, the earth and the sky still require separation from one another. Riiki the eel or Rigi the worm step in to fulfill this task.

Ancient Spider and Young Spider are known by a variety of names. These include Nareau and Naareau, Narleau, Na-arean, and Areop-enayp. Various myths may depict Ancient Spider already existing in the void of nothingness, or instead feature a series of creation events along the lines of other "evolutionary" style creation stories found throughout the Polynesian region. In these latter myths of succession, Young Spider picks up where Ancient Spider leaves off, continuing the act of creation (Poignant 71-72).

Another version of the same story depicts Areop-enayp, the Ancient Spider, floating in the space above the great sea. He finds the Tridacna shell, and tries to find an opening in it so he can crawl inside, but he cannot find one. He finally manages to open the shell, but finds everything in darkness, as there is no sun or moon (Dixon 249-250). This version goes on to provide an account for the coming of light into the world, picking up a common Austronesian theme stressing the existence of darkness before light, but without the lack of light necessarily denoting a state of evil or chaos.
MARIANA ISLANDS

Creation Myth of the Chamorro People

Before his death, Puntan instructs his sister to use his body to create a home for humans. She does as he requests, using Puntan’s breast and back to form the earth and sky. One of Puntan’s eyes becomes the moon, the other the sun. His eyebrows form the rainbow (Poignant 71).

As with the story of Pan Ku and the world egg version of Tangaroa as creator, Puntan, too, creates elements of the universe from the remnants of his body. As with Pan Ku, Puntan dies, rather than giving up his body in an act of self-sacrifice. This myth also includes a female counterpart as the distributor of Puntan’s body, rather than the god either deciding on his own how his body will be dispersed, as in the case with Tangaloa, or the dissemination occurring without any active will of the deity, as with Pan Ku.

Although Puntan was recognized as the primal male creating force, the people did not actually worship him. Both Puntan and his sister sprung into being under unexplained circumstances, in the same manner as other primordial beings. Inevitably a beginning point must be chosen, usually this means that the initial creator or creatrix simply appears, or has already come to being prior to the events of the creation myth.

Most of the residents of western Micronesia further believed that the sky and earth always existed, but required some action to be rendered habitable (Poignant 71), as happens in this myth. This attitude falls in line with the general sentiment found in Austronesia that some aspects of creation, whether just the primordial ocean, or perhaps the heavens, earth, or other components of the universe as well, existed from the start of time. Furthermore, many of the myths of Austronesia narrow their focus, sometimes
dealing only with the creation of a given island, or the origins of its people, as opposed to a wider explanation for the creation of the universe at large.

The use of the word “breasts” with regards to the male Puntan at first appears to be a translation error for “chest,” but a closer look reveals the need to leave the term as it is. Many creation myths, especially those that are patriarchal or become patriarchal, feature male gods possessing the ability to give birth. With Puntan the association with breasts, and thus the associations with nursing and nourishing, follows, as it is out of his body that the earth comes about. Puntan’s sister merely follows instructions in setting things in order.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

Lowa

Lowa exists alone in a world containing nothing except water. He hums, and islands emerge from the great body of water. He hums a second time, and plants and animals come forth. Lowa next fashions four gods, one for each of the four directions, plus a seagull-like god to circle the sky. Finally, Lowa creates man. This man takes all of the islands and places them in a basket, then dispenses them out of the basket again, trying to place them in the proper order (Leeming 185).

Lowa assumes the role of the sole male creating force in this myth, although he does not appear elsewhere in the Austronesian creation myth cycle. He may be a localized adaptation of the Tangaroa figure. Finally, this story provides a humorous explanation for the ordering of the Marshall Islands.
Maui the Trickster

Tangaroi fathers a son named Maui with a mortal woman. Maui is a braggart, but is also handsome and charming.

During this time, the sky lies too low, resting upon the earth. Maui comes upon a girl attempting to push up the sky out of frustration. She tries to do her chores, but it is too difficult to move about. Maui brags to her that he can move the sky, and shows off to her with various feats of strength. He offers the girl this bargain: he will push the sky out of the way in exchange for sexual favors. She agrees, and Maui succeeds in separating earth and sky. However, Maui is too egotistical in his handling of this situation, which proves to be the start of his downfall (Bierlein 111).

Centers for stories featuring Maui include New Zealand, Hawaii and Tahiti, with Maui sometimes figuring in the acts of creation (Westervelt vi). Maui here loses some of the dignity he had in the Melanesian accounts depicting him fishing up the islands. Here, his behavior falls in line with his general association as a trickster, as he cavorts about before actually setting about pushing the sky off of the earth. While the focus of this story is on the trickster figure Maui, it provides another account of the separation of earth and sky, a recurrent theme throughout the creation myths of this area. In this myth, the sky and earth are nothing more than natural elements, as opposed to Rangi and Papa, the
entwined pair who grieve over their separation. Maui’s lineage proves of great interest as well. His father is Tangaroi, who does not feature as a character in any other creation material. Given Maui and Tangaroa’s close association in Fijian myths, including their association as brothers, it is highly likely that Tangaroi is a regional variant of Tangaroa.

Kiho

The goddess Kiho exists all alone in the nothingness. She causes her thoughts to take form, and thus starts creation. First, she creates the waters, followed by night and then light. Kiho also creates Havaiki, the mythical homeland (Stimson 4-9).

Kiho’s role as the sole creating force sets it apart from a majority of Austronesian myths, which generally feature a male in the role of the creator deity. Kiho’s ability to physically manifest her thoughts puts her on a par with Tangaroa in terms of power, while at the same time maintaining a similarity to the Tongan creation myth beginning with the thought. The Havaiki mentioned here is the same ancestral homeland Hawaiki.

BOWDITCH ISLAND

The First Man

The first man comes forth from a stone. After a while, he decides to fashion himself a woman to keep him company. He shapes her figure out of the earth, then plucks a rib from his left side and inserts it into the avatar, whereupon it comes to life. He names his new woman Ivi and takes her as his wife (Von Over 389).

This myth does not specify who, or what, created the first man. As with the Tahitian version of the creation of the first woman, her name is Ivi here as well. The shared features with the Genesis account of the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib are
striking, and although the gods often shape human beings out of the earth in the
Austronesian creation stories, the element of creating the first woman out of the rib of the
man appears out of place. Roland Dixon agrees that this element of the myth comes as a
result of contact with missionaries, rather than being an extant variant of the story (24).

The creation of the first woman from the body of the male, as opposed to her
being the direct creation of the godhead, sets up a fundamental separation between god
and woman (Campbell, Myths 79). Additionally, this myth sets forth the creation of the
first man as emerging from a stone, thus creating a gap between the first male and god as
well. Human beings are irretrievably separated from the source of the divine, as they are
not directly fashioned from the same material.

EASTER ISLAND

Easter Island is located on the easternmost edge of Polynesia. The region was
fully Christianized by 1868, and the missionary effort “met little or no resistance here.”
Prior to encounters with outsiders, the native islanders started down a path of losing their
faith. As a result, the myths that survive are fragmentary in nature, yet provide intriguing
glimpses into the area’s history. Tangaroa appears in the writings of Easter Island, but
only in the lists of kings (Metraux 120, 124) and not serving as a deity in his own right.
Instead, the local god Makemake takes on the role of the creator god (Poignant 40).

An Easter Island creation chant focuses on an evolutionary pattern of emergence,
with each new creation coming forth in a logical and orderly fashion from another, in this
case via copulation. Unfortunately, the tale survives only in highly fragmented form,
devoid of context and difficult to pull apart. One important feature is the appearance of
the god Tiki, who copulates with stone, thus producing "burning-red-meat," which Alfred Metraux theorizes is a referent to Tiki’s creation of the first woman found elsewhere (129-130).

HAWAII

The Hawaiian Islands were originally named the Sandwich Islands by Captain James Cook. Unfortunately, the renaming of the islands by a European or Western outsider proved the least destructive of such influence. As previously discussed in the introduction, missionaries often wreaked havoc on native systems of belief, whether intentional or not, and the original Hawaiian material did not escape such a fate. Christian missionaries arrived in the region in March of 1820, although European explorers to the region likely also brought the religion with them. The missionaries arrived at a time when Hawaii was in a state of flux, reeling from a turning away from the old gods and religion, culminating in the rejection of the original Hawaiian pantheon in 1819 (Kalakua 4, 27). As their goal was conversion, rather than helping the Hawaiians to reclaim and value their heritage, the missionaries often viewed the native material with scorn. Sheldon Dibble, a missionary in the region from approximately 1831 through 1840, a time which marked the Christianization of Hawaii in earnest, commented that “no ancient works remain that indicate science, intelligence and skill” (10). To condemn all missionaries as insensitive or ignorant of the critical importance of recording original myths untainted would be unfair. However, the following creation myths from the area prove that Christian influence sometimes worked its way into the indigenous stories, reshaping their original themes and values in the process.
As for the creation myths themselves, the majority follow the pattern of life emerging in ordered stages, usually with the pairing of opposites, as is the case with the Kumulipo. Lower forms of life giving birth to, or otherwise creating, progressively higher forms proves another hallmark of the Hawaiian myths. Examples include water pairing with land, the gods giving way to the great gods, Po and Ao respectively, then to humans (Beckwith 3). However, Hawaii lacks substantial mythological material dealing with the time before the creation of humans, again in keeping with a common trait of other Austronesian myths. Kane features prominently in many of these myths, the counterpart to the god Tane. Kane usually appears as part of a triumvirate of gods, the other two being Ku and Lono. Kane takes the title of the head creator god, Ku the architect or builder, and Lono the director of the elements (Kalakaua 35-36).

Additionally, Lono may be the counterpart of the Tahitian messenger god Ro’o (Beckwith 31). As with Tane, Kane proves capable both of the act of creation and of astounding fits of poor decision making. He, too, mates with his daughter, causing her to flee the land of the living, and thus introducing death into the world.

Kumulipo (The Genealogy of All Things)

In the beginning, there was only Chaos. The god Ku chants, thus separating Ao from Po. Through this action, day and night are created, the rhythms of the human day laid down. Next, Ku brings forth Kanaloa, then Kane. Kane is the first man.

Kane desires offspring who are like him, and thus gathers red clay from Hawaiki, the mythical homeland of the Polynesians. From this clay, he shakes Hine-hau-ona, the earth-formed woman. Kane and Hine-hau-ona have a daughter named Hine-titana, the dawn woman.
Kane turns wicked, and tricks Hine-titana into an incestual relationship with him. He never reveals his true identity as her father.

Finally, Hine-titana learns the truth about her lover, and is overcome with horror at his actions. She flees her father, joining her mother in the land of the dead, the domain of Po.

As punishment for his abhorrent crime, Kane and his descendants must remain above ground in Ao. It is only when humans die that they can once again go and join their ancestral mother. Until then, we can only experience Po in our dreams (Bierlein 56-57).

