

# TRADITIONS OF AND NOTES ON THE PAUMOTU (OR TUAMOTU) ISLANDS.

*Collected by the Rev. Père Hervé Audran, of Fakahiva,  
Paumotu Islands.*

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY R. H. ROCKEL, M. A.

## PART III.

### NAPUKA AND TE POTO ISLANDS.

#### NAPUKA.

**T**HIS island, situated in  $14^{\circ} 9' 30''$  S. and  $141^{\circ} 17' 50''$  E., (of Paris) and distant about 520 miles from Papeete, Tahiti, and about 290 from Atuona, is on the direct steamer-route between Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands. The ready outlet thus furnished for its copra will certainly increase the importance of this island. Napuka, discovered by Byron in 1765, is formed of a group of islets united by massive coral reefs of irregular formation. These islets and reefs enclose a lagoon.

The name *Napuka* is comparatively recent. Formerly the island was called *Te Pukamaruia*. It was divided into four principal districts: Gati-Marō, Gati-Haumata, Gati-Pahaa, and Gati-Mahaga.<sup>1</sup> The first known Napuka man was called Tane-haruru-ariki, whose descent is unknown. However, one legend mentions him as being descended from the three original spirits (? or ancestors) of Hawaiki, "*No raro mai ratou i a Hawaiki.*" Tane-haruru-ariki had a son named Taikaroka.

The first navigators to land on this island were Kiore, Mahinui, Tu-tavake and Te Uhi, but their stay was of brief duration. The present population of Napuka-Te Poto is 164 souls. The inhabitants have the olive complexions of the natives of Tuamotu; and, according to a tradition, widely believed throughout the archipelago, these islands were formerly much more densely peopled (and in all probability much more cultivated) than is the case to-day. There is no doubt that some disaster occurred, bringing in its train destruction and death. Such were the hurricanes of 1903 and 1905. The royal

1. It must be remembered that the Paumotu people always pronounce an "n" before the "g," thus in the above names, Gati is the same as the Maori of New Zealand, &c., Ngati meaning the "descendants of."—EDITOR.

genealogy begins with Tutefa and ends with Taki,<sup>2</sup> crowned by the Rev. Father Germain Fierens. As champions, are mentioned Piki, Karere and the famous Kakurare, who single-handed destroyed the crew of a boat coming from the Marquesas—"Pahi no Nuuhiva mai."

The people of Napuka must have degenerated sadly, for their distinguishing characteristic to-day is their lack of energy. They carry to the utmost limit their indolence and freedom from all care.

Their occupation is to fish for the few *béni-tière* (clams) necessary to sustain life. The women, who do all the work, seem to have robust constitutions, as is shown by the following story told of the late wife of the present chief. One day, having gone out for food, as usual, she filled her basket with clams, and then got into her pirogue again. There she gave birth to a child, washed it, took a bath herself, and then returned calmly to the village, as if nothing had happened! As for the men, they spend their time in lounging about; or else carelessly stretched at full length on the ground; they chat or sleep.

It is on this subject that the Rev. Father Fierens wrote in 1877; "The natives of Napuka are, without any doubt, the most stupid and the most primitive of the inhabitants of the Tuamotu group. They live almost like animals in the wood, without huts and almost without clothing, usually sleeping on the ground whether the weather be wet or fine. They are a childlike folk, whose education must be begun, in every respect, with the very first and simplest elements. They have no idea of the arts most useful and most necessary to their material comfort." The good missionary adds that it is useless to urge them to work and to set them an example of this; they stir no more than do statues. When it was necessary to erect his temporary chapel, the Rev. Father Germain worked himself to encourage them, they all looked on at his working, but no one stirred. At last losing patience, in a moment of anger instead of speaking to them in their own language he burst out in French. The result was like an electric shock; everyone began to work. The Rev. Father often made use of this recipe, and even had recourse to Flemish, whose harsher pronunciation was still more effective in shaking up those stolid souls. To indolence they add stubbornness. Their palavers are interminable, and one individual can hold out against a hundred others, and will maintain his opinion tooth and nail.

Of course under these conditions, poverty reigns supreme in the island. The sole clothing of the natives is a few miserable rags around their loins. Although the soil seems fairly rich in phosphates

2. The following is a list of kings who have reigned in this island: 1. Tutefa, 2. Mapuhia, 3. Maru, 4. Fakaipoa, 5. Maruake, 6. Mapuhi, 7. Piriaro, 8. Te-Ariki-fau-tagata, 9. Taki.

and guano, the island yields nothing but a luxuriant growth of scrub, in which the predominant plants are the usual Polynesian species, pandanus, coral tree, and coco-nut.

