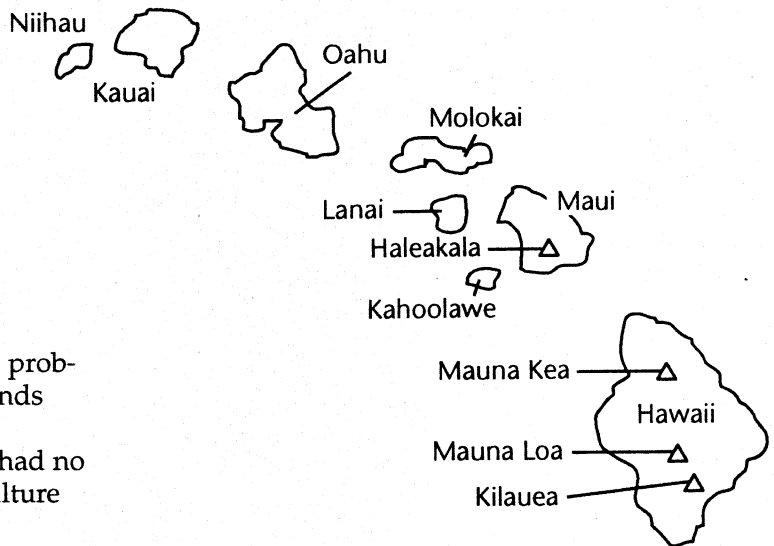


Chapter 10

MULTICULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Hawaiian Islands, Volcanoes, and Legends

Rising out of the North Pacific Ocean is the chain of islands known as Hawaii. There are eight major islands and 124 smaller ones in this archipelago, which stretches more than 2500 km. These tropical islands are actually the tops of volcanic mountains that rise thousands of meters from the ocean floor.



The First Hawaiians

The first people to inhabit these islands probably sailed here from the Marquesas Islands more than 3500 km away. These early Hawaiians, who arrived about 400 A.D., had no written language, but they did have a culture rich in oral tradition, myths, and legends.

One such legend tells of the islands' origins. According to this myth, the islands owe their existence to the legendary hero Maui, who was a great fisherman. One day Maui was fishing in the ocean. His hook caught on the bottom of the sea and, instead of a fish, he hauled up a piece of land, which became the island of Hawaii. Maui cast his line back in the sea and soon brought up another island, Maui. He continued to catch islands until the chain of islands was complete.

Volcanic Islands

The Hawaiian Islands did in fact come from under the sea. The first island probably began forming tens of millions of years ago as magma from Earth's mantle poured through a weak spot in the oceanic crust. The flowing magma from this hot spot created an underwater volcano. Over time, the volcano grew higher and higher and eventually rose above the surface of the sea, forming an island.

The oceanic crust beneath Hawaii lies on a tectonic plate that is moving westward a few centimeters a year. As the plate moves, it carries the newly formed island with it. Without a source of magma underneath it, the first volcano became dormant. A new volcano then formed over the hot spot and eventually became the next island in the chain. The process continues and today the hot spot lies under the largest and youngest island, Hawaii. The hot spot is still sending

magma upward through two of the most active volcanoes in the world—Mauna Loa and Kilauea.

Hawaii's volcanic origins also have a mythical explanation. According to legend, the fire goddess Pele reached the Hawaiian Islands from her home far away by canoe (much like the earliest human inhabitants of Hawaii). She arrived first at the island of Niihau, the westernmost large island in the chain, where she dug herself a fire pit for her home. But Pele had a jealous sister, Na Makia o Kahai, who was the goddess of the sea. With wind and waves, Na Makia o Kahai chased Pele away from Niihau. Pele fled to the next island, Kauai, and made a new home, but her sister followed her and again drove her out. Pele went from island to island, but each time her sister chased her away. Finally Pele reached Hawaii, and dug a home in the Halemaumau Crater inside Kilauea's caldera. And there she has remained, safe from her sister. Early Hawaiians believed that Pele was the cause of volcanic activity. When Pele was angry, she would send forth fire and lava from one of her pits.

The legend of Pele's travels helps explain the natural forces that created and shaped these islands. And indeed, the eight major islands were formed in the order Pele visited them, from the westernmost and oldest island Niihau to the easternmost and youngest island Hawaii.

Multicultural Connections (continued)

Pahoehoe and Aa

The early Hawaiians were keen observers of volcanoes and even identified different types of lava. They called the drops of liquid lava that sprayed out from volcanoes and then hardened "Pele's tears." Lava that was caught by the wind and spun into fine threads was called "Pele's hair." Two other common types of lava flows are now known around the world by their Hawaiian names: pahoehoe and aa.

Pahoehoe (Puh-HOEEE-hoeee) has a wrinkled surface that looks like twisted rope. This type of

lava forms when the molten rock is moving rapidly. The crust of the flow begins to cool and harden while the liquid lava beneath it continues to move, pulling on the crust and wrinkling it.

Aa (AH-ah) flows are made up of jagged blocks of lava. They form from flows that are moving slower than pahoehoe flows. The crust of these slow-moving flows cools rapidly and is broken into rough chunks as the liquid lava below the crust continues to flow.

Making the Connection

Make up your own myth to explain the origins of pahoehoe and aa flows. Use either or both of the legendary figures Maui and Pele in your myth.

1. What might the Hawaiian Islands look like millions of years in the future? _____

2. The fire goddess Pele is very important in Hawaiian mythology. Why do you think this might be so? _____