Elsewhere, Kane exists as part of a triumvirate of gods, in contrast to his description here as the first human. The incest taboo, one of the few universals found both in myth and across human cultures, plays a large role here. Kane’s decision to commit incest with his own daughter is not only unforgivable in the eyes of his daughter, but his actions also set up the reason why humans must die and exile Hine-titana to the underworld, paralleling the experiences and actions of the god Tane. In this version of the coming of death into the world, the myth places a positive spin on the inevitability of death by depicting it as the means by which humankind rejoin Hine-titana. Other Hawaiian myths featuring Hine, or Hina as a variant name, tell of her fleeing from a cruel husband to join her new husband the moon (Westervelt 168-169). In these stories, she retreats to the sky instead of to the underworld, but the moon, with its cycles of change, is just as mysterious and unknowable as the realm of the dead.

The origin of the “chaos” referenced here proves useful in understanding the context of the story. It came about as a result of the destruction of the previous world by
flood (Poignant 30). However, missionaries may have influenced the notion of chaos existing before creation. The vast majority of Austronesian stories do not depict a chaotic state in the aftermath of the world flood, portraying it instead as a natural cycle of death and eventual rebirth.

Kumohonua

Kane creates the upper world, or heaven, for the gods, the lower heaven above the earth, and the earth as a garden for humans. He then creates all life on earth, from plants to animals. Finally, he creates Kumohonua, the first man (Beckwith 42).

Sometimes, the gods Ku and Lono assist Kane in the creation of the world. As a triumvirate, these gods have parallels to the Tahitian worship of Tane, Ro’u and Tu, and to the Tane found extensively in New Zealand, who often forms an alliance with two or more of his brothers.

Kane the Creator

Kane dwells alone in darkness. The second era comes to pass, and light is created. Ku, Lono and Kane now begin the process of creation itself, starting with the earth, and then onto plants and other creatures. It is not yet time for the creation of humans.

During the third era, man and woman are created. The man is named Kumohonua, earth beginning, and the woman Lalo-huna, earth below.

For the remainder of the third era, Kane dwells on the earth with Kumu-honua and Lalo-huna. Once the fourth age comes, however, Kane leaves the earth to live in heaven. At this point, human beings can also die, as they have broken Kane’s law (Beckwith 42-43).
This version has clear elements of the Genesis account of the expulsion from the Garden. The exact nature of first man and first woman’s crime remains unknown here, but the consequences for the transgression are no less dire.

Kane, Ku and Lono

Kane, Ku and Lono emerge from Po, night, and decide to create three heavens to live in. Kane claims the uppermost heaven, Ku the next level, and Lono the lowest level. The three create the earth in order to have a place where they can rest their feet, naming the new creation Ka-honua-nui-a-Kane, the great earth of Kane.

Kane then creates the sun, the moon, and the stars, and sets them in their place between heaven and earth. Next, he fashions ocean salt. This is why priests purify with salt water. Finally, Kane creates man by forming him from earth, after his likeness. He shapes the head out of white clay brought from the seas of the north, south, east, and west. He uses the clay from the north and east for the right side of the head, that from the south and west for the left side. The body he forms from red earth mixed with his spit. Kane does not create man alone, however. Ku assists as a workman, Lono as a general assistant. Kane and Ku each spit into one of the nostrils, Lono into the mouth. This brings the figure to life.

The first man immediately rises up and kneels before the gods. Kane, Ku and Lono name him Ke-li’i-ku-honua, or Honua-ula, red earth. The man is given the beautiful garden Kalana-i-hauola, later known as Paliuli, to dwell in, located in Kahiki-honua-kele, the land that moved off. They also create a wife for him from the right side of his body and name her Ke-ola-Ku-Honua, or Lalo-hana. The gods give the man a law he must not break, but eventually he does so and is thereafter known as Kane-la’a-(kah)uli, a god who
fell because of the law. Kane’s white albatross drives the pair from the garden (Beckwith 43-44).

As with those creation stories featuring the first male emerging from a rock, and the first female fashioned from the rib of the male, the tone of the myth here sets apart humans from gods. Although the triumvirate of Kane, Ku and Lono take great care in molding the first man, he ultimately remains separated from them. His first action upon drawing breath is to prostrate himself before those responsible for existence, delineating the man as subject to the gods, not a part of the divine. Furthermore, the gods utilize clay to form the first man, as opposed to forming him from parts of their bodies, perhaps their blood, as is found elsewhere. This sets up a distinct difference between human being and god, with the woman farther removed by virtue of her creation from a part of the first man, rather than directly from the clay. The underlying message in this myth, as is the case with those others featuring the creation of human beings from some form of earthly matter or clay reasons that gods are the others, existing beyond the scope of full understanding. Therefore, human beings emerge from clay, rooted to the earth and to a substance which lies within the scope of human experience.

Kane, Ku, and Lono (variant)

Kane, Ku, and Lono exist in the darkness and chaos of Po. By their will, light is brought into being, followed by the heavens, earth, sun, moon and stars. The triad create angels from their spittle to do their bidding. Finally, man is created. Kane forms his head from red earth and his saliva, the head from white clay gathered by Lono from the four corners of the earth. Kane breathes life into the figure. The man’s name is Adam,
meaning red earth. The first woman is formed from one of the first man’s ribs. The pair is named Kumo-honua and Ke-ola-ku-honua.

The couple dwells in Paliuli, a beautiful garden paradise. The garden has three rivers and forbidden trees, a bread fruit tree and an apple tree. Kanaloa enters the garden in the form of a lizard, and deceives the pair. As a result, the pair are driven from the garden by Kane’s large white bird (Kalakua 35-36).

This story appears to be an amalgamation of a more original story and the influence of Christian missionaries. Again, Po becomes associated with the Genesis likening of darkness to Chaos. The vestiges of the older tradition, such as the original name for the first man and first woman, are layered with the association of the first man with Adam. The garden appears as well, along with specific reference to an apple tree. Although the association of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the apple has become a common part of Christian teaching, the account in Genesis never identifies the tree with any specificity. The story of the apple tree was thus likely taught to the native Hawaiians by missionaries, and the account then became conflated with an original myth.

In other versions, Kanaloa plays the role of tempter/trickster, yet here he specifically does so in the form of a lizard, recalling the serpent of Genesis, again in a parallel too close to that of the Bible to be labeled mere coincidence. Furthermore, given the prevalence of shared themes throughout Austronesia, but especially within Polynesia, this story stands out for its depiction of a deceitful Kanaloa and a paradisical garden. In nearly all other instances, Kanaloa, counterpart of Tangaloa, never exacts punishment on humanity, whether created by him or no. In fact, Tangaloa often remains an aloof figure, setting
forth the acts of creation, but then retreating to assume the position of either the god of the sky, or the god of the ocean.

Kane, the Triumvirate

Kane has three aspects combined in his being, Kane, Ku, and Lono. Kane lives all alone in the darkness of night, originally created by him. He then creates the first light, the heavens, the earth, ocean, sun, moon, and stars. All of these, including plants, come into being during the first five periods. Kane chants:

Here am I on the peak of day, on the peak of night.
The spaces of air
The blue sky I will make, a heaven,
A heaven for Ku, for Lono,
A heaven for me, for Kane,
Three heavens, a heaven.
Behold the heavens!
There is the heaven,
The great heaven,
Here am I in heaven, the heaven is mine

During the sixth period, Kane creates man.

Kane, Ku, and Lono, three aspects of the one god Kane, form Kumuhonoua, or first man, out of wet soil, which comes to life. The gods give him a wife, Lalo-honua, and give the pair a home in Ka-aina-nui-o-Kane, or the great land of Kane. One day, Lalo-honua meets Aaia-nui-nukea-a-ku-lawaia, the great seabird with white beak that stands fishing. The bird tempts Lalo-honua into eating Kane’s sacred
apples. The transgression drives her mad, and she transforms into a seabird herself. The
seabird spirits them both to the jungle, with the trees parting to let them through, but then
moving to their original spots, thus concealing the pathway forever.

Kumohonua’s penalty for the violation of Kane’s law is death. His name becomes
Kane-la’a-uli. As he travels along, others jeer at him as he laments his sorrow. He lives
alone for many years on a hill called Pu’u-o-honua. Finally, he returns to Kahiki-honua-
kele, dies there, and is entombed on the mountain Wai-honua-o-Kumohonua. His
descendants also are buried here (Beckwith 44-45).

This version has the idea of the ages of man, or the ages of the universe, although
the ordering here is different than in the previous version. The parallels to Genesis here
stand out, especially with the idea of eating forbidden fruit. In previous versions, the
exact nature of the transgressions remains a mystery, but here it is explained. The idea of
apples did not become associated with the Genesis story until late, so it is doubtful this is
original aspect of this Hawaiian story as well. Here, the first man and woman separate
after the transgression, alienated from both themselves and the divine.

The idea of the three-part god may also have evolved after contact with
missionaries, who brought the Christian notion of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In
other incarnations of this story, Kane, Lono and Ku are always separate deities, usually
brothers, with Kane tending to assume the role of head creator god.

Kane, Ku and Lono

Kane creates the heavens and the earth. Ku and Lono assist, while Kanaloa
opposes the action. Everything exists in a state of chaos before the triad joins forces to
create the world. Before this, there are only the upper regions and spirit gods. Creation
commences on the twenty-sixth day of the month, Kane’s day, and concludes in six days. These six days include the holy days of Kane, Lono, Mauli, Moku, Hilo, and Hoaka. Ku’s holy day, the Sabbath day, becomes the seventh day.

The first land planned by the gods lies on Oahu between Kualoa and Kaneohe. On the eastern edge of the crater hill Mololani, red earth mixes with bluish and blackish soil. Here, Kane, Ku and Lono form the first man. Kane draws an image of man very like the gods. The man’s head, body, hands and legs are all like those of the gods. After completing the image, Kane brings it to life. The gods name the first man Huli-honua, made out of earth. He receives a house of kou wood to dwell in.

Huli-honua notices that his shadow always clings to him. While he sleeps one night, Kane creates a beautiful woman from this shadow. When he awakes, she sleeps beside him. He names her Ke-aka-huli-lani, the shadow from the heavens (Beckwith 45-46).

Here it appears that Kane draws the figure of man into the soil, rather than forming it by hand as in other accounts. The myth provides a unique variation of the creation of woman, who elsewhere in the region either springs from the physical body of the man, or is formed from the earth. Here, she comes from shadow.

This is the first story that hints at any sort of strife at the beginning of creation, other than a general state of darkness or chaos. Kanaloa specifically opposes Kane’s decision to create, providing an antagonistic element to the pantheon. Kanaloa appears elsewhere as a squid god, often associated with Kane in some fashion (Beckwith 60). He plays a trickster role, a character associated with behavior which tests the boundaries of society, but who may also exhibit similarities to Lucifer as a figure of rebellion. In this
account, however, Kanaloa does not go so far as to attempt to destroy the new creations outright, as he does in the previous story when he tries to tempt the first woman.