The following is the tradition relating to the introduction of the first coco-nut into the island. This coco-nut tree was none other than the sprouted head of Tuna (the eel). This latter was a being half-human and half fish, whom the celebrated Maui had killed and whose head he had severed from his body. With the help of his wife, Hina, Maui buried the head in the earth. This head of Tuna had, by a miracle, sprouted, then grown and thus become the first coco-nut tree in our islands.<sup>3</sup>

The historical fact is that the first coco-nut tree was introduced into Napuka by Mahinui. He came from the West, that is, from Tahiti, and was accompanied by his daughter Nuhia, travelling on board of his own canoe, the 'Hoopu.' When the Catholic mission planted coco-nuts in this island, it is said that the missionary was greatly surprised to find on his return, that all the stems had turned yellow. He sought the reason and dug up the nuts. He was disagreeably surprised to find that the nuts had been taken up and eaten by the natives!

Thanks to the care of Laurent Vaipouri the island possesses a fine breed of fowls, originally from the Marquesas. The dog, which is considered edible, is of recent introduction.

From the religious point of view the island had, previous to the introduction of Christianity into Napuka, three celebrated *marae*: Taranaki at Te Matahoa, Rangihoa in the village itself, and Havana at Te Poto. The *marae* was the sacred place of Polynesian paganism. It was formed from Ruahatu.<sup>4</sup> On the *ranga*, a kind of altar were the *Fare-tini-atua*, a kind of reliquary in which was deposited the hair of the dead, whom it was desired to honour. It was these bunches of hair (*huruhuru tangata*) that formed, scarcely fifty years ago, the chief objects of adoration in our Polynesian islands. On the *marae* were to be seen the *Okaoka* or *Komore-niu*, that is to say, the spears of hard coco-nut wood. As a matter of fact each elder—and it was the elders who composed the priestly class—was bound, on great occasions and especially in the ceremonies which preceded the cooking of the first turtle of the season, to support himself in a dignified manner on his spear.

The elders formed a semicircle around the *marae*, keeping close to their long stone *te pofatu*, (? or wall) against which they leaned their

3. On the subject of Maui and the eel (*tuna*), see this "Journal," Vol. XXVI, p. 126; also "Myth and Songs," p. 77, where Dr. Wyatt Gill gives the full story according to the Rarotongans.—EDITOR.

4. It is suggested this expression means that the *marae* was dedicated to Ruahatu, who was a Tahitian god.—EDITOR.

backs. Near them was *te nohonga*, that is, the smooth and shining footstool cut out of a single piece of the trunk of a large and solid Tou tree. The outer edge of the *marae* was usually decorated with the leaves of the coco-nut palm skilfully interwoven. This formed "Te Kakinga."

In the middle of the open space were two kinds of amulets covered with garlands. These were two little decorated sticks, *te tokiofa*. As soon as the throat of the turtle was cut one of these little sticks was brought and laid on the victim, as if to consecrate it. After the sacrifice the little stick was returned to its place. The ceremony was accompanied by songs and rhythmic prayers. During the cooking the prayers continued. As soon as the turtle was done to a turn it was taken out of the Kanaka (or native) oven, the *tokiofa* was again placed on it, and then the turtle was divided up. The women alone went without a share.

The introduction of Christianity dates from 1877. The Rev. Father Albert Montiton had already visited Napuka, but his visit had been only a flying one. With unlimited energy, patience and self-denial the Rev. Father Germain succeeded in evangelising the natives and in inducing them to conform to the law of labour. He even had a fine stone church built; but this was unfortunately destroyed in the hurricane of 1903. Moreover his precious documents relating to the origin, history, traditions and beliefs of the natives have, only too probably, disappeared in the same way.

#### TE POTO.

Eight or ten miles to the west of Napuka is seen in clear weather and a calm sea a pretty clump of trees. This is the outline of the pretty island of Te Poto. It is oval in shape with a decided slope towards the centre. Probably this is the ancient crater of an almost filled-in volcano. The outer rim of the island is at least ten feet above the level of the sea. From this the land rises in a gentle slope as far as the centre of the island, which forms a kind of funnel-shaped basin having a wide rim. As the bottom of this basin is formed of an impermeable rock, rain-water accumulates there, and is only very gradually evaporated by the heat of the sun. The island is extraordinarily fertile, a luxuriant vegetation growing everywhere. About a third of the island is under cultivation, but the work is often done irregularly and in a very clumsy manner. The soil of Te Poto is formed of a very thick and very rich layer of humus. Pumpkins imported from the Marquesas grow wonderfully and bear splendid fruit. The same would be the case with the *maioie*, or bread-fruit, the banana and the orange. The inhabitants, who number forty-six, are a tribe hailing from Napuka. A large hut built of pandanus

serves them as a chapel. Of all the islands of the Tuamotu Group, Te Poto is perhaps the only one which has a cove. Situated on the north-west of the island, this cove offers a good anchorage and a safe shelter to cutters and schooners, when storms blow up from the south or the east.

The language of Napuka and Te Poto is one of the numerous Maori dialects. Finally, in concluding this brief account, I am glad to be able to add that, if the native has hitherto remained in his primitive state, it is due to his isolation and to the fact that he holds his property on the communal system ; but Christianity can transform him and commerce enrich him. Already, since my short residence in these islands I have been able to certify to a marked advance.

*(To be continued.)*