

# The Legend of Hotu Atua and Rua Tara

As told by Flores Lebert Mataura of Raivavae

To Lynn Danaher, June 2006

One day long ago during the ancient times of the pagan culture, there was great inequality between the sexes. The men at that time, were great warriors, made all the decisions and were in charge of all things. The women were tired of not having the same rights and treatment as the men. The women wanted to prove that all women were worthy equal rights.

There came a great woman warrior Toeno Hine who encouraged the women to challenge the men to a contest of strength and cunning. The women decided to offer a very difficult challenge to the men. The challenge consisted of each team (men and women) choosing a very large stone that would have to be moved a great distance. The first team to get the stone into the water of the lagoon before the cock crowed on the next day would win the contest. The male warrior's confidently took the challenge. Their names are now forgotten, due to their ill fated loss. They are only known as "the men who fell asleep".

The woman all gathered together on the day of the challenge to move the stone. They formed a coordinated effort with all their combined strength and strategic planning began slowly before the light of day to move the stone toward the sea. The men were arrogant of their strength. They assumed it would be easy to move the stone. So the men got a late start as they had been up all the night before celebrating their sure victory over the women. The men finally began after the sun had already risen well into the sky. The men to their surprise, found moving the stone much more difficult than they had anticipated.

The women continued to methodically move the stone at a slow steady pace toward the lagoon. The men realized they would need to work hard to catch up but were still confident of their ability to beat the women and get their stone into the sea first. The women continued to work hard through out the day and night without stopping to rest or eat. Because the men had been up late the night before they all became very tired; just as they got their stone to the edge of the sea, they fell asleep around its base.

The women finally reached the edge of the lagoon with their stone, while the men slept around their stone as it rested on the shore of the lagoon. The women with their last bit of strength pushed their huge stone well into the lagoon. Because the women had gotten their stone into the sea well before the cock crowed on the next day there was no one to witness their victory, except themselves.

Therefore the women all gathered together and decided to make sure the men did not get their stone into the sea and thus guarantee their victory. The women all very quietly, so as not to wake the men as they slept around their stone, gathered around the men's stone and urinated (mimi) directly on the stone, thereby severely contaminating it, as women's urine is tapu!! Then the women all began crowing loudly like the cock to wake the men. The men awoke startled; all realized they had been beaten! They could not touch their stone or move it one more foot as it was now forbidden to touch by the women's urine. The women all began to laugh and shout with great joy as they had won the challenge. There was a great celebration!!!

From that day forward all the women of Raivavae began enjoying equal rights with the men. Women have since been regarded as having tremendous power, strength and cunning. The women of Raivavae hold positions of power and are generally better educated than the men. The Pastor of both the Temples in Anatonu and Viauru is a female Pastor Vanina Maitui. She is the most important and powerful person on Raivavae. Her appointment on Raivavae and her acceptance to such a powerful position by the local islanders is due in a large part to the great courage and intelligence of a woman warrior of long ago, Toeno Hine.

Today both stones stand as a testament to this important contest of long ago.



One sits at the waters edge near the village of Anatonu it is called Rua Tara (the men's stone).



the other is past Anatonu at the far eastern edge of Raivavae well out into the lagoon. It is called Hotu Atua (the women's stone).

**John Stokes of the Bishop Museum explored the Austral Islands, specifically Raivavae in 1920. While researching his handwritten field notes in 2008 at the Bishop Museum, I found he had recorded the exact same legend. This gives great credence to the value of oral history and must be considered in all expeditions to remote locations.**