

ANALYSING THE MOTIF OF
“DWARF PEOPLE” IN POLYNESIAN MYTHOLOGIES.
MYTHICAL BUILDERS – Part II.*

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Mythical Builders

According to numerous Polynesian myths, the Menehune were great builders, especially when it came to working with wood and stone. They were very skilled in processing stones which they transported over great distances. Myths recorded on the Hawaiian Islands attribute to them many *heiau* – shrines, *loko-i‘a* – ponds, roads and waterways. All these myths have an interesting common motif of the Menehune always finishing their work in just a single night. Thomas G. Thrum, in his article “Stories of the Menehunes. Hawaii the Original Home of the Brownies” also presents a message of the informant Moke Manu who mentioned that it was their rule that any work undertaken must be completed in one night. Otherwise, it would be left unfinished, as they did not labour twice on the same job; hence the origin of the saying: “*He po hookahi, a ao ua pau*”, in one night, and by dawn, it is finished.¹

Another commonly found motif in these myths is the willingness of the Menehune to help people. This was mainly expressed through the Menehune

* This article contains many words and phrases from Polynesian languages, such as Maori and Hawaiian, which retain their original orthography, including apostrophes and dashes, from their respective language. However, when citing English language publications, the orthography of these words is given as it appears in the source cited. This study is published as part of the VEGA 2/0028/18 and 2/0053/20 grant project.

¹ THRUM, T. G. Stories of the Menehunes. Hawaii the Original Home of the Brownies. In *Hawaiian Annual*, 1895, pp. 112–117, 133.

building various structures for local people while the only reward they wanted for their work was food.

Their building efforts can be divided into numerous categories. Most of them were shrines which were usually built at the request of local chieftains. Examples of shrines like this are for instance Elekuna, Polihale, Kapa-ula, Malae, Poli-ahu and Kailioahaia on the island Kaua'i; Kiha-wahune on Niihau; Mauoki, Upo, Kukaoo and Kapukapuakea on O'ahu; Haleokane and Puukini on Maui; Na-pule and Mookini on Hawai'i, and Ili'ili'opae on the island of Molokai. According to tradition, the Menehune built these shrines using stone which they brought by hand from a great distance.²

Thomas G. Thrum in his study "Tales from the Temples" also names the goddess Hina's shrine Pakui near Wailuku on the island of Maui which was built during a single night from stones brought all the way from the shore of Paukukalo.³

An example of their work is the shrine of Mookini which is situated on the coast of Kohala on the island of Hawai'i (picture 1). This shrine is built on an elevated grassy plain. The stones used to build it come from the valley of Pololu, which is located about 20 kilometres away from the shrine. According to tradition, the Menehune transported stones from the valley by means of a human chain which spanned the whole distance between the valley and the shrine. All the stones required were supposedly transported during a single night and the shrine – *heiau* was also built during just a single night.

There is a shrine on the coast of the island Molokai called Ili'ili'opae (picture 2) which is the second-largest *heiau* on the Hawaiian Islands and according to tradition was also built by the Menehune.

Other than shrines, the Menehune are also credited with building numerous ponds. Alekoko on the island of Kaua'i is probably the most famous of these ponds.⁴

Its banks are made from massive stones which, according to myths, were transported by means of a human chain stretching from Makaweli to Niumalu, where the pond is located to this day (picture 3).⁵ This so-called Menehune pond was built by diverting the river Huleia by building a stone dam spanning 274 metres.

² THRUM, T. G. Who or What Where the Menehunes. In *Hawaiian Annual*, 1929, pp. 86–87.

³ THRUM, T. G. Tales from the Temples. In *Hawaiian Annual*, 1909, p. 40.

⁴ Some sources call him by the names Lihue or Niumalu.

⁵ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, p. 36.

Hawaiian mythology also attributes many crucial waterways to the Menehune. We have records of many myths which describe events connected with their construction.