Additionally, Kanaloa sometimes sleeps with the first woman, or is associated with the image of the albatross, the instrument by which Kane banishes the first pair from the garden. Kanaloa is the Hawaiian equivalent of the powerful god Tangaroa, so the tension he has with Kane results from the depiction of Kane surpassing him in power and influence. Furthermore, New Zealand myths featuring Tangaroa, Rangi and Papa are rife with tension between the trio, suggesting competition between gods for dominance. Here, the use of a span of seven days seems too similar to Genesis to ignore the possibility of its influence. The other stories do not make mention of a span of days in this matter, but rather refer to a more nebulous measure of time in the different “periods.”

Kane, Ku and Lono Create the First Man

The east side of the crater hill Molonai houses red earth lying beside back soil. Kane fashions an image of man out of the earth. Ku and Lono give the figure life by capturing an air spirit, and encasing it within the figure. The gods name the first man Wela-ahi-lana-nui. The first man sees his shadow, but does not know what it is. Kane tears the first woman from Wela-ahi-lana-nui’s body, which is then healed by Ku and Lono. The man names the first woman Keaka-huli-lani since she came from his shadow (Beckwith 46).

This provides an interesting variant in that the creation of the first woman causes physical trauma to the man. Even though previous versions depict the first woman being formed either from a part of the first man, or even from his shadow, it is this story which implies that the action was violent and painful, requiring Ku and Lono to administer aid.
The World Egg

A large bird lays an egg in the ocean water. It hatches in the warm water, forming the Hawaiian Islands (Kalakua 38).

A second version of the creation myth contains only one slight change. Instead of just forming the Hawaiian island chain, the contents of the egg produce the entire world (Dixon 20).

The motif of the world egg recurs throughout Austronesia, sometimes featuring a bird producing the egg, while in other myths, a god like Tangaloa emerges from the shell. In the latter instances, the god usually ends up dismembering himself and through the scattering of his body parts and blood, creation occurs. However grisly such accounts of creation appear on the surface, they should not be taken to glorify violence. When Tangaloa sacrifices himself, he does so willingly, gifting the universe with all its creations in the process. This theme of the dismembered god freely sacrificing his or herself stands in stark contrast to other cultures’ myths featuring similar themes. For example, the castration of Uranos, the means by which Aphrodite comes into being, features the mutilation of a god performed at the hands of a power-hungry son trying to usurp his father, in direct opposition to the idea of the freely given sacrifice. The theme of the world egg, then, is “generally linked with the symbolism not of birth, but of rebirth, or the repetition of the world at the moment of creation” (Demetrio 261). This falls right in line with the thought patterns found in many Austronesian myths, which begin with the understanding that the previous world drowned beneath the waters of the great flood, but that the waters did not rise out of punishment for a transgression. Instead, the cycles of
flooding and creation of life anew reverberate through time as a natural component of
existence.

MANGIAN ISLAND

Vatea

A coconut shell contains the earth. At the bottom of this shell dwells a female
being who came into existence on her own.

Vatea is one of six children born of this female primal being, whose full name is
Vari-ma-te-takere, the Beginning-and-the-bottom. She plucks him from her side. Rather
than being fully human, Vatea is half-fish and half-man.

Vatea and Papa eventually bring forth the other gods, as well as humans (Poignant
31-32).

An unusual feature of this story lies in Vatea’s identity as a child of an older,
primal female creating force, rather than the offspring of the sky god Atea. The
Polynesian goddess Kiho parallels the unnamed female being of this story, both of whom
came into being on their own in the ancient reaches of the past. This myth focuses in on
the origin of Vatea, rather than concerning itself with either the origin of Vari, or Vatea
and Papa’s actions as the primary creator pair. The depiction of Vatea pulled from the
body of the goddess is akin to the world egg stories in that the creator has a personal,
physical tie to the created, an intimate binding, as opposed to a god who creates
impersonally by the voice or through fashioning beings out of a substance such as clay.
The creations resulting from the former method end up bodily sharing the essence of the
divine.

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MARQUESAS

Tiki

The god Tiki floats upon the world ocean in a canoe. As he moves along, he fishes up land from the bottom (Dixon 20).

Although this myth lacks detail, it provides another variation on the theme of the world ocean. That Tiki brings up land from the sea floor suggests a world that once existed, but was then destroyed by the great flood. He does not so much create as he does assist in the re-creation of the world by dredging up land. No origin is provided for Tiki. Rather, he already existed as a timeless, omnipotent presence, a common Austronesian pattern. Maori myths sometimes depict Tiki as responsible for creating human beings, while Easter Island depicts him as creating the first woman. This small fragment lacks description of the coming into being of the rest of creation, but even this brief image of Tiki fishing up land proves his power. The act of fishing up land from the ocean floor puts Tiki on a par with gods such as Maui and Tangaroa, both of whom dredge up land and set it in its proper place.

NEW ZEALAND

Despite the dominance of Rangi and Papa throughout New Zealand mythic material, stories providing entirely different explanations for the creation of the world and human beings appear as well. Furthermore, Maui sometimes appears as a creating force and New Zealanders at times refer to Maui as “creator of land.” Although Maui may take on a role of more prominence in some of the Polynesian stories, his usual role is that of the trickster, testing the boundaries of society and often ending up creating
mischief along the way. In New Zealand myths, more often than not, Maui appears quite human (Westervelt vii, 4). Despite his status as a demi-god, Maui often spends his time setting up a household, and getting into trouble with his wife. New Zealand’s creation myths depict the world as emerging in stages, beginning with thought, then progressing to night, light, land, gods, and then humans. The thought stage is “not tied to the will of a god, but almost to the will of the universe at large to create something in place of nothing” (Taylor 14-15), as opposed to the god of Genesis, one of many whose thought becomes manifest in the external world. Richard Taylor’s account of the “thought” stage of creation begins thus:

From the conception the increase
From the increase the thought
From the thought the remembrance
From the remembrance the consciousness
From the consciousness the desire (Reed, *Treasury* 19).

The thought from which creation originates lacks all ties to a specific deity, moving instead in logical order from what may best be described as a spontaneous act of the universe.

The World Egg

A bird lays an egg on the waters of the world ocean, which then bursts open. An old man and an old woman emerge, along with a canoe. They travel the waters with a boy, a girl, a dog, and a pig (Dixon 20).

In this myth, the account provided in the Hawaiian version gains added detail. The old man and woman suggest an old god and goddess pair, such as Rangi and Papa.
The group traveling with them symbolizes vibrancy and youth, manifesting in the boy and girl, as well as important aspects of island life, including the bonds forged with animals, the dog as a protector and hunter, the pig as a source of sustenance.

The Entwined God and Goddess

Father god Rangi and mother goddess Papa, the sky and earth respectively, are literally bound together by sinew and connective tissue. The sons born to the pair find themselves trapped, confined in the dark in between their parents’ bodies. The brothers decide that Rangi and Papa must be separated one from the other. The separation process proves quite difficult, involving several failed attempts. Among those unsuccessful is the war god Tu. He hacks away at the connective tissue with his axe, and while not able to separate his parents, the resulting blood becomes the red clay sacred to the Maori. At last, Tane, god of the forests, steps in. Slowly, he pushes the pair upward until separation occurs, reminiscent of how a tree trunk inches up with great patience from the earth. Rangi and Papa grieve over their separation. Tears flow, flooding the earth. This problem is solved by turning Papa over onto her back, so she cannot see Rangi (Stookey 144-145).

A striking feature of the Rangi and Papa cycle of myths lies in the existence of darkness before light. Between Rangi and Papa, only darkness prevails, as the gap between them does not allow for the penetration of light. Yet the relationship between darkness and light is not fraught with conflict; darkness becomes the dwelling place for ghosts and evil spirits, although is not itself intrinsically evil (Reed, *Treasury* 17). An ode to the gods begins, “Sacred is the dark world of Night/Sacred is the bright world of Light” (Stimson 191). One element balances the other, each a crucial component of

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2 The eyes of Papa and Rangi’s children were the first body part created, allowing them all to distinguish from good and evil (Reed, *Treasury* 22).
human existence. Rangi and Papa themselves form a complementary pair as the elements of earth and sky different, but bound together, yearning for one another even when separated. However, with as many as seventy offspring trapped between them (Reed, *Myths* 80), Rangi and Papa must be moved apart from one another, allowing for the continuing progression of life. In some versions, the impetus behind the decision to separate the pair occurs when their offspring catch a glimpse of light on the outside, creating a longing within them (Reed, *Treasury* 23).

Creation of Humans

One of the sons of Rangi and Papa, either Tu, Tiki, or Tane depending on the version, creates human beings. The god adds his blood to red river clay, and shapes it into an exact likeness of himself. Next, he breathes life into the clay form, bringing it to life. The name for “human” is Tiki-ahua, meaning “likeness of Tiki” (Von Over 380).

Io

An interesting feature of the Maori creation material lies with the late introduction of an entirely new god into the existing pantheon of gods. The god Io appears nowhere else in Polynesian mythology, with the first accounts of Io appearing in writing from the 1860s, recorded by Maori priests. Given the late date for the appearance of a major god into the pantheon, the creation of Io may be a deliberate attempt to fashion a new god, perhaps born out of an attempt to reclaim cultural identity lost in the onslaught of missionaries and outsiders. His appearance may also signal an attempt to create an equivalent to the omnipotent/all-knowing Christian god (Poignant 40-41), while at the same time allowing the Maoris to fashion him in their own manner, rather than simply adopting another culture’s head god. However, the creation of Io as a counter to
missionary efforts proves problematical. A.W. Reed theorizes that Io may be a local god who spread from the Ngatai-Kahungunu to a few other neighboring tribes (Treasury 58-59).

Io’s traits were calculated out with great detail, “the final doctrinal points were thrashed out by a committee of Maori priests and elders” (Poignant 40). The introduction of Io did not, however, bring about the destruction of the other Maori gods. Io was placed at the top of the pantheon, to rule as the head god. However, Io removed himself from all creation, residing in the uppermost part of heaven and “unapproachable by the messengers of the lesser gods, except by special permission” (Reed, Treasury 58). The retreat of a primary deity does not prove unique to Io, however, and appears throughout many world mythologies. Furthermore, if Io was created as a means to preserve cultural identity, his remoteness allows for his easy inclusion in an existing pantheon, as he does not end up in direct conflict with other deities. Another possibility for the role of priests and elders in shaping the story of Io is that the worship of this god functioned along the lines of the mystery cults of ancient Greece, where only the highest echelon of priests knew all the secrets of the religion. Given that mystery religions do not otherwise appear within Austronesia, the similarity may be only coincidental.

