



Ancient Oahu: Stories from Fornander and Thrum

Emma M. Nakuina

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"Ancient Oahu" contains mythic stories of O'ahu before high rises, freeways and hotels, before sugar plantations and pineapple fields, before churches and Bibles. Selected from the collections of Abraham Fornander (1812-1887) and Thomas G. Thrum (1842-1932), the stories present an ancient history of the island and its first people, telling of the heroes, ancestral spirits, and demigods who performed good works and punished evil-doers. Like ancient petroglyphs, these pre-contact oral traditions are recorded on the land itself – the mountains, rocks, and place names of O'ahu speak them. Stones in Wahiawa attest to the sin of the cannibal king O'ahunui. A depression in a cliff at Kaluanui marks the place where Kamapua'a lifted his family to safety from the attack of 'Olopana. A stone in Waipahu is the one thrown by Maui to straighten his grandfather's humpback. The island of Mokoli'i, offshore of Kualoa, is part of the body of the cannibal rat-wizard killed by Kaulu. No longer dependent on the fertility of the life-giving 'aina, having grown up on imported food and goods produced and packaged thousands of miles away, many residents of O'ahu no longer feel a connection to the land or a reverence for the ancestors who made the island productive and safe for humanity. Stories of the first people have been largely neglected and ignored by the colonial educational system in Hawai'i. Yet the values embodied in these stories – hospitality, fairness, generosity, courage, and respect for the land and life – are part of a way of life that is as important as ever today. As our population increases, and the social and natural environments become more degraded, we are reminded that our well-being and quality of life, as in ancient times, depend on such values.

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