One version of a myth about a waterway on the island of Kaua‘i is presented in William H. Rice’s book “Hawaiian Legends”. The chieftain Ola was greatly worried about his people lacking the water required to water their crops. Wishing to solve this problem, Ola consulted his *kahuna* (priest), Pi, who gave him this advice: “Establish a *kapu* (taboo) so that no one can go out of his house at night. Then I shall summon the Menehune to build a stone waterway around the point of the Waimea River so that your people will always have an abundant water supply.” Ola established the *kapu*. No man, woman, or child, was to go out of his house at night. Then Pi summoned the Menehune to come from foreign lands and make the waterway in one night. The Menehune fulfilled their promise. This watercourse is still called Kiki-a-Ola and is still standing on the island Kaua‘i (picture 4).⁶

A slightly different version is presented in Thomas G. Thrum’s book “Hawaiian Folktales”. “Pi was an ordinary man living in Waimea, Kauai, who wanted to construct a *mano*, or dam, across the Waimea River and a watercourse therefrom to a point near Kikiaola.⁷ He went up to the mountains and ordered all the Menehunes that were living near Puukapele to prepare stones for the dam and watercourse. Menehune agreed. The Menehunes were portioned off for the work; some to gather stones, and others to cut them. All the material was ready in no time, and Pi settled upon the night when the work was to be done. When the time came, he went to the point where the dam was to be built and waited. At the dead of night, he heard the noise and hum of the voices of the Menehunes on their way to Kikiaola, each of whom was carrying a stone. The dam was duly constructed, every stone fitting in its proper place, and the stone *auwai*, or watercourse, also laid around the bend of Kikiaola. Before the break of day, the work was completed, and the water of the Waimea River was turned by the dam into the watercourse on the flatlands of Waimea. When the work was finished, Pi served out food for the Menehunes, which consisted of shrimp *opae*, this being the only kind to be had in sufficient quantity to supply each with a fish to himself. They were well supplied and satisfied, and at

⁶ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, pp. 45–46.

⁷ T. G. Thrum, similarly to W. H. Rice, does not write this name using dashes, Kiki-a-Ola.

dawn returned to the mountains of Puukapele. The *auwai*, or watercourse, of Pi is still to be seen at Kikiaola”.⁸

Thrum’s informant Kaiwa also mentions this event and says that they built the canal during a full moon. It is said that they stood in line from above the source of the watercourse of Kikiaola to below Polihale, and each stone was passed hand to hand by the Menehune this long distance of some five or six miles, and yet the watercourse was completed and the water diverted by the morning of its construction. Thanks to this structure, Hawaiians who lived in the lowlands could grow taro on flooded fields.⁹

The chieftain Ola requested many favours from the Menehune. They fulfilled these requests and built many structures on the island of Kaua’i. Some of them, such as the stone road from Waimea to the Wainiha hills, can be seen to this day.¹⁰

Near the shores of the island of Kaua’i, various stone walkways and roads, which were built by the Menehune according to tradition, can still be seen. These structures can be seen in Honapepe, Makaweli, Mana, Napali, Milolii, Nualolo and Hanapu.

Even the everyday lives of the Menehune were connected with stones. As mentioned earlier, they liked making hills from rocks just for fun or they would throw stones into the sea and then bring them back out. It was their custom to place in the streams big stones on which to pound their food. Stones like this can be seen on the island of Kaua’i, for example near the stream of the river Hanalei, near Huaia, near Mauinahina hill and above Wainihou.¹¹

Breaking a taboo was also related to stones. Their punishment was supposed to be being turned into stone. According to Hawaiian tradition, some of the large rocks seen on the island Kaua’i are actually petrified Menehune. In the valley of Waimea, the stone named Poha’-kina-pua’a is supposed to be a petrified Menehune punished for stealing.¹²

Another petrified Menehune was Ka-u-ki-u-ki, who declared that he could go to the top of the hill of Kilohana and catch the legs of the moon. This boast

⁸ THRUM, T. G. *Hawaiian Folktales; a Collection of Native Legends*, pp. 110–111; THRUM, T. G. Stories of the Menehunes. Hawaii the Original Home of the Brownies. In *Hawaiian Annual*, 1895, p. 114.