Tane and Hine

Tane, whose appearance is that of a human, searches for a wife. He first seeks out his mother Papa, but she rejects him. Next, he tries to pair up with other beings, but the resulting offspring are not human, rather objects like stones or animals like reptiles. Finally, Tane follows Papa’s advice and forms women out of red sand from the shores of
Hawaiki, the heavenly realm where gods dwell. The first woman he creates he names Hine-hau-one, the earth-formed maiden.

Tane and Hine have a daughter, Hine-Titama, the dawn maiden. Tane decides to take his daughter for a wife, knowingly keeping his identity secret from his daughter. Eventually, Hine-Titama learns the terrible truth, and flees into Po, darkness. Tane attempts to pursue her, but cannot (Poignant 41-42).

Although described here as the realm of the gods, New Zealanders also describe Hawaiki as the distant land of their origin, the first land from which the other lands and islands were created. Richard Taylor argues that Hawaii and Hawaiki are one in the same, and that the difference in pronunciation and spelling result from the Maori retaining the use of “k” sounds, which their ancestors lost (15, 192). Given the likely migratory pattern of Polynesians through Hawaii and into New Zealand, the equating of Hawaiki with an ancient homeland follows logically.

In this version of Tane’s incestual relationship with his daughter, the god first attempts to mate with a host of inappropriate choices in mates. In the process, Tane loses the wisdom attributed to him in the separation of Rangi and Papa. Here, he not only attempts incest once with his mother, but succeeds in the act with his daughter. The message of this myth is one of proper mating and marriage. When Tane mates with these “other beings” the resulting offspring are not human. However, Tane fails to realize that he cannot mate with one of his own sire, and thus the etiological explanation for death emerges. Tane’s actions bring death into the world. Hine-Titama waits for her children in the underworld, and always seeks to drag them down to her, placing a negative cast on
the eventuality of death, as other versions describe death as a reunion with our original, primal mother.

Rangi and Papatuanuku

Rangi, Father Sky, and Papatuanuku, Mother Earth, give birth to the other gods. Despite their seventy offspring being trapped between them, Rangi and Papatuanuku remain pressed together. Tired of being compressed within such a small space, their children decide and they must be separated. Several different gods attempt to complete this task.

Rongo-matane, the god of agriculture, only succeeds in separating them the height of a taro plant. Tangaroa tries, but only raises the sky to the height of a wave.

Next, Humia-tikitiki, the god of wild food, steps in, but his attempt only pushes the sky to the same level as a banana tree.

Finally, Tane-mahuta, the god of the forest, steps forward for his turn. He stands on his head, and pushes the sky upward with the strength of his legs, successfully moving Rangi far enough so that the gods may move about comfortably.

Although the parting is necessary, Rangi and Papantuanuku grieve over the loss of contact with one another (Bierlein 57-58).

In this story, Rangi represents Ao, while Papatuanuku represents Po. Tangaroa takes on the role of the sea god here, rather than serving as the head creator god, as he does in Samoan myth. Further, Tangaroa is set at odds with his brother Tane. The ability to cultivate land stands at the forefront of importance to these island peoples. The sea, as a body of salt water, provides no sustenance to crops, and thus stands at odds with an

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3 Rongo is the equivalent to the Hawaiian god Lono. Although both are powerful gods in their own right, they function as one aspect of a triumvirate, with Tane or Kane respectively at the head.
agrarian lifestyle. Tane, as the forest god, comes to the role of primacy here, demonstrating a focus on the fertility of the land over the infertility or barrenness of the salt water. There is a pattern in the succession of gods who attempt to move Rangi and Papatuanuku apart. Each god succeeds in pushing the sky as far upwards as his role allows. Rongo-matane only moves the sky to the height of a taro plant, which is within his domain. Tane-mahuta succeeds due to his lordship over the trees. He pushes upwards with his legs, akin to a tree trunk, sturdy and powerful. Like a tree, this god is also patient in pushing steadily upwards, as well as having the capacity to grow to great heights, thus enabling him to set the sky in its rightful place.

Tangaroa, Rangi, and Papatuanuku

Tangaroa is the oldest of all the gods, and uncle of Rangi, also known as Heaven. Tangaroa marries Papatuanuku, the earth. When Tangaroa leaves one day, Rangi takes Papatuanuku away from him. Enraged, Tangaroa duels with Rangi, and is the victor. As a result, Rangi ends up permanently lamed. Tangaroa leaves Papatuanuku, leaving her to be the wife of Rangi. Rangi’s wounds do not allow him to stand upright any longer, so he ends up lying flat upon the earth. Most of their offspring are lame, with only a few proving sound of body, including Tane. Rangi and Papatuanuku press so closely together that that the children born to them exist in a place with no light, and with no circulation of air. The children discuss how to gain their freedom. Some propose murdering Rangi, while others suggest raising Rangi off of Papatuanuku. They agree to the latter plan, and together raise Rangi, who is then fastened in place by Tane. Rangi and Papa feel the pain

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4 Further muddying the genealogical ties between this triumvirate of gods are descriptions of Tangaroa as the last son of Rangi and Papa, and “the father of all fish, the great god of the ocean” (Taylor 19).
of their separation. Papatuanuku’s sighs rise like mist towards Rangi, while her husband cries tears which fall as dew upon the earth.

Tane looks upon his father, deciding that he looks dark and still grieves for the loss of Papatuanuku. Tane finds ornaments, which he uses to brighten Rangi. Next, he embellishes Rangi with the Milky Way and the constellations. Tane now sets his sights on decorating his mother, as he did Rangi. He takes some of the crippled children, who are the trees, and places them with their roots upward and their branches downward, but he does not like how they look. He turns them around the other way, and enjoys how the trees look in this manner⁵.

His work completed, Tane now wanders about in search of a wife. Unsuccessful, he seeks his mother’s advice. She suggests he marry Hinehaone, Maid Formed out of the Ground. Tane and his wife have a daughter, Hineatauire, Maid of the Bright Morning Sky. Eventually, Tane takes his own daughter as his wife, although she does not know his true identity. All of their children have names denoting death or decay. Tane leaves to visit his brother Rehua, and Hineatauire goes to Papatuanuku to inquire of his whereabouts. Papatuanuku reveals the terrible truth, that Hineatauire’s husband is also her father. She flees in shame to the underworld. Tane returns to find his wife missing, and his mother recounts what happened. Tane travels to the underworld to bring back his wife, but to no avail. Hineatauire is sequestered within a house, but her voice filters outward, advising Tane to return to the world of the living (Wohlers 343-344). This creation myth is provided last due to its development of many of the themes found in the New Zealand stories. Tangaroa appears here, but has limited power. Additionally, the

⁵ Tane sometimes adorns Rangi with a blue robe during the daytime, which thus becomes the sky, and covers his mother with a variety of plants and grasses (Reed 81).
stories featuring Tangaroa, Rangi and Papa often depict Tangaroa as being the god of the ocean, and aligned with Tane and his siblings in agreeing to separate the earth/sky pair (McKenzie 149). Although depicted as the oldest of the gods, Tangaroa cedes his place as the husband of the earth in favor of Rangi, his nephew. Furthermore, Tangaroa does not participate in any acts of creation, and no mention is made of any offspring resulting from his marriage to Papatuanuku. Tangaroa and Rangi, each a powerful male creator deity, depending on the tale, cannot enter into this arrangement peacefully. Although Rangi wins out in the end, thereby edging out Tangaroa as the sole god in favor of a god/goddess pair, Tangaroa succeeds in permanently wounding Rangi, a display of his physical prowess, before exiting the myth. Rangi and Papatuanuku, as the creator/creatrix pair, then take center stage, and are responsible for the creation of many offspring. The injuries wrought on Rangi by Tangaroa pass on to most of the pair’s children. Although no longer present, Tangaroa’s power continues to reverberate through the story. Given that elsewhere, Tangaroa reigns as the supreme creator deity, the lingering sense of his might follows logically here.

Although Tangaroa lurks in the shadows of this version of the creation story, Tane becomes the central figure once Rangi and Papatuanuku are separated by their children. It is through Tane’s strength and wisdom that the gods succeed in escaping from the confines of the space between their parents’ bodies without having to kill them, a course of action favored by some of the gods. Although not mentioned specifically by name here, Tutenganahau, third son of Rangi and Papa and the “grand author of evil,” immediately suggests murdering their parents rather than thinking of a different solution. In addition to advocating matricide and patricide, Tutenganahau assists in the separation
of Rangi and Papa in some instances by cutting the sinews holding them together, but he does so “cruelly” (Taylor 18, 20). His lack of reverence for his parents exemplifies lack of ancestral respect, an abhorrent trait. Despite Tane’s initial role as the figure of reasoning, and the author of a plan to successfully separate Rangi and Papa, he soon embarks on a series of questionable decisions leading to tragedy for his daughter. Tane’s actions appear confusing at the onset, flying in the face of his role as the patient god of the forest, yet his actions reveal a god not intrinsically imbued with righteousness, but rather as capable of destructive behavior as any other lesser creation around him.

In this version, Tane does not attempt to take his own mother to wife, but does eventually commit incest with his own daughter, who again remains ignorant of his true identity. Some variants of this myth feature Hine specifically asking Tane if he is her father, which he first denies, but eventually admits to with some sort of a gesture (Reed, Treasury 46), most likely pointing in some way to indicate himself. As in other versions depicting this incestual relationship, the offspring resulting from Tane’s union with Hineatauira do not prove properly viable. Elsewhere, these children are described as inhuman, but in this version, all are associated in some manner with death and decay. In either case, the state of the offspring condemns the incestual nature of this union, following a universal taboo against incest. At the end of this version, Hineatauira also takes on the mantle of the goddess of the underworld, where she waits for her children to return to her, providing an explanation for the coming of death into the world.

Several versions recounting the trickery of Tane and Hine’s resulting horror and shame include her transformation into the goddess of the underworld. Hine’s association with the moon explains her move to the realm of the dead. E. Seler describes the moon as
“the first of the dead” (Eliade 171), which proves strikingly true in Hine’s transformation as the goddess of the dead. The moon serves as a symbol, with its gradual shift from full to dark and back again, mimicking the earthly cycles of death and rebirth (Campbell, *Myths* 235). Hine becomes the manifestation of half of this process, that of the inevitable death awaiting all life. However, death here does not constitute a complete end, but rather a return home, echoing the completion of one full lunar cycle.

NIUE

The First People on the Island

Two men, Huanaki and Fao, swim to Niue from Tonga. When they arrive, they discover the island is all but underwater. They stomp on the island, causing the land to rise up from the ocean. They continue to stomp, creating trees, plants and vegetation. Finally, their actions cause man and woman to grow from the ti plant (Turner 304).

This account may have more influence from Tonga than from Samoa. Turner notes that the people on this island speak a combination of Samoan and Tongan (304). The other possibility is that this is a variant tale, containing only the familiar element of man and woman emerging in some way from a plant.

