

'Ulu- Breadfruit

A Mo'olelo of the Gift of Kū

Mary Kawena Pukui tells of a Hawaiian myth which explains the origin of the 'ulu tree as a gift from the god Kū. This story takes place on the south coast of the island of Hawai'i at a place called Kawa'aloa, Kona.

At a time of starvation and famine in Hawai'i, the god Kū buried himself in the earth near his hale (house). Kū told his wife, "My body will be the trunk and branches. My hands will be the leaves, the heart inside the fruit will be my tongue. Roast the fruit, soak it, beat off the skin, and eat some, and feed our children." It was from his head that the tree grew bearing the 'ulu fruit, shaped like a man's head and the leaves shaped like hands. This story is known as the gift from Kū because Kū sacrificed himself to feed his family in a time of famine.

'Ulu is such an important plant to the people of Hawai'i that it has multiple Hawaiian gods associated with it. 'Ulu is also known as Kameha'ikana, a Hawaiian goddess in the form of Haumea—the elemental force and god of regeneration, fertility, and birth.



SOURCES:

Kamakau, S. M. (1964). *Ka Po'e Kahiko: The People of Old*. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.

Kamakau, S. M. (1991). *Tales and Traditions of the People of Old: Nā Mo'olelo a ka Po'e Kahiko*. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.

Handy, E. C., Handy, E. G., & Pukui, M. K. (1972). *Native Planters in Old Hawaii: Their Life, Lore, and Environment*. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.

Pukui, M. K., & Elbert, S. H. (1986). *Hawaiian Dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Background Information about Mo'olelo:

Mo'olelo and ka'ao are what we understand today as Hawaiian stories and legends. Mo'olelo comes from the words mo'o and 'olelo which mean a continuum of talk, as all stories in ancient times were oral, not written.

Today the sharing of mo'olelo can help us connect to our place by uncovering the behaviors and patterns of the people of old Hawai'i. In mo'olelo there is always kaona—the hidden lessons and deeper meanings within stories. What can stories of plants and animals, valley walls and mountain peaks, and the winds and the rains teach us?