⁹ THRUM, T. G. Story of the Race of People Called the Menehunes, of Kauai. Hawaiian Tradition. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1920, Vol. 29, No. 114, pp. 70–71.

¹⁰ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, pp. 45–46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

was ridiculed, and when he was unable to carry it out, he was turned into stone.¹³

Other than working with stone, Menehune were also exceptionally skilled in processing wood and making canoes. Hawaiian mythology includes many myths which centre on this motif. Records of these myths were published in the book “Hawaiian Folktales” by Thomas G. Thrum. One of these myths is about Laka, who decided to search for his lost father.

His grandmother advised him to go to the mountains and look for a tree that has leaves shaped like the moon on the night of Hilo. That would be the tree used to build a canoe. Laka followed this advice and went to the mountains to find the tree for his canoe. Finding a suitable one, he began to cut it in the morning, and by sundown, he had felled it to the ground. This accomplished, he went home. Returning the next day, to his surprise, he could not find his fallen tree, so he cut down another, with the same result. Laka was thus tricked for several days. At last before cutting it, he dug a big hole on the side where the tree fell. Upon cutting the tree, it fell right into the hole or trench, as designed; then he jumped into it and lay in waiting for the person or persons who were re-erecting the trees he had cut down for his canoe. While thus waiting, he heard someone talking about raising the tree and returning it to its former position, followed by someone chanting as follows:

*E ka mano a ke Akua,
Ke kini o ke Akua,
Ka lehu a ke Akua,
Ka lalani Akua,
Ka pukui Akua!
E na Akua a ke kuahiwi nei,
I ka mauna,
I ke kualono,
I ka manowai la-e,
E-iho!*

O the four thousand gods,
The forty thousand gods,
The four hundred thousand gods,
The file of gods,
The assembly of gods!

¹³ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, p. 39.

O gods of these woods,
Of the mountain,
And the knoll,
At the water-dam,
Oh, come! ¹⁴

When this appeal ended a short time later, the place was filled with a band of people who endeavoured to lift the tree; but it would not move. Laka then jumped out from his place of hiding and caught hold of two of the men, Mokuhalii and Kapaaikēe, and threatened to kill them for raising again the trees he had cut for his canoe. Mokuhalii then told Laka that if they were killed, nobody would be able to make a canoe for him, nor would anybody pull it to the beach, but if they were spared, they would willingly do it for him, provided Laka would first build a big and long shed of sufficient size to hold the canoe and prepare sufficient food for the men. Laka gladly consenting, he released them and returned to his home and built a shed on the level ground of Puhikau. Then he went up to the woods and saw the canoe, ready and complete. The Menehunes told Laka that it would be brought to the *halau* that night. At the dead of night, the hum of the voices of the Menehunes was heard; this was the commencement of the lifting of the canoe. It was not dragged but held up by hand. The second hum of voices brought the canoe to Haloamekiei, at Pueo. And at the third hum, the canoe was carefully laid down in the *halau*. Food and fish were spread out there for the workers, the *ha* of the taro for food, and the *opae* and *oopu* for fish. At dawn, the Menehunes returned to their home. Kuahalau was the name of the *halau*, the remains of the foundation of which were to be seen a few years ago, but now it is ploughed over. The hole dug by Laka still exists.¹⁵

A similiar myth is found on the island of O‘ahu. According to this version, which was also recorded by Thomas G. Thrum, the chieftain Kakae lived in the region of Wakiawa. One day his wife told him that she desired to go in search of her brother, Kahanaiakeakua, who was supposed to be living at Tahiti. Kakae thereupon ordered Kekupua to go into the woods and find a suitable tree and make a canoe for his wife for this foreign voyage. Kekupua, with a number of men, searched in the mountains without success. At night they slept in the cave at Waolani. In the dead of night, they heard the hum as of human voices but were unable to discern any person, though the voices sounded close to them. At

