

Title: Conversations

Subtitle: The Ancient Hawaiian Religion

Second Subtitle: The Ancient Hawaiian Religion

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URL: https://www.wizanda.com/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=29

The Gods and Goddesses

The ancient Hawaiians had a polytheistic religion. Over the years, they developed a system of gods and goddesses of various rank and form. This system of gods and goddesses was closely tied to the Hawaiian class system. The Hawaiians had main gods, local gods, and demigods. There were three main types of gods.

The Hawaiians had six male gods and two female gods. Included in the sacred eight were Kāne, the creator god, Keawe, the god of the sea, and Lono, the god of fertility. Kāne is believed to be the original spirit present at the beginning of time. He is the ancestor of all of the gods. Kāne is his son, who is a conduit for his father's power. Kāne is the Lord of the East and the West. Nāwāhine, daughter of Keawe in female form, is the goddess of the Moon and the Holy Mother of Heaven or the Moon Goddess. Kāne and Nāwāhine produced the gods of the sea, Kanaloa, and Kū. Lono was the god of the East and fertility. Kanaloa was the god of the Pacific Ocean. Kū was the god of the North and War. The goddess Papa was the goddess of the Earth and the rulers of nature. Keawe, Kāne, Nāwāhine, Lono, Kanaloa, Kū, Papa, and the goddess Hāloa were the sacred eight.

Through devotion to the eight, a person could gain entrance to the gates of Heaven. The actions on Earth were reported to the court of Heaven, which rules on the actions of the gods. There are eight gates. Angels, the nā awaikū, observed human actions and presented them to the court for judgment.

Each Hawaiian region had individual gods or goddesses. For example, Liliʻo, the goddess of the moon, Haleakalā, and Poliʻahu, goddess of Mauna Kea were worshipped by the people of the region. These local gods often received offerings at sacred stones or sacred sites.

Each Hawaiian profession had its own gods. For example, hula dancers worshipped Kalaipāhoa. Often, the priests of the particular god would set elaborate kapu. A fisherman would have to follow the kapu during the fishing season, and after in order to ensure the capture of his fish and to prevent the loss of his catch.

The Hawaiians also had volcano gods or goddesses. The personification of the volcano was the explanation of their actions. When one of the volcano gods or goddesses erupted, offerings were thrown into their lava streams in order to appease them.

Each Hawaiian family had their own ʻaumākua, family god. This family god was the ancestor. It was believed that sickness or bad luck is caused by displeasing the ʻaumākua.

There were a group of humans who were considered demigods. These humans were the children of the gods and goddesses.

magic that had some effect on the gods, such as Maui. Maui was believed to have fished up the islands, captured the sun, and brought fire to mankind.

The Kahuna

The rank of kahuna was the second highest rank in Hawaiian society, which was based on connection to the divine. Within the rank of kahuna, there were priests, kahuna lapa`au, necromancers, sorcerers, and diviners.

The priests lived within the heiau, temples made of lava rock. Priests of the gods were the only ones allowed in to the kapu or inner court. A Hawaiian priest could declare kapu, forbidden acts or land. Hawaiian priests also had the power to perform human sacrifices. The priests of the gods and goddesses passed down their knowledge through an oral tradition. Often each priest was responsible for flawlessly reciting the words of a ceremony. On very important occasions, the head chief would present a hula to the gods and pronounce the conclusion.

Chiefs offered human sacrifices in the cases of grave illnesses, for the benefit of success in war, and to prevent natural disasters. Their religious rituals were based on the stars, moon, and sun in the sky. For example, the rise of the constellation Pleiades, at sunset signaled the return of the sun's warmth. At this time the god of fertility, was held.

The kahuna lapa`au, medicine men, were called to treat illnesses. The medicine man would search for omens. He would use that information to find a way to please the gods.

Necromancers came in several different varieties, but they operated on the same principle. Necromancers employed spirits often called `unihipili. The ways in which they operated determined the type of necromancer. For example, a kahuna ho`ounâunâ would determine the cause of an illness and exact revenge.

Sorcerers, like necromancers, also had various divisions according to their methods. The `anâ`anâ performed their rituals at night in secret. The kuni performed their rituals during the day. Both the `anâ`anâ and kuni used a part of their subject in their rituals, for example. They would bury the part of the victim. An `anâ`anâ would cause the death of a subject. A kuni's subject was already dead. The kuni determined the cause of death and the murderer. The ho`opi`opi`o and pâh`iuhi`u, classes of sorcerer, operated by marking a spot in the road with a death spell, over which the intended victim would pass.

Another class of sorcerer practiced `apo leo. These sorcerers would strangle their victim and steal his voice.

The diviners, kilo kilo, came in several different varieties: kilo `uhane, kilo po'i`uhane. The kilo`uhane and po'i`uhane worked using the same basic principle. They were believed that the human had two souls. One soul resided in the body. The other soul could roam about and return to it again. The kilo`uhane could see the free soul of a potential client that his free spirit was troubled. An elaborate set of rituals was prescribed. The po'i`uhane could capture the free spirit within a calabash.

Astrologers studied the heavens to predict the fortunes of various chiefs.

Summary

The ancient Hawaiian religion is structured similarly to their society. At the top of power a god or goddess wielded. Keawe is at the top of the hierarchy. From which all of the other gods and goddesses descended. The structure of the priesthood also reflected this trend. Within the kahuna, there were different divisions further divided by jobs.

Source: Emily Morishima
arcturus.pomona.edu/islands/hawaii3.html