

The story about the sky

This text describes what the Usan ancestors did and said they would do again when the sky would come down. It is a parallel to many accounts of a time of darkness as found among Papua New Guinea Highlands groups (see: Blong, R.J. 1975. 'The Krakatoa myth and the New Guinea Highlands' The Journal of the Polynesian Society 84.213-217; and Blong, R.J. 'The time of darkness: Legend and reality'. Manuscript, not dated.)

tât der-ib-â qâmb ebet ig-our eng ye qob su-âb
sky come.down-sg.Fut-3s say.SS do.SS be-3p.Pr the I talk cut-SS

qemer-ib-âm. eng ete: goan ininou nomongur ne ininou tain-eb
say-sg.Fut-1s Giv.this thus old our ancestor and our father-pl

eng ete qâmb ig-urei: goan tât qur gas der-erei. tât
the thus say.SS be-3p.FP old sky fruit only come.down-3s.FP sky

qur eng der-er eng nomon gâs ende oân-oân. dâr-âb
fruit the come.down-3s.FP eng stone like thus white-REDUP come.down-SS

mon ombobanet mor der qiyo â man der mâni
house demolish.SS in.house come.down or and garden come.down yam

uiebig-a biet qiyo â mi qei-qei uiebig-a biet g-âb
cover-3s.DS rot.SS or and thing some-REDUP cover-3s.DS rot.SS see-SS

â wai qâmb bur qaar iua mor di g-âb â ende
and animal say.SS pig wild go.SS in.house come.up see-SS and thus

at ig-urei.
do.SS be-3p.FP

I will tell the story about what they used to do when the sky was about to come down. It goes like this: long ago, our ancestors and our fathers used to say thus: long ago the sky came down in pieces only. The sky pieces that came down were like stones, they were whitish. They came down, demolished the houses and came down into the houses, or they came down in the gardens and covered the yams and they rotted away, or they covered various things and they would rot away, or all kinds of animals, and wild pigs would run away and come into the houses, or thus they used to do (=it would happen).

end ne tât bo der-ib-â qâmb ne
this.Giv.for and sky again come.down-sg.Fut-3s say.SS and

tai-si-une me der qâmb ete at ig-urei:
short-make-1p.DS not come.down.sg.Imp say.SS thus do.SS be-3p.FP

mâni ber opur ba di-âb nam nân su-âb
yam young break.across.SS take come.up-SS tree tooth cut-SS

ag yâb ne qâmbâgâmb so-opur
outside thrust.in.the.ground.SS and q. cut-break.across.SS

ba di-âb nam nân yom-unor end iyot wogub
take come.up-SS tree tooth thrust-3p.UF the.at hang.over.SS cease.SS

saberî weipi ne mâni qâmb â nanasingir â qai
platform lay.out.SS and yam say.SS and corn and sugarcane

â mâni tangu qâmb â wâgai qâmb eng gâgâr ba di-âb
and yam t. say.SS and w. say.SS the all take come.up-SS

orom end ârir ende at ig-urei. mi eng ende
platform the.at throw.SS thus do.SS be-3p.FP thing the thus

u-t-une n-ub gen ini-mbâg wog qâmb.
him-give-1p.DS eat.SS body/trunk us-see.SS cease.sg.Imp say.SS

Therefore, when the sky would come down again they used to do thus in order to stop it from coming down: They used to break the new yam and bring it up, cut trees with teeth (=forked posts) thrust them outside into the ground, cut qâmbâgâmb vines, bring them up, and hang these over the posts that they would put into the ground, and then they would lay out a platform and bring up yams, corn, or sugarcanes, tangu yams, wâgai yams and everything, and throw all of this on top of the platform (orom is a fork in a tree-branch; saberî a bed-like platform), thus they used to do. (It was) in order for (the sky) to eat the things that they would give him (so that) he would see their bodies (=feel sorry for them) and cease.

ne qei ya âib der qiyo ai qebisi qâmb â
and some rain big come.down or ground tongue.make.SS say.SS and

moon âib di ende ab-a g-âb eng tât der-ib
wind big come.up thus do-3s.DS see-SS the sky come.down-sg.Fut.SS

ab-a qâmb wais wiger qeriri nob wuri-simo-ar
do-3s.DS say.SS rat w. (a lizard) with them-cry.for.help-Dist.SS

ete at e-âb ig-urei: `wais wiger e, ye me yu-rui-om
thus do.SS cry-SS be-3p.FP rat w. this I not me-hand.over-sg.Imp

e, mâni ub-ine n-ub igo-ân e. qeriri e, munai
this yam plant-1s.DS eat-SS be-2s.Pr this q. this house

mind-it-ine sigen-t igo-ân e, me yu-rui-om
build-for.you-1s.DS dry-at be-2s.Pr this not me-hand.over-sg.Imp

e, ende qâmb e-âb ig-urei.
this thus say.SS cry-SS be-3p.FP

And some (people) when they saw that a heavy rain would come down or, that there would be lightning and thunder (the ground makes a tongue, the ground speaks), or a strong wind would come up, thinking that the sky was about to come down, they used to cry out for help to the wiger rat and the qeriri lizard thus: ``Wiger rat here, do not hand me over to death. Since you are eating the yam that I planted. Qeriri here, since you are dry in the house

