



# LEGENDS OF MICRONESIA

Book Two



MICRONESIAN READER SERIES

# Legends of Micronesia

BOOK TWO

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1951

HIGH COMMISSIONER

*Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*

*Department of Education*



### How The Sail Came To The Outrigger

The people of the Marshall Islands had interesting stories to explain certain things in nature. The stories were told again and again, through the years.

Why are certain stars in the sky? Why are they always in the same places? Who first made and used a sail on the outrigger canoe? The answers can be found in an old, beautiful Marshallese legend.

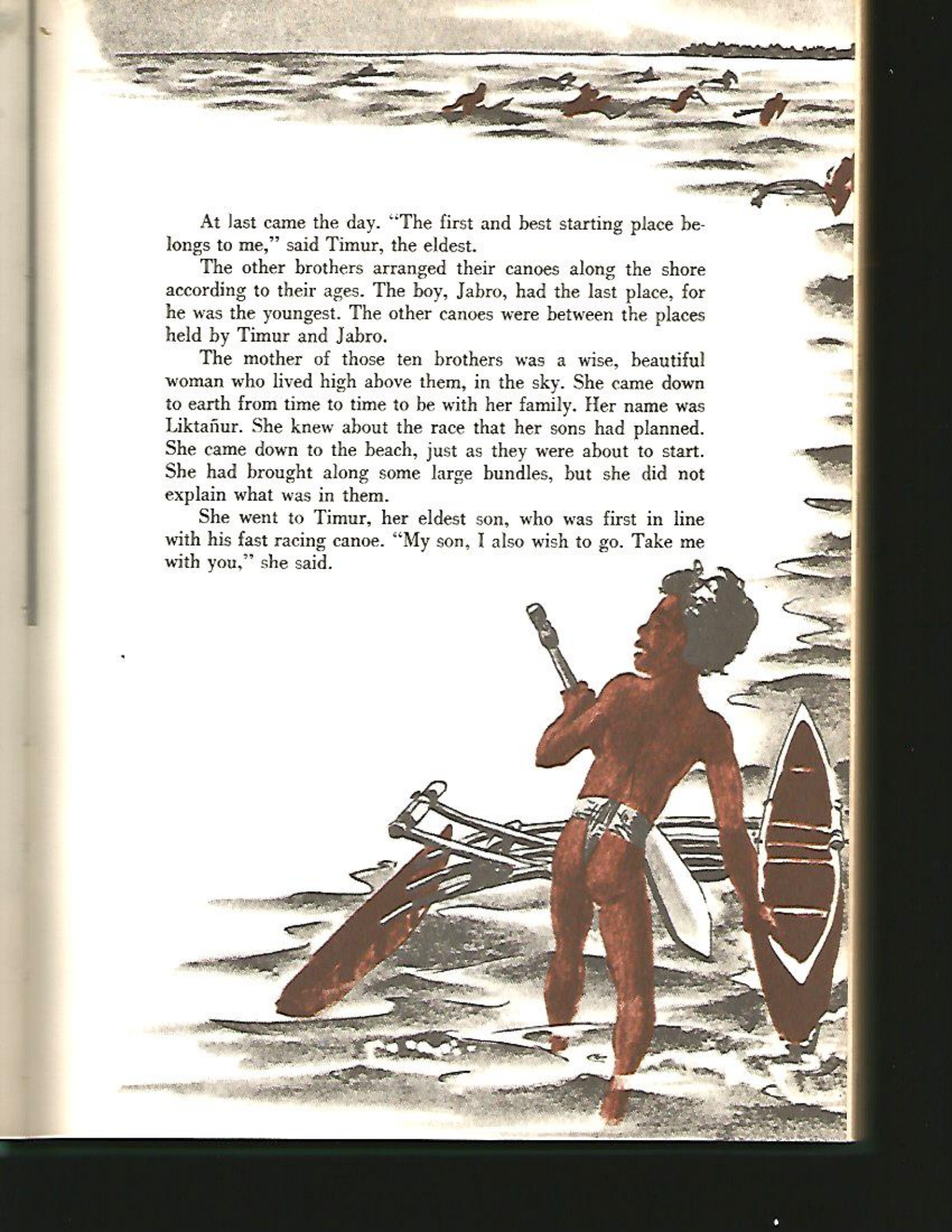
Once, a family of ten brothers lived on Woja, one of many islands of the Ailinglaplap Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The brothers thought that one of them should be chosen to rule over the others.

They decided to race their canoes far away from Woja Island, across the wide lagoon, to Jeh Island. It lay a great distance to the east. They felt sure that the best man would win the race.

In those days, sails had not yet been invented. A man used a pole with which to push his canoe along in shallow water. He used a paddle in deeper water.

The canoes of the ten brothers were built for speed. Each man had made his own. Each one had carved a special paddle for the great race.