SAMOA

Tangaloa, the Supreme God

Tangaloa dwells all alone. Not even heaven or earth exist. Aside from Tangaloa, there is only the rock named Tangaloa-faa-tutupu-nuu, which is found in the place where the god stands. All life comes from this rock. Over time, the rock begins to swell. Finally,
Tangaloa orders it to split open and three pairs of beings emerge, Papa-tao-to and Papa-soso-lo, Papa-ano-ano and Papa-ele, and Papa-tu and Papa-amu-amu along with their children.

Tangaloa speaks to the rock, then strikes it so that the sea and the parents of all nations of the earth can come forth. The newly created sea covers Papa-soso-lo, with Papa-Tao-to offering a blessing.

Tangaloa speaks, and the next four creations emerge. They are Tui-tee-langi (heaven), Ilu (immensity), Mamau (space), and Niu-ao.

Tangaloa speaks again, bringing forth Luao, a boy, and Lua-vai, a girl. Both of these children are placed on an island named Saa tua Langi.

Tangaloa speaks once again, this time bringing forth another boy and girl, Oa-vali and Ngao-ngao-le-tei respectively, followed by a man. He also creates Anga-nga (spirit), loto (heart), fingalo (will) and masalo (thought) (Von Over 381).

A striking feature of this creation myth lies in its careful structuring of creation. The first set of beings created, which are not specifically described, but can be best described as demi-gods, or something other than human, issue directly from Tangaloa-faa-tutupu-nuu. All of the other stages of creation occur as a result of Tangaloa speaking, at first directly to the rock, but in subsequent stages, the emphasis shifts to the power of the voice as the main impetus for creation, whether or not the rock is still involved. The reference to the creation of the parents of all the earth again does not appear to describe human beings, but rather likely refers to the emergence of differing islands and other land masses, necessary before human life can issue forth. Creation here is orderly, and conducted in logical fashion. First, the lands and sea must exist, followed by the vastness...
of the earth, signified by the creation of Ilu, Mamau, and Tui-tee-langi. Once these are in place, the first boy and girl can come into being. These two may be more akin to the higher beings first created, as they appear in isolation, and live on an island. The next boy-girl pair appears to be the origin of humankind. These two are not created alone in this phase, but are accompanied by Anga-nga, Loto, Fingalo and Masalo, all critical components of a human being.

Tangaloa the Angry Grandfather

The god Tangaloa has two children, a son named Moa and a daughter named Lu. Time passes and Lu gives birth to a son, also named Lu. One night, grandfather Tangaloa hears his grandson Lu singing a song named “Moa Lu.” However, Lu changes the song shortly thereafter, and begins to sing “Lu Moa.” Tangaloa grows furious when he hears this, as it appears that his grandson puts himself about Moa, the firstborn male.

Tangaloa devises punishment for his arrogant grandson. He calls the boy to him, asking him to scratch his back. When Lu comes close enough to do so, Tangaloa beats him with the handle of a flyswatter.

Lu flees his grandfather and lands on earth, naming the land Samoa.

Although this story briefly covers the birth of the first creatures after Tangaloa, the story is vague as to the nature of Moa and Lu. They may be human, but they may also be demi-gods, or lesser gods beneath Tangaloa. Nonetheless, the story provides not only the start of creation by the head creator god, but it also provides the origin of the name Samoa, and provides the islanders with a direct link back to Tangaloa (Turner 11). The importance of respect for the elders of the clan crops up here, as Lu’s punishment results
from his arrogance in placing himself before the older members of his family and attempting to supersede the status of the firstborn son.

Tangaloa Creates the Land

Tangaloa exists alone, and does not even know his own origins. Eventually, he makes the heavens to live in. He also creates Lalolangi, under the heavens, which is the earth.

Savaii and Opulo come next, created either from stones from heaven or drawn up from the ocean by a fishing hook.

Next, Tangaloa creates cuttlefish. The cuttlefish bring forth rocks of all kinds, including the island of Samoa itself (Turner 7).

This story provides a record of the creation of land, ending with Samoa, but does not turn its concern towards the creation of anything else, including human beings. Again and again, Austronesian creation stories keep their focus very narrow, whether providing the origin of a specific island and/or a specific people. The exact nature of Savaii and Opulo are not clear, in keeping with the frequent depiction of beings who clearly are not human, yet may not be on a par with powerful divinities like Tangaloa. Given the description of how they are created, it is logical to conclude that they are either islands or mountains.

Tangaloa Searches for Creation

The great flood has devastated the earth. Tangaloa sends down his daughter in the form of the bird Turi, a type of snipe. Turi flies all over, but cannot find a resting place, so she returns to her father.
Tangaloa sends Turi forth again, and this time she sees land slowly emerging from the surface of the water. She reports back to her father, then returns again. Now, she witnesses the land expanding, and hurries to tell Tangaloa. He sends her back again, this time with earth and a creeping plant.

Turi plants the creeper, and returns to visit it. Eventually it dies, and is filled with maggots. On another visit, Turi finds that the maggots are now men and women (Turner 7-8).

This myth may contain elements from the Christian account of Noah and the flood mixed in with the tradition of humankind emerging from maggots, as part of a long process of creation. Despite the parallel to Genesis whereby a bird becomes the means to test for dry land, the myth does not describe the flood as an instrument of punishment. Tangaloa clearly did not bring forth the deluge, as he actively works to seek out any signs of life and dry land. Interestingly, this story specifically references that both men and women emerge from the maggots, whereas in other places, men only are mentioned, leaving the creation of women unclear.

This myth is also one of many in which Tangaloa keeps a bird for a pet, who sometimes goes by the name Tuli. The bird is sacred to Tangaloa, functioning as both his assistant and a beloved pet. The association of a bird with the sacred follows logically in an island chain surrounded by the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. Birds are quick, and unencumbered by the limits posed by a land immersed in or surrounded by water. The gift of flight allows for free exploration in a manner not granted to any other living creature, thereby making Tuli the perfect instrument by which Tangaloa can gauge the goings on down below the heavens.
Tangaloa and the Bird

Tangaloa dwells in the uppermost heaven. One day, he sees a rock floating in the vast ocean below, all that exists in this lower world. He draws the stone to him, shapes it into a human woman, gives her life, then marries her. She gives birth to bird, which Tangaloa sends down into the lower world. The bird requests someplace with shade, so Tangaloa provides the Peopling Vine (Dixon 17-18).

Tangaloa and Tuli

Tangaloa’s bird Tuli flies over the oceans searching for a place to land and rest. Tangaloa casts down a rock to help out Tuli. The rock becomes Manu’a, the main island of the Samoan group. Tangaloa finishes creating the rest of the Samoan islands, then creates Tonga and Fiji.

Tuli desires some shade on these new lands, so Tangaloa gives Tuli the Peopling Vine to plant. Humans eventually emerge from this plant (Poignant 29).

The three preceding myths all feature Tangaloa and his relationship to the bird sometimes named Tuli and the emergence of human beings from the Peopling Vine. Douglas Oliver states that Tahitian accounts specifically describe the bird as being an albatross (60). Echoes of the sacred relationship between seabirds and those of travel the oceans remain in modern day works of literature, as in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, where the thoughtless execution of an albatross brings misery and death. The third version does not concern itself beyond the creation of Samoa, and the islands in its immediate vicinity.
Tuli and the Peopling Vine

Eventually, the Peopling vine decomposes and swarms with maggots. Tangaloa shapes humans out of the maggots, including giving humans a heart and a soul (Poignant 41).

Creation as a sort of evolutionary pattern continues here in the story of the Peopling vine. Although here, Tangaloa directly steps in to create human beings, the direct intervention of a god is not always required. In some accounts, the humans emerge whole and otherwise unaided from the rotted remains of the vine and the maggots, thereby making humans one more step in the advancement of creation.

Tangaloa Recreates

An ancient, primeval octopus^ bears the offspring fire and water. These two battle one another, flooding the whole of the earth. As a result, Tangaloa must start creation anew.

Although not a creation myth in the sense of starting at the beginning, this tale nonetheless has interesting features. It contains elements of the flood motif, although here, the flood does not bear much resemblance to the punishing deluge it is in Genesis, leading to the conclusion that this story remains part of an older tradition. Fire and water, as two opposing elements, immediately come into conflict with one another (Poignant 30).

Other variants of this myth specifically point out that the rocks and cliffs were first to emerge, eventually leading to the octopus (Dixon 17). Within this myth, the two

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^ Hawaiian creation stories describe the octopus as the sole survivor of the previous world, which was destroyed by flood. The octopus dwells in the vast ocean resulting from the deluge (Dixon 15).
main traditions of evolutionary creation and creation by the act of one all-powerful deity merge with little trouble.

Rocks Marry the Earth – The Origin of Samoa

After the marriage of the rocks and the earth, the earth becomes pregnant. Salavao, the god of the earth, notices the movement of the fetus in the moa, or center, of the earth. The child is thus named Moa. Everything else upon the earth, from the water to the rocks, to everything growing, is sa ai, or sacred, to Moa. For this reason, the island is named “Samoa,” or sacred to Moa (Turner 10-11).

Although this is not a complete creation myth, it serves an important function in providing an origin for the name Samoa. As with many of the other islands, much of the creation material focuses on the creation of the island and its people, rather than with global creation. Absent from this brief story is mention of Tangaloa, in favor of a variant more along the lines of the Rangi and Papa cycle, with vestiges of the evolutionary tradition. In place of the sky and the earth as a mated pair, the rocks and the earth serve as the primal creation force. However, there is a sense of progression from rocks, to earth, to the mention of other life on the earth. Even though Salavao becomes personified as the god of the earth, he does not usurp power and complete the act of creation on his own.

Ants and Stones

Ants and small coral together make the small rocks. The small and large rocks cause the loose rocks. From these loose rocks and fire, the first man emerges. His name is Anari, “to appear.” Anari and his wife create both the human race and cuttlefish (Turner 8).
Although this is a fragmentary tale in which the reader receives tantalizingly few details, the theme of ants reappears in some Tongan creation accounts. The origin of the large rocks, and also of Anari’s wife, are unknown. The loose rocks appear to denote volcanic activity, evidenced by the addition of fire to create the first man.

Lu and the Sacred Fowls

A great flood kills off all life on the earth except for some fowls and pigeons. The pigeons choose to leave, but the fowls stay behind. The fowls, called moa, are thus made sacred by Lu. Hence, the name Samoa emerges, meaning “sacred fowls.”

The details of this story lack completeness, including the origin of, and reason for, the great flood. However, it provides an example of a flood myth devoid of the Christian overtones which encroach elsewhere. The flood does not occur as punishment, but appears instead to occur as part of a natural cycle of destruction and creation. While not dealing specifically with the creation of humanity, the gods, or the universe, the tale serves to provide an alternate explanation for the origin of the island Samoa. Turner translates “samoa” as preserve fowls, but “sacred fowls” seems more accurate in describing the relationship of these birds to Lu (Turner 11).