I built for you, do not hand me over to death, (NOTE: the final deictics make presuppositional nominals out of these sentences, which increases the imperative illocutionary force), thus they used to cry out.

ne gor wuri tât der munai ten wuri-uebig-iner qâmb qoren
and also they sky come.down house with them-cover-3s.UF say.SS post

gagam-gagam su-âb mon yâb ii igum-une der
strong-REDUP cut-SS house thrust.SS support.SS be-lp.DS come.down

erer igo-âr qâmb. ende at ne tât dâr-a mor
above be-sg.Imp say.SS thus do.SS and sky come.down-3s.DS in.house

igo mi n-ub igor-un qâmb qiyo, â urut urugeni igor-un
be.SS thing eat-SS be-lp.UF say.SS or and torch light.SS be-lp.UF

qâmb mâni goanet ba di big urut su-âb ârâsi
say.SS yam dig.SS take come.up put.SS torch cut-SS prepare.SS

big ende at ig-urei. tât dâr-âb igâm-a eng ai
put.SS thus do.SS be-3p.FP sky come.down-SS be-3s.DS the ground

bo me urigerem-inerei, ne worom mäg ger me g-unei, ende qâmb
again not daybreak-3s.UF and sun eye one not see-lp.UF thus say.SS

at ig-urei.
do.SS be-3p.FP

And also, lest the sky would come down and cover them with house and all they cut strong posts and thrust them into the ground and support the house in order that the house (when it) would come down would stay above. Thus they did and in order that they would have something to eat (when) the sky came down and they had to stay indoors, or, in order that they could light torches, they would dig up some yams, bring them up and put them, cut some torches and put them ready, thus they used to do. If the sky would be coming down, it would not becoming light again, and they would not see the sun again, thus they thought and did.

tât dâr-a mor igo mi ârâsi big-unor eng
 sky come.down-3s.DS in.house be.SS thing prepare.SS put-3p.UF the

mom n-ub ug-âb wogub bo mi ni-au ue g-âb ur
 enough eat-SS finish-SS cease.SS again thing eat-NOM not see-SS father

unor der wurinou wau wâ-râmb n-ub qiyo, â numungoan
 mother get.up their child him-hit.SS eat-SS or and barkcloth

bipâmi n-ub qiyo, â qorau nerub n-ub qiyo
 tear.apart.SS eat-SS or and breech-cloth pull.out.SS eat-SS or

â tari im birugeni n-ub ende at igor-ub-our.
 and head hair pull.out.SS eat-SS thus do.SS be-pl.Fut-3p

(When) the sky comes down and they are in the house, and they have completely finished eating the things that they have prepared and they see that there is nothing to eat anymore, parents will get up and kill their child and eat it, or, they will tear apart their barkcloths and eat, or, they will pull out their breech-cloth and eat them, or, pull out their head hair and eat that, thus they will be doing. (NOTE: nerub means 'pull out' or 'pull loose', said of clothes; the verb birugeni can only be used with 'hair' as object.)

ende at g-unor eng sig me iro-a g-âb eng wau
 thus do.SS see-3p.UF the very not ascend-3s.DS see-SS the child

wâ-râmb big qiyo, abau geer â tugar
 him-hit.SS put.SS or stringbag without.handle and basket

piepi qâmb eng gâgâr gum-ari o-âb qogom
 flat.basket.above.fire say.SS the all burn-3p.DS burn-SS smell

is-a tât ig-ub munon mom umb ubur-âb qogom
 descend-3s.DS sky hear-SS man enough die.SS finish-SS smell

is-our qâmb ir qâmb ende obo-ub-our. tât
 descend-3p.Pr say.SS ascend.sg.Imp say.SS thus do-pl.Fut-3p sky

qur qoan der-er eng se-e igo. âi qobur
 fruit old come.down-3s.FP the now-here be.3s.Pr bamboo break.along.

eng âin moan-t g-inen eng tât qur igor-ib-â.
 the grain.SS the bamboo knot-at see-2s.UF eng sky fruit be-sg.Fut-3s

end ne tât qur qoan der-er eng munon
 this.Giv.for and sky fruit old come.down-3s.FP the man

igâr-amorei qiyo sir ue. tât qob eng ende.
 them.hit-3s.FP or very not sky talk the thus

Given that they may do and see thus (=if they try this), if they see that (the sky) does not really ascend, they will kill a child and put it (outside) or, they will burn stringbags (an qeer stringbag is big, and without a handle), or baskets, piepi baskets (=large flat baskets that are hung above the fire to put meat and vegetables in that have to be dried) (so that) the smell will go down (=forth) in order that the sky would perceive the smell and think that all the people have completely died and go up, thus they will do. The pieces of sky that came down long ago are still (there). If you break bamboo open along the grain and you look at the bamboo knots, there will be the sky pieces. So, whether the sky when it came down long ago has killed people, I don't know. Thus is the story about the sky.