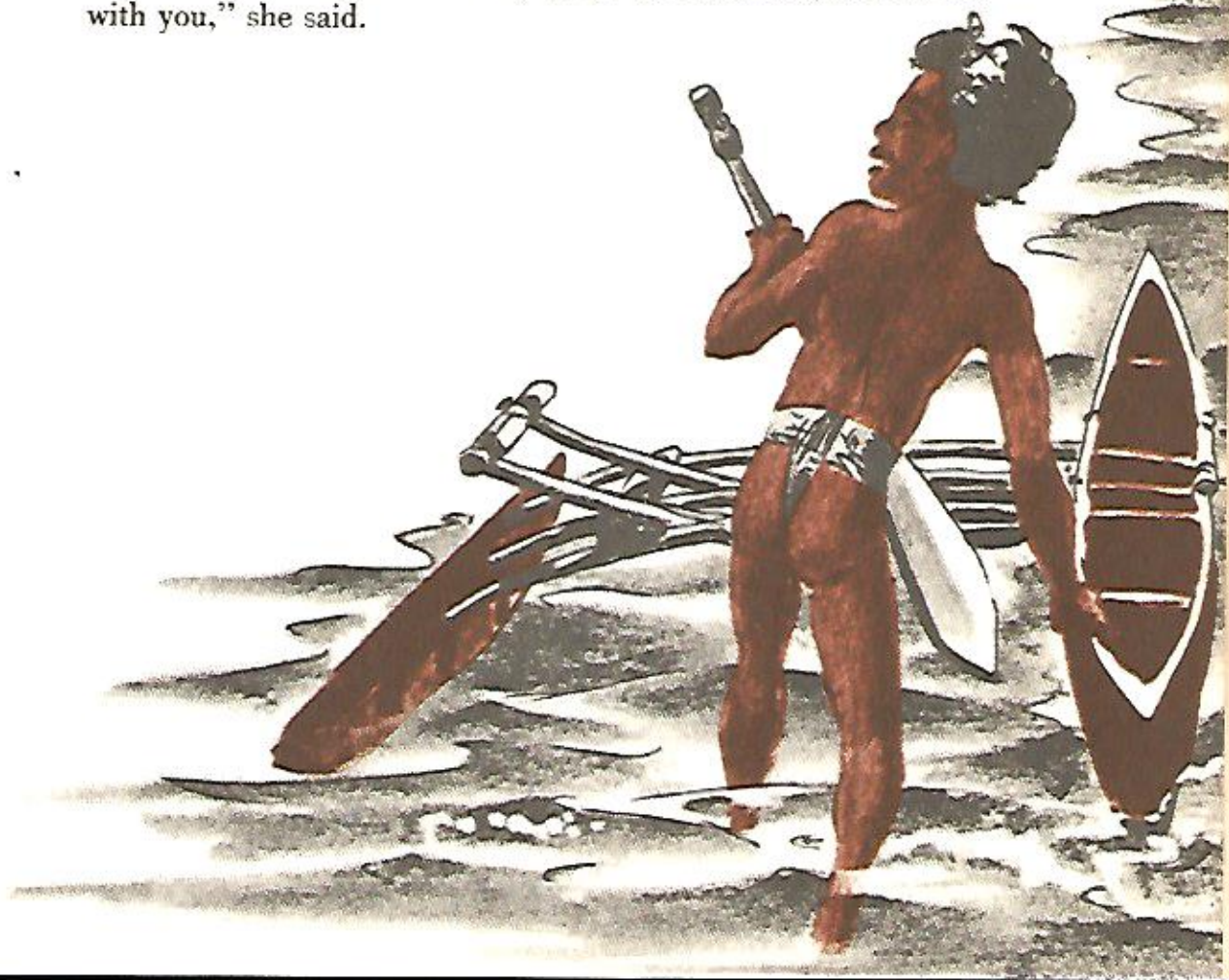


At last came the day. "The first and best starting place belongs to me," said Timur, the eldest.

The other brothers arranged their canoes along the shore according to their ages. The boy, Jabro, had the last place, for he was the youngest. The other canoes were between the places held by Timur and Jabro.

The mother of those ten brothers was a wise, beautiful woman who lived high above them, in the sky. She came down to earth from time to time to be with her family. Her name was Liktañur. She knew about the race that her sons had planned. She came down to the beach, just as they were about to start. She had brought along some large bundles, but she did not explain what was in them.

She went to Timur, her eldest son, who was first in line with his fast racing canoe. "My son, I also wish to go. Take me with you," she said.





Timur looked at his mother and saw the heavy things lying on the sand. He thought to himself, "My mother and her bundles will load my canoe too much. If I take her along, I might lose the race."

He shook his head. "I can't take you. Ask my brother," he said.

The mother went to the second brother and said, "My son, let me go with you in the race."