Lu and the Sacred Fowls, variant

Lu is the son of the god Tangaloa. He has a flock of sacred fowl, which are dear to him. One day, two fishermen from the heavens kill the birds when they catch the fowl eating their fish. Enraged, Lu pursues the two young men, and finds them eating the birds. They pair flee from Lu, but he again pursues them all the way to the tenth heaven. Tangaloa intervenes at this point, brokering peace between Lu and the fisherman, since no strife is allowed in this area.
Lu eventually returns to the earth, and names it Samoa in honor of his birds (Turner 11-15).

While retaining some of the features of the previous tales, several interesting variants appear. Here, Lu is the son of Tangaloa. In previous versions, Tangaloa had a daughter named Lu, and then a grandson by her with the same name. This story conflates the two figures together, as one descendent of Tangaloa. This story also repeats the theme of Samoa deriving in some manner from a flock of sacred birds.

The Origin of Heaven

One day a catastrophe happens: the heavens fall down. As a result, humans are forced to crawl around like animals, unable to stand upright any longer. Eventually, the arrowroot, along with one other plant, continues to grow and push the heavens a bit in the process. Now, humans can stand up, but their heads still bump the skies. Further, the air within the confined space swelters.

One day, a man approaches a woman who had just drawn water and asks for a drink. In exchange for some water, he advises her he will push up the heavens the rest of the way. He pushes the heavens up a bit, then a bit more at the woman’s request. He finally gets the heavens to an appropriate level above the earth, and in exchange receives a coconut-shell water bottle from the woman.

Others say that the god Ti’iti’i is the one who pushes the heavens back up to their proper place. A rock bears six foot long hollow spots said to be the god’s footprints (Turner 198).

This story bears striking similarity to the Maori story of the pressing together of earth and sky. However, it lacks the personification of the elements as found in Rangi and...
Papa, who agonize over their separation. Furthermore, unlike myths featuring Maui-as-trickster responsible for moving the sky, no sexual favors are traded for the assistance. One final significant point at which this myth diverges from the Rangi and Papa cycle lies in the implication that at one point, the sky was in its proper place before falling back down against the earth, as opposed to the Maori myth describing the first separation of the two.

The Origin of the Universe

In the beginning, there was Leai, or nothing. From this nothingness springs forth Nana mu, fragrance. Next emerges Efuefu, dust, followed by Iloa, perceivable, and Maua, obtainable. Eleele, earth, and Papatu, high rocks come into being, followed by Maataanoa, small stones, and Maunga, mountains.

Maunga marries Malaeliua, changeable meeting place. They have a daughter named Fasiefu, piece of dust.

Fasiefu marries Laua i fulufu lu tolo, down of the sugarcane flower. Their sons are Mua, first, Uso, brother, and Talu. Their daughter is Sulitoru, true heir (Turner 3).

Origin of Humans

Fire and water come together in marriage. Their offspring are the earth, rocks, trees, and everything. All does not remain peaceful, and battles ensue.

Fire and rocks enter into combat, and the rocks win. The large rocks challenge the small, and the small ones win. Small rocks battle the grass, and are defeated. The grass fights trees and lose. Finally, the trees challenge the creepers, and the creepers are victorious.
Over time, the creepers rot and fill with maggots. The maggots grow into men (Turner 6-7).

The “everything” referenced in the myth proves misleading, as human beings do not enter the scene until much later in the story. Violence and combat play a large role in this myth, much more so than in many of the other island creation stories. In this series of battles, the party who instigates the conflict ends up the loser, providing perhaps a cautionary tale against the folly of starting trouble for no reason.

Men Come from Mussels

Men come forth from mussels, either the hard-shelled variety, or the poisonous type. Those emerging from the hard-shelled mussels enjoy a long life. Those who issue forth from the poisonous are not nearly as fortunate. They come to an early death, and have a fragile, easily upset personality (Turner 8).

As in other stories, whether men and women are created simultaneously from the mussels, or if only men do, remains elusive. The author of the book in which this myth is recounted, as a missionary to the islands, may have placed a value judgment/assumption that men were created first. No variant of this account exists elsewhere in the region, which would allow for a more definitive conclusion.

THE SOCIETY ISLANDS

Ta’aroa and His Shell

Ta’aroa came into being all alone within his shell, which he named Rumia, upset. Nothing else existed. One day, Ta’aroa flips the shell and left it, only to discover that he was still in complete solitude. He found a new shell, and spent eons ensconced within it
deciding what to do next. Finally, he uses the new shell as the foundation of the earth, and the old shell as the sky. Next, Ta’aroa commences the act of creation. He brings forth the gods by calling out in the darkness. He shakes his red and yellow feathers, which drop trees and plantains upon the earth. Earth and sky are not yet separated, held together by the great octopus Tumu-ra’i’feuna.

When Tane is created, everyone describes him as unattractive, like a jellyfish. Ta’aroa rectifies this by having some artisans craft him into a handsome form. Ta’aroa gives Tane the tenth, or highest, level of heaven to inhabit.

Tane’s major task is finally separating the earth from the sky. The demi-gods Ru, Hina, and Maui all try to lift Atea, the sky. Ru goes first, but only manages to raise Atea to the height of a coral tree, but the strain is too great. Ru becomes humpbacked and his intestines issue forth from his body, eventually becoming the clouds above Borabora. Maui manages to set props in place to keep the sky from falling back completely against the earth.

Tane descends to earth with adzes and his pet white swallow. He takes logs and uses them as levers to hoist Atea upwards. He also digs into Atea with the adzes, cutting away despite Atea’s cries of agony until the sky and earth finally separate. Light enters the world (Poignant 34-37).

Ta’aroa assumes the position of supremacy throughout this tale. The story stresses Tane’s inferiority; all of his glory is gifted by Ta’aroa. Tane finally succeeds in separating Atea from the earth, but the identity of those who try and fail first change. In other stories it is Tangaroa who has a white bird, usually an albatross. However, Tangaroa exists the story, allowing Tane to finalize the coming of light into the world.
thus the sacred bird of the divine becomes associated with Tane instead. Although this myth features an octopus keeping the sky and earth pressed together, the story shares features with the Maori accounts of Rangi and Papa. The introduction of light into the world proves profoundly significant in that it both replaces darkness as a primary force (Oliver 51) and allows for life to flourish in abundance.

TAHITI

Tahiti is a part of the Society Islands group (Leeming 265), and lies east of Samoa, in the region of the Pacific also known as French Polynesia. Marau Taaroa, the last queen of Tahiti, recounted to Henry Adams the first visit of Europeans taking place when Captain Samuel Wallis showed up on June 24, 1767 on the ship *The Dolphin* after first catching sight of Tahiti on June 18th (47), marking the beginning of western contact. As with a vast majority of Austronesian mythology, Tangaroa, here also referred to as Ta’aroa, frequently plays a role in creation, whether that of the universe, humankind, or some combination thereof. In some accounts, Ta’aroa takes a consort named Ofeufeumaiter’ai, who is also a self-created, original being. The pair have a son ‘Oro, who goes on to father two sons with his own consort. These six beings go on to form the uppermost division of Tahitian deities. A Tahitian informant dictating stories of Ta’aroa in 1822 and 1833 translated the name as “The Unique One” (Oliver 49, 51).

Although Tangaroa appears in various Tahitian creation accounts, his presence, and the interpretation thereof, proves problematical. At the time of prolonged contact with the Western world, beginning with James Cook’s landing in 1769, the general observation made by the Europeans held that the Tahitian people “acknowledged in a
vague mystical way the existence of a supreme being” (Moorehead 6). The world egg myth featuring Tangaroa follows this line of reasoning in the sense of the god depicted as “mystical.” He creates the entirety of the world using his self-sacrificed body parts, but as a result, undoes himself, leaving behind the remnants of godhood in all earthly things. The next myth related here, featuring Tangaloa/Ta’aroa creating human beings in a nearly identical fashion to the account found in Genesis on the surface appears to be wholly influenced by Christianity, and indeed details such as the first woman created from the rib of the man lead to no other logical conclusion. Yet the nature of Tangaroa as the all-powerful deity exists in many instances in Austronesian myth, and the description of the Tahitians as possessing only a “vague” sense of a superior does not hold in any of the creation myths of Tahiti. Two possibilities account for Tangaloa appearing in two completely different manifestations. The first is that the Tahitian people always had the differing accounts of Tangaroa, and given the waves of migration through the entire area, it is not farfetched to conclude that at some point, they picked up a different aspect of Tangaloa and his role as a god. The second possibility circles back to the reality that missionaries often viewed native pantheons and religion with scorn, and thus failed to give credence to any description of a god differing from the depiction of an anthropomorphic, stern father figure found in the Bible.

Tangaroa and the World Egg

Tangaroa-tahitumu resides inside of an egg. Eventually, he grows restless and cracks the eggshell in two. Upon emerging from the shell, in the form of a feathered, birdlike god, he discovers he is alone. He rectifies the situation by creating out of the materials he has on hand, namely himself and the remnants of the egg. He creates the sky

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out of half of the eggshell, the earth out of the other half. From his backbone, Tangaroa-

out of half of the eggshell, the earth out of the other half. From his backbone, Tangaroa-
tahitumu forms the mountain ranges. His intestines form the clouds, his other bodily

organs the various creatures of the sea. His feathers take root as plants, his blood brings
color to this emerging world, and his flesh forms gods and humans. In the end, only
Tangaroa-tahitumu’s head is unused. The people worship the head of the creator god, but
it is understood that the creator is expressed in all things as a result of this method of
creation (Stookey 35).

Unlike those myths centered on humans as related to the godhead only in the
sense that he fashioned them from an inert substance such as clay, or pulled the first
woman in some manner from the body of the first male, this account provides for an
intimate relationship between creator and created. Joseph Campbell notes that this mythic
pattern proves widespread throughout the East, especially to the east of Iran, and sets up a
relationship whereby human beings share the same fundamental matter as god (Myths
79). That Tangaroa dismembers himself, thereby causing his death, does not become a
mournful act in that he continues to exist in all life.

The themes of both the world egg and the dismembered god recur on the Asian
mainland, especially in China and Japan. The Japanese myth of Ogetsuno, Goddess of
Food tells the story of abundance emerging from an act of violence. The goddess
Ogetsuno was murdered by Tsukiyoni. From her remains, life comes forth. Rice grows
from her stomach, millet from her forehead. Her lower body sprouts wheat and beans.
Her eyebrows are the origin of silkworms, the ox and the horse emerge from her head
(Stookey 100). This myth centers on an act of violence, rather than a freely given
sacrifice, but it parallels the world egg account in that the god/goddess infuses creation
with his or her essence. The Chinese myths of the world egg and of Pan Ku follow more closely Tangaroa’s sacrifice. However, the Chinese account of the world egg appears relatively late to its mythology, approximately the third century CE, supporting Padraic Colum’s assertion that the myth was imported from outside the region. Despite questions relating to the means by which this myth entered China, it nonetheless maintains its similarity with other Chinese myths, which focus on a universe created by impersonal forces, not gods who act as personifications of various natural forces (Colum xxii). The Chinese version is as follows.