¹⁴ THRUM, T. G. *Hawaiian Folktales; a Collection of Native Legends*, p. 113.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114; THRUM, T. G. *Stories of the Menehunes. Hawaii the Original Home of the Brownies*. In *Hawaiian Annual*, 1895, pp. 115–116.

dawn silence reigned again, and when the sun arose, there stood a large mound of stones, the setting of which resembled that of a *heiau*, or temple, the remains of which are said to be noticeable to this day. Kekupua and his men returned to their chief and reported their unsuccessful search for a suitable koa (*Acacia koa*) tree for the desired canoe, and also related the incident at Waolani. Kakaē, being a descendant of the Menehunes, knew immediately the authors of the strange occurrence. He, therefore, instructed Kekupua to proceed to Makaho and Kamakela and to stay there till the night of Kane, then go up to Puunui and wait till he heard the hum and noise of the Menehunes, which would be the signal of their finishing the canoe. And thus it was; the Menehunes, having finished the canoe, were ready to pull it to the sea. Kekupua followed all these instructions faithfully. He waited till dusk, when he heard a hum, as of many voices, and proceeding farther up near the slope of Alewa he saw these wonderful people. They were like ordinary human beings but diminutive. He directed them to pull the canoe along the farther side of the Puunui stream. By this course the canoe was brought down as far as Kaalaa, near Waikahalulu, where, when daylight came, they left their burden and returned to Waolani. The canoe was left in the ditch, where it remained for many generations, and was called Kawaa-a-Kekupua (Kekupua’s canoe), in honor of the servant of the chief Kakaē.¹⁶

In the book “Legends of Gods and Ghosts” William D. Westervelt presents a fragment of a variation of previously mentioned myths and talks about Hawaiian Kahanai who saw signs in the sky telling him to journey after his parents. Because of this, he requested a canoe from the god Kane. Kane called Eepo and Menehune and ordered them to build a canoe for him. They built the canoe in the Waolani mountains and sailed it on the river Nuuanu in order to bring it to the shore.¹⁷

A similar motif was recorded on the island of Samoa, which is approximately 4,200 kilometres away from the Hawaiian Islands.

The myth is about a woman named Mata-iteite, who decided to search for her lost husband. She asked Tagaloa¹⁸ to send her someone who could build her a proper canoe. The builders of the canoe agreed, but on the condition that while they worked in the woods, people would bring them food but would not look at them. One day, women brought them food and decided that they would secretly look at them. When the builders saw that they were being looked at, they flew

¹⁶ THRUM, T. G. *Hawaiian Folktales; a Collection of Native Legends*, pp. 114–116.

¹⁷ WESTERVELT, W. D. *Legends of Gods and Ghosts*, pp. 141–142.

¹⁸ In Samoan mythology Tagaloa was considered to be a god of creation, sky, water and woods.

away into the sky. According to the myth, these builders did not wear any clothes, did not use any tools and carved wood by using their teeth.¹⁹

Even though this myth is clearly different from its various Hawaiian versions, it is also clear that there are common motifs present, such as searching for relatives, a request to build a canoe, working in woods and food as a reward for work. The main differences are in their disappearance and flying away into the sky. In Hawaiian mythology, we can see that they are not as afraid of people and their fear is shown only by the fact that they work at night and by their being somewhat timid.

Further proof of the Menehune inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands in ancient times are myths talking about various unusual natural spots. One of the legends from the island Kaua'i is connected with such a place.

One day, as the Menehune were bathing at Lumahai, one of them caught a large fish, a ulua. The fish tried to escape, but the little man struggled bravely, and finally killed it. The man was so badly wounded, however, that his blood flowed over the spot, and turned the earth and stones red. This place is still called Ka-a-le-le, from the name of the wounded man.²⁰

Other mythical ethnicities – Mu, Nawao, Patu-pai-a-rehe, and their Characteristics

Other than the most popular mythical Menehune “dwarf people”, Polynesia also had other peoples of similarly small stature. Some myths recorded on the Hawaiian Islands even state that other than the Menehune, ethnicities known as Mu, Wa, Wao and Eepa also lived there and it was, in fact, difficult to tell them apart.

