

Sources from the Past

Mō'ikeha's Migration from Tahiti to Hawai'i

A group of Polynesian oral traditions preserve memories of numerous two-way voyages between Tahiti and Hawai'i in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. One of them has to do with Mō'ikeha, a high chief who left Tahiti because of domestic difficulties and migrated to Hawai'i, where he founded a new chiefly line. The legend recounts several voyages between Tahiti and Hawai'i. The following excerpts deal with Mō'ikeha's establishment as a chief in Hawai'i and the later arrival of his Tahitian son La'amaikahiki, who is credited with the introduction of Tahitian religious and cultural traditions to Hawai'i.

It was dark by the time they arrived [at the Hawaiian island of Kauai], so they did not land, instead, mooring their canoe offshore. Early the next morning the people saw this double-hulled canoe floating offshore with the kapu sticks of a chief aboard. The canoe was brought ashore and the travellers got off. Meanwhile the locals were gathering in a crowd to go surf-riding. . . . Among them were the two daughters of the ali'i nui [chief] of Kauai, Ho'oi'poikamalanai and Hinanu.

Mō'ikeha and his companions saw the crowd and followed along to take part in the morning exercise. Mō'ikeha was a handsome man with dark reddish hair and a tall, commanding figure.

When Ho'oi'poikamalanai and her sister saw Mō'ikeha, they immediately fell in love with him, and they decided to take him for their husband. Mō'ikeha in the meantime was also struck with the beauty and grace of the two sisters, and he, too, fell in love with them and decided to take one of them to be his wife. After enjoying the surf for a time, Ho'oi'poikamalanai and her sister returned home and told their father about the new arrival and said: "We wish to take that young chief as a husband for one of us." The father approved.

Orders were issued that Mō'ikeha be brought to the house of the two ali'i women. Mō'ikeha and his company were sent for and brought in the presence of the king [the ali'i nui of Kauai]. The love of these young people being mutual, Ho'oi'poikamalanai and Hinanu took Mō'ikeha to be their husband. Mō'ikeha became ali'i nui of Kauai after the death of his father-in-law. . . .

as their population increased, Hawai'i built ingenious fish-trap gates into rock-enclosed bays to harvest larger fish from escaping. Hawaiians to harvest large fish with relative ease and thus reduce their dependence on islanders' food supplies. The es-tablishment of fishing societies led to growth in all the larger Pacific islands, Tonga, the Society Islands (including Hawai'i), and Hawai'i. In Hawai'i, the population of the Polynesian island may have exceeded 100,000 when European mariners arrived in the eighteenth century.

Population growth led to environmental and social strife on small islands. Easter Island in particular had dramatic problems arising from limited resources. Easter Island in the Pacific was originally settled by Polynesian migrants originally settled Easter Island in the late fifteenth century. Migrants from the Society Islands, including Hawaiians, arrived in the late fifteenth century. Migrants from the Society Islands, including Hawaiians, arrived in the late fifteenth century. Migrants from the Society Islands, including Hawaiians, arrived in the late fifteenth century.

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Mō'ikeha worked to make his two wives and five children happy, giving his undivided attention to the bringing up of his boys. He thought no more of Lu'ukia [his lover in Tahiti], but after a while, he began to feel a yearning desire to see his son La'amaikahiki, his child by his first wife Kapo. So he called his five sons together and said to them: "I'm thinking of sending one of you boys to bring your elder brother to Hawai'i." . . .

[After Mō'ikeha's son Kila sailed to Tahiti and found his elder half-brother] La'amaikahiki immediately prepared to accompany his brother to Hawai'i, as Mō'ikeha wished. La'amaikahiki took his priests and his god Lonoika'ouali'i, and set sail for Hawai'i with the men who had come with Kila. When they were approaching Kauai, La'amaikahiki began beating his drum. Mō'ikeha heard his drum and ordered everything, the land as well as the house, to be made ready for the reception of the chief La'amaikahiki. Upon the arrival of La'amaikahiki and Kila, the high priest of Kauai, Pōloahilani, took La'amaikahiki and his god Lonoika'ouali'i ("Lono at the Chiefly Supremacy") to the heiau [temple]. It is said that La'amaikahiki was the first person to bring a god (akua) to Hawai'i. . . .

[After returning to Tahiti, then sailing again to Hawai'i, La'amaikahiki] set sail again, going up the Kona coast [of Hawai'i Island]. . . . It was on this visit that La'amaikahiki introduced hula dancing, accompanied by the drum, to Hawai'i. . . .

La'amaikahiki stayed a long time on Kauai teaching the people the art of dancing. From Kauai La'amaikahiki visited all the other islands of this group and thus the drum dance (hula kateke) spread to the other islands.

For Further Reflection

- How would you characterize the political, social, and cultural significance of two-way voyaging between Tahiti and Hawai'i?

Source: Teiura Henry and others. *Voyaging Chiefs of Hawai'i*. Ed. by Dennis Kawaharada. Honolulu: Kalamaku Press, 1995, pp. 138-39, 144-46.