He, too, looked at the bundles and refused to take her. "It's impossible for you to ride in my canoe," he said. "Ask my brother."

And so it went with the other brothers. None was willing to take her along in the race, except the youngest one. When she asked Jabro, he said, "Of course, Mother. Come with me and welcome."

That day, the wind was blowing strongly from the east. The brothers knew that they would have to paddle hard all the way. But even so, Jabro was willing to take along his mother and her bundles.

The canoes of nine of the brothers leaped over the water. Each man paddled with great strength and skill. Soon they were far apart on the horizon, but Liktañur kept Jabro on the beach for a while.

"Don't worry because you are late in the race," she said. "You'll catch up with your brothers."

Then she asked him to loosen the strings of her large bundles, and Jabro did so. There was strange-looking gear, such as he never had seen before. Among such things as poles, hardwood blocks, ropes, and twine, he saw a large piece of strong, woven material.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Something new, Jabro," replied his mother.

"Who made it?"

"I did, my son. I wove strips of pandanus leaves. Then I sewed the strips together into this three-cornered shape."

"What is this thing to be called?"

"It's a sail. We'll hang it on a mast and put it on the canoe. It will fill up with wind and push your canoe along fast."

"Faster than I can paddle?"

"You won't need to paddle at all, my son. The sail will do all the hardest work for you. But you must learn how to put it up and to handle it, and how to steer the canoe with a paddle."

It was the first sail ever made. Liktañur helped Jabro put up the mast, the *kiju*. Then she helped him to place the other gear. Among the things she had brought along were the *repakak* and *jirukli*, one for each end of the canoe, so that Jabro could move the sail boom from one end of the canoe to the other and tack from right to left, against the wind.

They arranged the ropes and lines until the rigging was complete, with the *lot*, or pulley, at the head of the mast. Liktañur showed her son how to put up the sail and how to steer the canoe with a paddle. "Now we can go," she said.

Jabro was delighted when the sail filled with air and the breeze carried them fast over the high waves. He looked for his brothers, but by that time, they were a long way ahead. They had paddled far apart from each other and were out of sight, among the swells and the waves.

Liktañur showed Jabro how to get speed by tacking, first to starboard, the right side, and then to port, the left side. The canoe flew over the water like a great bird, and he was happy and excited. He and his mother passed the other canoes, one by one, without being seen by his brothers.

At last, they were ahead of all except Timur. Then they came to him. He was surprised to see the sailing canoe. "Give me that boat! Exchange with me at once!" he shouted.

"I'll have to give Timur my canoe," said Jabro.

"Very well," said Liktañur. "We'll get into his canoe and let him have this one. But take along with you the *repakak* and *jurikli* from one end of the canoe. Leave him only those at the other end."

So Timur got the sailing canoe. Jabro and his mother paddled ahead in Timur's canoe and were soon hidden from him by high waves. Timur sailed very fast, but when he tried to tack, he had trouble, because of the missing gear. The canoe would go only one way. Jabro reached the shore of Jeh Island long before the others.

*Fine*



His mother smiled at him. "Hide Timur's canoe in the brush and come with me," she said.

She led Jabro to the ocean side of the island, where they would not be seen from the lagoon side. Near the shore, there was a pool of clear water. She bathed her son. Then she rubbed him with perfumed oil. She gave him a new skirt of the inner bark of the *loo* tree and some beautiful necklaces of colored seashells. She put sweet-smelling white flowers around his head.

Then she stood in front of him and spoke. "I give you the kingly name of Jeleilōn," she said.

The other brothers thought that Jabro and their mother had been left far behind. Even Timur thought so, for he did not see them, when he landed. He was the first of Jabro's brothers to come to Jeh Island. He was sure that he had won the race.

Then the other brothers arrived at the beach and saw Timur there. They saw the canoe with its gear that worked like magic. They all shouted,

"Iroj Timur - - oo!  
Timur is king!"

Then Liktañur said to Jabro, "Now is the time to go over and show yourself to your brothers."

Jabro, bathed and oiled and decorated, walked over to his brothers and stood before them. They looked at him in surprise. Then came Liktañur, their mother, and the people of Jeh Island, shouting,

"Iroj Jeleilōn - - oo!  
Jeleilōn is king!"

And so Jabro became king. Timur was angry. He turned his face away from Jabro and looked back toward the west. To this day, he faces to the west in the sky. When their life on earth was over, the ten brothers went to live in heaven with their mother. They are the bright stars by which men steer their boats on long voyages. From their places in heaven, Timur and Jabro can never see each other. The only star which is close to Jabro is his mother, Liktañur.

As the people sit together under the evening sky, the children look up at the star mother and her sons. They point out the brothers, one by one, saying, "Timur, Lomij-drikdrik, Labwal, Ar, Mejlep, Dra-im-kobban, Titata, Lok, Jabe, and Jabro."