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**a. Oral traditions as to the first settlement of Mitiaro - Tua taito no te au tangata tei no'ō mua ki Mitiaro**

The gods drew this island up from the depth of the ocean, but it was bare rock, without any soil. One of the gods, Tane, decided to beautify the island. Suddenly two iron-wood trees sprang out of the rock near the sea: one on the east coast, facing Ma'uke, the other on the west coast, facing Atiu. Both trees touched the skies. No wonder, for they were embodiments of Tane-tarava, Tane the all-sufficient. The trees bowed down until their tops rested on the neighbouring islands. Fairies collected soil in coconut-leaf baskets, which they put in the branches. The trees raised themselves and the soil in the baskets was poured out over the island. This process was repeated many times until the island was fit for human habitation. One can still see the glens from which the fairies took the soil on Atiu and Ma'uke.<sup>1</sup>

The island was settled from Atiu.<sup>2</sup> An ancestor was Kutikuti-rau-matangi, and an ancestress Te Rongo-te-maeva.<sup>3</sup>

The ancient name of the island is Nuku-Roa, translated by William Wyatt Gill as "Vast Host",<sup>4</sup> not "Vast Boat".<sup>5</sup> An old meaning of "Nuku", however, was "Land",<sup>6</sup> and a better translation seems to be "Large Land". This meaning is in any case substantiated by the facts. Aerial photographs taken in 1959 showed that Mitiaro is twice as big as previously thought, and 1,000 acres bigger than Ma'uke. It is the fourth island by size of the whole group.<sup>7</sup> The present-day name Mitiaro is translated by William Wyatt Gill as "Face of the Ocean".<sup>8</sup> "Aro" can mean "face". "Miti" for "ocean" is not frequently used today, although. Savage gives it as a second meaning; the first being "salt".<sup>9</sup> But "miti" is the Tahitian word for "ocean".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gill, William Wyatt, *Life in the Southern Isles...*, 1876: 171; Gill, William Wyatt, *Historical Sketches of Savage Life in Polynesia...*, 1880: 39

<sup>2</sup> Gill, William, *Gems from the Coral Islands*, 1856: 254

<sup>3</sup> Buck, Sir Peter, *Arts and Crafts of the Cook Islands*, 1944: 12

<sup>4</sup> Gill, William Wyatt, *Myths and Songs from the South Pacific*, 1876: 17; Pakoti, John, ...*The first Inhabitants of Aitutaki; The History of Ru* 1895: 64, 70

<sup>5</sup> Williamson, Robert W., *The social and political systems of central Polynesia*, 1924: Volume I 2580

<sup>6</sup> Walsh, D.S., and Biggs, Bruce, *Proto-Polynesian Word List I*, Auckland, 1966: 74

<sup>7</sup> Anon., *Mitiaro*, in CIR 6(1960) no. 4: 9

<sup>8</sup> Gill, William Wyatt, *Myths and Songs from the South Pacific*, 1876: 17

<sup>9</sup> Savage, Stephen, *A Dictionary of the Māori Language of Rarotonga*, 1962: 162

<sup>10</sup> Tryon, D.F., *Conversational Tahitian*, Canberra, 1970: 154

Another explanation is that Mitiaro is a shortened form of Motia-Aro,<sup>11</sup> also spelt as Motea-Aro.<sup>12</sup> “Motia” means: settlement, village, region.<sup>13</sup> Mitiaro is also said to mean: L’Île en lutte contre la mer,<sup>14</sup> the Isle in combat with the sea.

The late Tangata Nekeare explained the name of his home island as follows: The original name was Miti-Vai-Aro. “Aro” is the immature coconut; “vai aro” is the fluid of the “aro”, and “miti” is “to lick”. This name is said to refer to a battle with the Atiuans, when the blood of the victims was licked up like “vai aro”.<sup>15</sup>

Mitiaro was sometimes spelt as Mittiero, Mitièro, Mattiario,<sup>16</sup> and Metiario.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly before the arrival of the Gospel in 1823, Rongomatane ariki of Atiu attacked the island. The brave warriors of Mitiaro held their stronghold Te Pari against the invaders, until it was captured by stratagem.<sup>18</sup>

## **b. Wars in Mitiaro**

As detailed by Peter Buck<sup>19</sup> traditions from Aitutaki, Atiu, Mangaia, Mitiaro, and Mauke show that waves of people Aitu or Ngati-Tane (worshipers of Tane) from Tahiti descended upon the coasts of the islands and fought with the people already in occupation.

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, Stephenson Percy, *Hawaiki: The Whence of the Māori...*, 1899: 9

<sup>12</sup> Te Ariki-Tara-Are, *A Collection of Stories (or History) of the Ruling Chiefs, and the Priests, and the Lesser Chiefs*, Translated by Smith, Stephenson Percy, JPS 8 (1899): 62-64,75-77: 74

<sup>13</sup> Savage, Stephen, *A Dictionary of the Māori Language of Rarotonga*, 1962: 167

<sup>14</sup> Villaret, Bernard, *Iles des Mers du Sud*, Paris, 1966: 240

<sup>15</sup> Kloosterman, Alphons M.J., *Discoverers of the Cook Islands and the Names they Gave*, ...1976: 27

<sup>16</sup> Findlay, A.G., *Directory of the Pacific Ocean*, London, 1884: 495; Marin, M. Aylic, *Promenades en Océanie*. Le Tour du Monde: 214; Petit, E., *En Océanie*, Paris, 1888: 65; Kelly, J.L., *South Sea Islands: Possibilities of Trade with New Zealand*, Auckland, 1885 (Cook Islands, 48-54): 48

<sup>17</sup> Ellis, Rev. William, *Polynesian Researches*, 1831: Volume I 359

<sup>18</sup> Large, J.T., *Some Notes on Atiu Island, Cook Group, South Pacific*, JPS 22 (1913) 67-76: 69

<sup>19</sup> Buck, Sir Peter, *Mangaian Society*, 1934: 37-39