The myth “The Legend of Kanehunamoku the Phantom Isle; Home of the Menehunes and the Mu” talks about how to differentiate between the Menehune and the Mu. Similar to the Menehune, the Mu are very short, stocky and active but unlike the Menehune they have beards, they are brown, their hair is shaggy and their beards and eyebrows bushy. However, the Mu were supposed to eat only bananas. The Menehune were also sometimes characterised as eating mainly bananas. In addition to that, the Mu also made their clothing from

¹⁹ STUEBEL, O. *Samoanische Texte, Veröffentlichungen aus dem königlichen Museum für Völkerkunde*, 4 Bd., pp. 59–246.

²⁰ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, p. 38.

banana leaves. Unlike the Mu, the Menehune were very skilled craftsmen who could work very skilfully with stone.²¹

It is interesting to note that while many sources say that the Menehune mainly ate bananas, the myth published by Thomas G. Thrum states that this is not true, and the staple of their diet is small fish while bananas are eaten only by the Mu.²² Their speech is full of strange, uncanny grunts and cries that differ from the Hawaiian. The Mu are wild, easily frightened, and always alert and ready to escape, which they accomplish very quickly.²³

Similarly, Katharine Luomala in her book “The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania” presents interesting information about the Mu, which was printed in the Hawaiian newspaper *Aloha Aina* in the year 1893 and was translated from Hawaiian by Mary K. Pukui. The story talks about the encounter of an unknown person with the Mu. According to this story, the Mu lived near the Wainiha valley on the island of Kaua‘i. Many banana as were said to grow there and that was their main source of food. Apparently, they were unusually cunning.²⁴

In 1913, an article written by John M. Lydgate was published in the Hawaiian Annual which talks about so-called “people from Laau” who lived in the northern parts of Kaua‘i island in the valley of Wainiha, a deep valley with many waterfalls and springs which flow into the nearby sea. They were not Menehune but an ancient ethnicity that was characterised by their short stature and stocky bodies. Supposedly they were the first inhabitants of the island that eventually retreated into the mountains. Even though the article does not mention their name, it is clear from their description that they could probably be Mu. Their way of life was very simple; they lacked fire, clothing and domestic arts, though another account ascribes clothes of dried ti and banana leaves to them. Bananas were the staple of their diet, and they built banana-leaf huts on steep, inaccessible hillsides from where they could clearly see any intruders. At night they come to the lowlands to steal fish, poi, and roast bananas, and to snatch tapa cloths off sleepers.²⁵ A similar motif of thievery is found in a myth from Rarotonga. This myth relates how these people bathed in a spring called

²¹ LUOMALA, K. *The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania*, p. 25.

²² The Legend of Kanehunamoku the Phantom Isle; Home of the Menehunes and Mu’s. In *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual*. Ed. T. G. Thrum, p. 144.

²³ LUOMALA, K. *The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania*, p. 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ LYDGATE, J., M. The Affairs of the Wainiha Hui. In *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual*, 1913, p. 125–127.

Vaitipi in the settlement of Aarrangi and stole taro, coconuts and bananas from locals.²⁶

