

Another Story About Kamehameha

When Kamehameha's mother, Kekuiapoiwa, was pregnant with him, she had a craving for the eyeball of a chief. Instead she was given the eyeball of a man-eating shark and the priests prophesied that this desire meant that the child would be a rebel and a killer of chiefs. Alapainui, the old ruler of the island of Hawai'i, secretly made plans to have the newborn infant killed.

Kekuiapoiwa's time came on a stormy night in the Kohala district, when a strange star with a tail of white fire appeared in the western sky. According to one legend, the baby was passed through a hole in the side of Kekuiapoiwa's thatched hut to a local chief named Naeole, who carried the child to safety at Awini on Hawai'i's north coast.

By the time the infant in Naeole's care was five, Alapainui had forgotten his fears and accepted the boy into his household. It was said that he was a child without laughter, and so he was named Kamehameha (the Lonely One). At the royal court, he was introduced to the complexities of the *kapu* system, the network of taboos that reinforced Hawaiian society and pervaded every aspect of life. Canoes were not built, nor fields cultivated, without the proper prayers and ceremonies. It was forbidden under penalty of death for men and women to eat together, or for the shadow of a commoner to fall on a chief.

In 1782, Kalaniopuu died, naming his son Kiwalao heir but giving his nephew Kamehameha custody of the powerful war god, Kukailimoku. The cousins did not get along well and before long there was open warfare between Kamehameha and his rivals, and Kiwalao was struck down by a sling stone and his throat was cut with a weapon edged with shark's teeth.

For nine years, between 1782 and 1791, Kamehameha battled rival chiefs on the island of Hawai'i and embarked on his conquest of Maui. There were many bloody encounters but no clear victor. As contact with foreign traders increased, the chiefs hurried to equip themselves with musket and cannon. In addition, Kamehameha pressed two English seamen into his service, Isaac Davis and John Young, who would play a large part in his future victories.

During this time, Kamehameha took two wives. One was Kaahumanu, a six-foot 300-pound woman who would become Kamehameha's great counselor. The other bride was the delicate 11-year old Keopuolani, with whom he would have a formal politically expedient union. She belonged to the highest ali'i class, and the right of succession of their two sons (Kamehameha II and III) was never questioned.

In 1790, frustrated by his stalemate with the rival chiefs, Kamehameha sought the advice of a famous soothsayer on the island of Kauai, who said that he must build a new temple for his war gods on Puukohola (Hill of the Whale) near Kawaihae if he was to be ruler of Hawai'i. Work on the structure began just before Kamehameha successfully repelled an attack by his cousin Keoua.

On Keoua's retreat south to his home in Kau, he tragically lost a third of his warriors in a violent eruption of the Kilauea volcano on the slopes of Mauna Loa. The incident was psychologically damaging to Keoua for it appeared that the volcano goddess, Pele, had shown her favor to Kamehameha.

In 1791, the Puukohola heiau was completed. Rows of wooden images and thatched houses for priests and the ruling chiefs were erected on a huge 224-by-100-foot platform of lava rocks with a commanding view down the coast. Two of Kamehameha's counselors travelled to Keoua and persuaded him to come to Kawaihae, saying Kamehameha wanted peace. As Keoua went, one of Kamehameha's chiefs threw a spear at him, which he then dodged. Muskets were then fired from the shore, and Keoua was killed. Some accounts of the story say that Kamehameha genuinely sought to end the fighting with his cousin but was thwarted by his ambitious chiefs. As was the custom, the body of Keoua was baked in an underground oven until the flesh came loose from the bones. The bones, which Hawaiians believed contained the mana of the chief, were offered to the war god Kukailimoku in a solemn night of prayer. If anyone made a sound during the prayers, they themselves would have been put to death.

With the dedication of the Puukohola heiau and the death of Keoua, Kamehameha who was then in his 30s became ruler of the island of Hawai'i. Four years later, in 1795, he launched an invasion fleet of some 1,200 canoes and more than 10,000 warriors and finally took Maui, Molokai, Lanai, and Oahu. Kamehameha's superior strength in

European weapons was credited with routing the strong Oahu army up the Nuuanu Valley. Trapped, many of the fleeing warriors were pushed or jumped to their deaths off the 1,200-foot Nuuanu Pali.

Kamehameha then set his sights on Kauai and Niihau - 70 miles away and the only islands outside his control. Kamehameha's men encountered a storm half way across the treacherous channel between Oahu and Kauai and many canoes were capsized. The crippled fleet then returned to Oahu.

Kamehameha's next tragedy was to build a navy of very large stable canoes which were rigged with sails of western design and which could hold 50 to 100 warriors. Some 800 of these *peleleu* canoes were eventually assembled on Hawai'i but this fleet met with no more success than the last. At this time, during a stop-over in Oahu on his way to Kauai in 1804, an epidemic killed many of his warriors and the magnificent canoes were left to rot on the shores of Waikiki. Kamehameha himself became ill but recovered. In just 26 years after first contact with Europeans, the Hawaiian population had shrunk from an estimated 300,000 to 195,000, primarily because of imported diseases, such as pneumonia, smallpox, measles, syphilis, and gonorrhoea.

Finally, Kauai and Niihau were incorporated into Kamehameha's kingdom in 1810 by diplomatic means. American and European merchants who did not want warfare to disrupt the lucrative sandalwood trade finally persuaded Kauai ruler Kaumualii to acknowledge Kamehameha as sovereign. Kamehameha, in turn, permitted Kaumualii to govern the island until his death. The conquest of the islands is now complete and it had taken Kamehameha 28 years to achieve.

As ruthless as Kamehameha was in war, he was generous and forgiving in peace. In addition to the Law of the Splintered Paddle, he created laws against murder, theft and plundering. Kamehameha also divided the conquered lands among his high chiefs in detached parcels to diffuse the possibility of rebellion and to create a lasting kingdom. In 1812, Kamehameha returned to the island of his birth, Hawai'i, and spent the remainder of his days in Kailua on the Kona Coast, now a bustling resort town and center for deep-sea sportfishing. Kamehameha himself was an avid fisherman and scheduled affairs of state in his later years around the running of his favorite fish.

Of all Kamehameha's abilities, it was his resourcefulness in dealing with foreigners that inspired the most admiration. He obtained from the British and Americans arms to conquer the islands and western luxuries to enhance his people's lifestyle. No foreigners were permitted to own land. Indeed, the island of Kauai might well be soviet territory today had not Kamehameha insisted that Kaumualii expel an ambitious German doctor, Georg Schaffer, who was in the employ of the Russian-American Company. The tsar of Russia desired only friendly trade relations with the Hawaiians, but Dr. Schaffer built a fort for the Russians on Kauai and even planted the Russian flag on leeward Oahu.

In the spring of 1819, Kamehameha became very ill, and, when it was clear that he was beyond the help of men skilled in the medical art, the leading kahuna said a human sacrifice should be made to save the king. Kamehameha, however would not permit it and early on the morning of 8th May, 1819, Kamehameha drew his last breath. A pig was cooked and offered to the gods so that his spirit would be received into the realm of the aumakua. Kamehameha's flesh was removed from his bones and laid to rest in the sea. A sennit basket was then woven around the bones and taken to Kaloko in north Kona where they were buried.

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