The giant Pan Ku emerges from an egg. Along with Pan Ku, Yin and Yang emerge. Yin, the heavier of the two elements, forms the earth, while Yang forms the sky. After 18,000 years pass, Pan Ku dies. From his head, the sun and the moon emerge. His blood becomes the rivers and the seas. Wind comes from his breath, thunder from his voice. Finally, human beings come forth from the fleas living on his body (Stookey 35). Yin and Yang should not be taken as god and goddess, but rather as the opposite elements of light and darkness, or here the earth and sky. A second account of Pan Ku omits the world egg, and envisions the god perishing during the creation, rather than deciding to give up his life, but retains focus on the idea of creation infused with the divine.

Pan Ku creates with a chisel and mallet. He is almost elephant-like, enormous with horns jutting from his forehead and tusks from his jaws. The mallet and chisel create features of the earth, including mountain bases, river beds, and valleys. It took 18,000 years for Pan Ku to accomplish all of this. Dragon, Unicorn, Tortoise, and Phoenix all assist Pan Ku.
Pan Ku sets the sun and moon in the wrong spots, and they end up in the sea, leaving the world devoid of light. Pan Ku follows the sun and moon, and points out where they should go. He then repeats an incantation three times, after which the sun and moon take their proper places.

Pan Ku dies before he completes creation, after 18,000 years elapse. His body becomes different aspects of creation: his breath becomes the wind and clouds, his voice the thunder, his flesh the soil, and his blood the rivers. One aspect of creation left uncompleted is a gap at the bottom most part of the human world. People sometimes fell into it until the woman Nu-ku fits a stone into the chasm, thus solving the problem (Colum 237-239).

An examination of these varying accounts of both the world egg and the notion of the infusion of the divine into creation demonstrates thematic similarities between Asia and Austronesia, supporting both proposed migratory patterns via the conceptions of the godhead found therein. Creation in these myths focuses less on the will of a father-type god who guards over all he fashions, favoring instead the possibility that even if the god dies, whether by choice or no, the essence of the divine endures in all living things. Thus, the gap between creator and created lessens.

Ta’aroa Creates from Red Earth

Ta’aroa creates the first human out of red earth, which also served as the god’s food until the creation of bread fruit. Seeing that his creation, a man, needs a companion, Taaroa puts him to sleep and creates a woman out of one of his bones. The woman becomes the wife of the first man (Von Over 381).
The Tahitian word for “bone” is “ivi,” remarkably similar to the Christian “Eve.”

It may well be that the basic story itself, that of human beings formed from some sort of clay or earth, is a mythic element native to the region, as it appears in many areas. However, the close parallels in this myth to the biblical account of the creation of Eve, likely result from the influence of Christianity.

Ta’aroa Creates Man

Ta’aroa creates the first man, naming him Ti’i. This first male becomes the spouse of Hina, at once goddess and the first woman (Poignant 42).

Ta’aroa here is the same figure as the powerful creator god Tangaroa. Further, Ti’i is a variant name for Tane. Here, the Tane-figure is not divine, but fully human. The origin of Hina, playing the dual role of goddess and woman, is not specified here. Hina proves an elusive figure throughout the Austronesian body of creation mythology, ranging from goddess, to human woman, to a combination thereof. Furthermore, the Tahitian myths describe Hina as one who can “see backwards and forwards” (Leeming 265). This likens her to the versions of Hina, or Hine showcasing her transformation into the queen of the underworld after fleeing from a previously unknown incestual relationship with her father. The description denoting her ability to see aligns with her role as a death goddess, one who sees the beginnings and ends of lives.

TONGA

Tonga lies in between Hawaii and New Zealand, and the myths found in this region show evidence of influence from its neighbors. Tongan myths include those featuring the octopus and ants, as well as Hina taking on the role of the moon goddess.
Hawaiian material makes mention of the great octopus, while ants feature in a Samoan creation account. The association of Hina with the moon occurs throughout Austronesia, and into myths of the Asian mainland. Although not specifically a creation myth, Tongans associate Hina with the land of the dead in some instances, describing how she visits her paternal grandmother Hikuleo, goddess of Pulotu, in order to retrieve the soul of her murdered husband (Gifford 183, 206-207). Hina’s close relationship with the underworld commonly results from her father’s decision to trick her into an incestual affair with him by hiding his true identity.

The Tongan creation myths presuppose that there already existed “the sky, the sea, and the land of Pulotu (the home of the souls of departed chiefs)” (Gifford 14). In keeping with a common Austronesian theme, the myths found here do not concern themselves with the origins of every last element of the universe. In addition to the widespread understand that the world ocean existed from the beginning of time, the Tongans include Pulotu, an aspect of the afterlife, as eternal. Given the understanding that Pulotu served as the dwelling place specifically of chiefs, they gain an even greater standing within the community, as their afterlife always existed.

Aspects of Tangaloa

Tama-puuli-amafoa, King of Heaven, Tangaloa-eiki, Celestial Chief, Tangaloa-tufunga, Celestial Artisan, and Tangaloa-atu-logo-logo, Celestial Messenger, all live in the heavens. Tangaloa the Messenger comes down in search of any lands below. He travels on the back of a bird. On his first trip, he spies only a sand bank. He reports back to the others, whereupon he is told to return again in seven days, at which time there is

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Beatrice Shirley Baker’s translation of a Tongan creation myth dealing with the god Laufakanaa describes Tangaloa-tufunga as both carpenter and axe-maker (Gifford 16).
more land revealed. He reports back, and again is told to wait for seven days. When he
returns again, the earth is uncovered. He asks Tangaloa the Artisan to cast down some
chips and shavings left over from his work to provide a resting place, which leads to the
creation of the island Eva. Tangaloa the Messenger returns to the heavens a final time to
ask for plants or trees. Tangaloa the Chief provides some seed, which then becomes a
vine covering all of the land (Dixon 19).

A unique feature of this myth is the splitting of Tangaloa into several
complementary parts, rather than presenting him as an all-powerful deity. Vestiges of
Tangaloa as supreme god still resonate here, including the appearance of a bird which
assists him, as well as Tangaloa in some way either discovering, or uncovering, the land
covered by oceans. Each of the aspects of Tangaloa provide an integral contribution to
the story of creation, from the one who explores, to the one who provides the means for a
resting place, culminating in the presentation of seed. The resulting vine, although not
named specifically here, has clear similarities to the Peopling Vine seen elsewhere,
through which humanity comes forth. Although this myth concludes before describing
the emergence of human beings in some fashion from the peopling vine, the parallels to
other creation myths of the region logically lead to the conclusion that the vine ultimately
plays a role in creating humans.

The stylistic use of the time span of seven days holds obvious parallels with the
account of creation found in Genesis, and given that such an accounting of days does not
otherwise exist in Austronesian creation mythology, its appearance is a likely result of
influence from Christian explorers and missionaries.
Tangaloa and the Carpenters

Tangaloa came down from heaven in ancient times, along with this son. After staying in Tonga for a while, the pair visits Fiji. Once in Fiji, they build a fortress impassable by all who do not have their express permission to enter.

The Fijians fight the carpenters assisting in the construction effort out of jealousy, but they are unable to break through into the fortress. Eventually, a Fijian god makes an offer to the Fijians: this god will fight Tangaloa and his carpenters. The god brings down rain, but the wooden wall holds. However, after hours of the downpour, the fortress floats away, thus scattering the carpenters throughout the world (Gifford 201).

While this myth does feature the first appearance of Tangaloa on earth, it otherwise focuses on aspects other than creation. The story serves to illustrate the influence Tongans eventually had over the mythic material of Fiji. The unnamed Fijian god lacks the power to destroy Tangaloa and the work of his carpenters, setting the stage for Tangaloa to reign unopposed as the most power god of the region. This myth also provides a lovely explanation for the origin of carpentry as a craft. These scattered carpenters taught the craft in those places where they washed up, thus spreading carpentry worldwide.

Laufakanaa

Ata is the first land. Tamapouialamafoa, the king of the sky, commands Tangaloa-eiki, Tangaloa-Tufunga and Tangaloa-atulongolongo to find a ruler for the new land. They send for Laufakanaa, advising him he may rule Ata in any manner he chooses. However, the Tangaloa warn Ata that he must create the winds, and if the people call on
him for assistance, he must provide favorable winds for sailing vessels. In turn, the
people must always provide Laufakanaa with an offering of bread cooked in coconut oil.

Laufakanaa agrees to rule Ata, and brings with him a fishing net on which all
other fishing nets are based. He also brought bananas, the root plant known as si, and two
types of yams (Gifford 16-17).

As with many creation myths from the Austronesian region, the story recounted
here is both lavish in detail and frustrating for its sometimes fragmentary elements. It
starts in medias res, with Ata already having sprung into being in some nebulous fashion.
However, its inclusion here lies in its depiction of the first ruling god of Ata, as well as
the creation of various foodstuffs critical to the survival of the islanders.

Beatrice Shirley Baker translates Laufakanaa as comprised of two parts: lau,
meaning speak, and fakanaa, to silence (Gifford 16). Laufakanaa is the joining of two
opposites which coexist in harmony.

The Sandpiper

A sandpiper digs worms up out of the earth, then leaves them out in the sun to rot.
Man emerges from these rotted carcasses (Dixon 29).

Rather than the Peopling Vine producing maggots, which eventually form human
beings, the sandpiper here assumes the responsibility of setting the creation of man forth.
The myth does not specify whether males are created alone, or males and females
together, but no separate account of the creation of women exists. The use of the term
“man” may simply be anachronistic from Dixon’s book, written in 1916 when “man” was
still utilized as a referent to both genders. Given that the traditions dealing with the
emergence of humans from the remains of the Peopling Vine hint that both men and women are born from the worm corpses.

TUVALU

Tuvalu was formerly known as the Ellice Islands and includes Nanumanga, Nui, Nukufetau, and Vaitupu. The island group lies to the westernmost border separating Micronesia from Polynesia.

NANUMANGA

The Separation of Heaven and Earth

Heaven and earth rest against one another, not allowing any room for creation to grow between them. A sea serpent decides to separate these two aspects, and is successful in her task. Her mate is the earth (Turner 288).

The Nanumangans claim their origin as Samoa, as do other members of the Tuvalu island chain. From this original homeland, they travelled northwest to Nanumanga. An interesting feature of this story lies in the depiction of earth as male, rather than female, as is common throughout many world mythologies.