John M. Lydgate mentions in his article “The Winnig of the Mu-ai-maia Maiden”²⁷ his own experience with a visit of the Wainiha valley. Lydgate visited it guided by ten Hawaiian natives. When one evening, they came across a place where an exceptional amount of oranges and bananas grew, he asked others if they would build a shack from banana leaves in which they could sleep during the night. The natives refused to do so and explained that this place is a very dangerous and evil place called Laau. It is an ancient home of Mu-a-Maia, who planted the banana trees there, and their *aumakua* – spirits haunt the area to this day. Great misfortune would befall anyone who would desecrate it by entering it. It was apparent that they were terrified of this place and so they decided to find shelter elsewhere. When he asked his guides who the Mu-ai-Maia were, they answered that when the first people from Kahiki came to Kaua‘i, they found evidence of a primitive aboriginal people already here. The particular group that lived at Wainiha they came to know as the Mu-ai-maia because they lived exclusively on bananas. They were not very different from the Menehune, perhaps a different tribe or clan.²⁸ Lydgate then asked them if they had ever met a real Mu-ai-Maia. Only one older man answered that he had never met a Mu-ai-Maia because they were already extinct, but he used to know a short woman who was half Mu-ai-Maia. Her father was a Hawaiian bird-catcher, and her mother was from Mu living in Laau in the Wainiha valley. The guide then told him a story. Long ago, a bird catcher lived in that area. Often he went to the mountains to hunt birds, but he never came across a Mu-ai-Maia. However, after some time, they stopped being afraid of him and became friends with him. One day when he was walking across the Wainiha valley, he came all the way to the place called Laau. Suddenly a big storm came, and he could not return to his settlement, so he decided to spend the night under a rock overhang. A Mu-ai-Maia found him and took care of him. As a reward for that, he taught them how to use fire and cook food. The Mu-ai-Maia became very fond of him and accepted him as one of them. There he met a girl from the Mu-ai-Maia tribe and eventually married her. After some time, they had an exceptionally beautiful daughter. Even a chieftain from a settlement called Nane heard about her beauty. This chieftain also ruled over the Wainiha valley. After some time had passed, the bird catcher considered returning home. However, he never told anyone anything about the Mu-ai-Maia from Laau. One day the chieftain asked

²⁶ GILL, W. W. *Myths and Songs from the South Pacific*, p. 265.

²⁷ LYDGATE, J. M. The Winning of the Mu-ai-maia Maiden. In *Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society for 1920*, pp. 25–31.

²⁸ Mai‘a means banana or banana tree in Hawaiian.

him if he wanted to return home. He answered that he would like to, but he did not want to abandon his daughter. The chieftain asked him why he would not take her with him. The bird-catcher answered that the Mu are very wild and would not want her to leave. After some time, the chieftain organised a wild boar hunt in the Wainiha valley. The real intention behind this hunt, however, was to take the bird catcher’s daughter from the Mu. A large group with their dogs were moving across the valley, slowly approaching Laau. The chieftain then ordered everyone to stop and be quiet, and slowly moved forward with a small group. He heard sounds from the Mu settlement, but when they came to Laau, there was no one there. However, evidence suggested that they had left only a few moments ago. Then they found just one person there – the old bird catcher. The chieftain asked him where everyone had gone. The bird-catcher answered that everyone, including his daughter, had left when they heard him coming. The chieftain suggested that he would order the others to go away while he hid. He hid on a big shelf above the doorway where tapu was stored, and waited. When the bird catcher’s daughter returned, she asked her father if everyone had already gone. He answered her that they had all gone away already, but she exclaimed that she could smell Malihini and ran away into the forest. This was repeated several times. Her father, however, assured her that it was not true. Suddenly, the chieftain jumped out from his hideout and managed to shackle her, and returned with her to his village. There he gave her all the luxuries he could, and she eventually accepted her fate. Then she had a beautiful daughter. Her daughter was the woman whom the old man knew when he was a little boy.²⁹

As has been mentioned, it is interesting that when king Kaumuali’i on the island of Kaua’i in the year 1820 ordered a population census, 65 people identified themselves as Menehune.³⁰ However, Lydgate argues that these people were, in fact, Mu-ai-Maia, as they all stated that they came from the Laau region in the Wainiha valley.³¹

Other than Menehune and Mu, Polynesian mythology also mentions people called Nawao, sometimes shortened as Wa. Abraham Fornander in his book “Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-lore” states that an ancient ancestor of Lua-nuu was through his first-born son the ancestor of the so-called Nawao “wild people”, and through his youngest son Kupulupulu he was an ancestor of the Menehune. Hawaiians also called Nawao by the name

²⁹ LYDGATE, J. M. The Winning of the Mu-ai-maia Maiden. In *Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society for 1920*, pp. 27–31.