Another striking feature shared by other Austronesian myths is the depiction of the serpent in some way assisting in creation. In China, the red dragon serves as a representation of the “rhythms of the cosmos and conferred fecundity on the earth” (Eliade 208). By sloughing off its skin and thus existing in a perpetual state of regeneration, the serpent serves as the ultimate symbol of the life cycle.

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NUI

The Separation of Heaven and Earth and Creation of Humans

Heaven and earth rest against one another, and must be separated. The decision is made to raise the heavens upward to solve the problem. The serpent successfully completes this task, but is then cut into pieces. These pieces become the nearby islands, and its blood forms the stars.

The god Aulialia decides to create human beings. He forms models, then raises them up. As soon as he stands them up, the models come to life (Turner 300).

The means by which the serpent manages to raise the heavens does not appear in this account. The beauty of creation mythology lies in seeing how one motif changes or evolves over a given area, and this tale is no exception. Here, the serpent serves the dual purpose of solving the problem of heaven resting upon the earth, then giving up its life so that islands and stars can spring from its remains.

NUKUFETAU

The Separation of Heaven and Earth

Heaven rests upon the earth, not allowing enough room for anyone to move around. The fish hold a meeting to solve the problem. Eventually, the eel steps forward and offers its services in the quest to separate heaven from earth. Ultimately, the eel succeeds in moving heaven off of the earth (Turner 285).

The eel in this story bears striking resemblance to the serpent described in the myth from Nanumanga.
VAITUPU

The Origin of Humans

Long ago, the heavens and the coral were one. They were separated when vapor emanating from the rocks causes the heavens to rise. Man forms from this vapor as well. Man’s sweat forms the first woman. They have three sons, two of whom gain renown for raising the heavens even higher. The third one cannot reach the heavens because he is short and must climb a hill in order to achieve the task.

The people of Vaitupu trace their origin to Samoa (Turner 283). Given that the two islands lie quite close to one another, with Vaitupu just to the north and west of Samoa, the possibility of initial settlement from Samoa follows logically.
Australia lies just south of Melanesia. How it came to be populated remains unclear, but it appears that the first settlers to the island entered along the northern coast, then followed the Cape York Peninsula downward (Poignant 111). The setting for their creation myths is named the Eternal Dreamtime, which Joseph Campbell eloquently describes as, “The permanent, no-where, no-when, of the mythological age...when all was magical” (Masks 89). The Australian material focuses to a great extent on the worship of ancestors, who often take on the role of creator gods and goddesses. However, a few of these creation myths do focus on one main source of creating power, whether male or female, which takes on the role of a remote god, as opposed to the ancestors, who are associated with the earth, and remain a part of it. Although some features of these myths, especially the vision of the Eternal Dreamtime, remain unique to Australia, influence from nearby New Zealand, with its tradition of Rangi and Papa, asserts itself in the form of myths detailing a time when the sky pressed upon the earth, but devoid of specific reference to the New Zealand god and goddess. The richness of the material is evident, yet as was the case when Europeans encountered indigenous peoples throughout the Austronesian region, the myths instead suffered derision. The words of William Dampier, a Dutch explorer writing in 1688, read thus: “I did not perceive that they did worship anything” (Moorehead 102). The reader encountering these myths for the first time would
be hard pressed to concur with such a statement, which stands as yet another example of how indigenous material ends up marginalized, maligned and misunderstood when it deviates from a recognizable, frequently Christian, pattern.

The Aborigines speak of the ancestral beings emerging from an otherwise featureless landscape. These ancestors took different forms, from animals, to birds, to plants, and sometimes humans. They travelled the land, fashioning everything as they went, including rivers, rocks and the like. The account of the ancestors moving across the barren landscape, granting it features and life as they move along, differs significantly from accounts featuring gods such as Tangaroa, who function as creators and sources of power. Gods of this type remain remote from the people, in opposition to the ancestors, who the Aborigines envision as settling down on earth as a part of the land. A myth from Cape York ascribes the initial creation process to two brothers, who chop down a giant tree. The flying bits of bark become different species of trees, as well as plants, animals, and all other aspects of creation (McKenzie 142-143). The emergence of humans remains elusive, given no more primacy than the bringing forth of flora or fauna. This trait proves common to Australia, where creation myths focus on matters of concern to the tribe, such as rituals and sacred places, as opposed to a large cosmogony. Only the most perfunctory explanations are given for the origin of life and landscape.

Accordingly, the following myths are brief as well, but follow the pattern seen throughout the region, especially New Zealand, of the sky pressing upon the earth. In one account, the sky rests upon the earth, restricting the movement of the sun. A magpie comes along and pushes up the sky, then props it in place using a stick. The sun gains the freedom to move across the sky. Other stories tell of the sky resting on mountains or
trees, rather than flush with the earth. The focus of these two myths remains narrow, providing only scant accounts of how the sky came to ascend to its proper place. Whereas other myths of the sky pressing on earth expand to provide the origin of other entities, while depicting the separation as the means by which light, and thus a bounty of creation, come into the world.

The Aborigines describe many different sky spirits, as opposed to areas focusing on Tangaroa or Papa as the primary centers of male power. One of them, a powerful male, emerges as a creator god. He not only creates human beings, but provides them with tools, ceremonies, and other features of society (Poignant 116-117). It is important to note that this male spirit does not hold sway over the other spirits, nor is he a supreme deity, or head of the pantheon.

Eingana the Mother

Eingana is the creator of all things. At first, however, she vomits up what she creates, rather than being able to give birth normally. One day, she emerges from a watering hole in the form of a snake, filled with all the different life forms. Distressed and in pain, she rolls about crying and wailing. An old man named Barraiya watches her for a time, then spears her. This action creates a vagina-like opening through which she can give birth.

Eingana keeps hold of the Toun, a string joined to every form of life. When she lets go of the string, death occurs. Eingana cannot die; if she did, all creation would perish as well (Meltzer 11-13).
KULIN TRIBE

The supreme god Bunjil created everything, from the earth, to the animals, and plants. He creates humans out of clay, and breathes life into their mouths, noses and navels. Bunjil gives dominion over the earth to his son Bimbeal, and the sky to his daughter Karakarook. Bunjil himself now dwells above the clouds.

Bunjil retreats from a place of prominence to a more remote role, where he is removed from everyday interaction with his creations. As with instances where Tangaroa replaces Rangi, the original sky father retreats to the reaches of heavens in favor of more vital/vivid children (Eliade, *Patterns* 41-42, 52). Bunjil’s offspring remain behind on the earth, as do the other ancestor-gods of Australian myth, replacing their father as the deities in closest proximity to the human world.

THE NORTHERN ARANDA

All is darkness. Karora, the bandicoots’ ancestor, slept in llbalintja, a sink not yet filled with water. Above Karora grow red flowers and overgrown grasses. A great sacred pole sways above him as well, grown up in the midst of all the flowers. Karora’s head rests at the root of the pole, which reaches up into the heavens. The pole itself lives, covered in skin like a man. While Karora lies there, he starts to think, to wish and to desire. Bandicoots then emerge from his armpits and navel. They break up through the dirt and grass, and live. Dawn breaks, the sun rises, then Karora also gets up and emerges from the sod. The resulting hole he left behind fills with honeysuckle juice, and is now known as llbalintja Soak.
Karora hungers, as his magic left his body. He grabs two of the bandicoots massing around him, then cooks them in the sand, in the heat of the sun.

Evening approaches and Karora falls asleep while thinking of someone to help him. From Karora’s armpit emerges a shape like a bull-roarer, which then takes human form and is fully grown by the end of the night. Karora awakens from the weight of this human on his arm, and sees him resting against his shoulder.

The pair performs a ceremony when dawn breaks.

This myth belongs specifically to those of the Bandicoot totem (Campbell, *Masks* 106-107), so the emergence of the first bandicoots before the first human comes as no surprise. Although the myth gives little detail into the nature of Karora, he is a god of immense power, evidenced by his ability to think the first human being to life, without the need of magic, an agent such as clay or mud, or even for Karora to be awake. The sacred pole featured here bears a striking resemblance to the axis mundi.

Although not full creation myths on their own, the following provides insight as to the divinities worshipped elsewhere in Australia. The southeastern tribes, including the Kamilaroi, Wiradjuri, and Euahlayi, worship the god Baiame as the supreme creator, who was himself self-created. Other tribes along the eastern coast, including the Muring, name their supreme god Daramulum, who plays the same role as Baiame (Eliade 41).
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Time marches ever onward, humanity moves further away from its origins, yet the myths of our beginnings remain, perhaps evolving over time to fit new worldviews, scientific discoveries, or changing technologies. As Bronislaw Malinowski gracefully stated, myths are “a statement of a primeval, greater and more relevant reality” (Colum viii). No matter what religion a given person subscribes to, his or her mind inevitably drifts from time to time to a contemplation of how life began, by what means was the universe set into motion, and what ramifications these beliefs have on everyday life. Perhaps only the very closed-minded fail to appreciate the richness of the creation materials of all the world’s nations, while the fortunate majority appreciate the opportunity to see the world through another culture’s eyes, even one which remains otherwise mysterious or unknown.

Indeed, the stories found in the corpus of Austronesian mythology resonate with the modern reader, even when he or she shares no ancestral commonalties with the region. The creation stories provide a wealth of variety for the reader, and run the gamut from humorous, as is the case with the tricksters botching the act of creation, to the tragic, found in Tane’s treachery towards his daughter Hine. The recurring theme of the great flood which destroys creation provides the reader with a view of the world as comprised of natural cycles of rebirth and destruction, rather than a world at the whim of
a god who may decide to eradicate all life out of anger. Within these ordered, continuous, and natural patterns of life and death, human beings live with the understanding that destruction may come, but it always arrives after a given number of years. Therefore, humans need not live in fear that on any given day, a god may decide to destroy the earth. The tale of Rangi and Papa, pulled apart by necessity, yet ever yearning for one another, calls to the essence of humanity, to that component of our psyches spurring us on to seek love, then grieving if it is lost to us. The might of Tangaroa, as well as his widespread influence over the region, shares some similarities with the Christian concept of an all-powerful, patriarchal male deity.

Although some over-arching themes are found within Austronesian creation mythology, a great deal of the regional stories present methods of creation found nowhere else, as is the case of the myth of men emerging from mussels. While these widely differing accounts may be frustrating simply due to their number and the difficulty in keeping all of the stories straight, they also demonstrate a richness of thought and inventiveness which easily rival other mythologies of the world. Beauty can be found even in those myths which exist in only a sentence or two, as the most obscure references provide glimpses into how these island nations conceived of themselves, and of the rest of the world. Although much Austronesian mythic material has been lost, primarily due to the encroachment of Western outsiders into the area, we are all fortunate to have the opportunity to share in what remains.


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Rangi Above/ Papa Below, Tangaroa Ascendant, Water All Around Us:
Austronesian Creation Myths

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