³⁰ JOESTING, E. *Kaua ‘i: The Separate Kingdom*, pp. 20–22.

³¹ LUOMALA, K. *The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania*, p. 25.

Ka Lahui Mu Ai Maia o Laau Haelele. They described them as wild hunters. In ancient times, there were supposedly a significant number of them, but gradually they became extinct.³² Even though tradition mentions many mythical ethnicities inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands, only the Menehune are considered by Hawaiians to be their ancestors.

It is evident that we are dealing here, in the legend of Luanu‘u and his forest-dwelling, banana-eating progeny, with that period of early settlement noted in the chant of Kumulipo as directly following the dawn of day (*ao*) and the appearance of Kane, Ki‘i, and Kanaloa, when the ancestors dwelt in the uplands on the edge of the damp forests favourable to the planting of bananas, which were their principal food.³³

Mentions of a tribe that lives in the mountains can also be found in Maori mythology. Here they have a different name: Patu-pai-a-rehe. Many Maori myths consider them to be mortal beings that are no different from other inhabitants of the islands. Others, however, consider them to be *iwi-atua*, which means a tribe of supernatural beings. They are described as small people with reddish skin, hair with a golden tinge called *uru-kehu*, eyes black or blue, dwelling in the mountains. They only went outside during the night or on foggy days. They mainly ate fruit found in the forest but sometimes came down to the shores and fished. They hated the smell of cooked food coming from *hangi* – an earth oven – and the smell of red okra which was made by mixing soil with shark oil. Some of them were knowledgeable about magic. They had good relations with the Maori, and they were peaceful and timid.³⁴

According to myths, on the North Island of New Zealand Patu-pai-a-rehe lived in the tall mountains near the Waikato-Waipā river, in the mountain range of Te Aroha and in the hills near lake Rotorua. On the South Island, they were supposed to live in the mountainous region near Lyttelton harbour and Akaroa, and in the mountain range of Takitimu.³⁵

³² FORNANDER, A. *Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-lore*, Vol. VI, pp. 270–271, 277.

³³ BECKWITH, M. *Hawaiian Mythology*, pp. 322–323.

³⁴ SMITH, S. P. *Hawaiki: The Original Home of the Maori; with a Sketch of Polynesian History the Papuan Race of Indonesia*, p. 96.

³⁵ James Cowan obtained this information from members of these tribes from North Island: Ngati-Maniapoto, Waikato, Ngati-Ihenga, Ngati-Tunohopu and Te Arawa, and the Ngai-Tahu and Ngati-Mamoe tribes from South Island. COWAN, J. The Patu-paiarehe. Notes on Maori Folk-tales of the Fairy People. Part II. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1921, Vol. 30, No. 119, pp. 143–151.

According to tradition, Maori taught Patu-pai-a-rehe how to make nets to catch fish.³⁶ Even though no similar motif was ever recorded in other parts of Polynesia, it does appear in the mythology of the island of Niue which is about 2,400 km away from New Zealand.

John White, in his work “The Ancient History of the Maori; His Mythology and Traditions”³⁷ also mentions the existence of the Patu-paiarehe tribe. According to Maori mythology, New Zealand was created when the culture hero Maui fished it out from the bottom of the ocean. This is the reason why in the Maori language North island is called Te ika a Maui – Maui’s fish and South Island is called Te Waka a Maui – Maui’s boat. Maui gave the island to a man named Kui whose descendants then created a tribe called the Nga-to-kui. After many years, a people called the Tutu-mai-ao started coming to the island. On the one hand, they killed the local people, but they also married them. Eventually, the Nga-to-kui became extinct, and the Tutu-mai-ao came to be the rulers of the island. However, history repeated itself, and different people called the Turehu came to the island and slowly took it over. After some time, a different new people came to the island, this time called Maori. After the Maori had lived there for ten generations, they completely replaced Turehu, and after 46 generations became the rulers of the island. According to tradition, however, the Turehu, who are considered to be beings with supernatural powers, live in the mountains to this day under the name Patu-pai-a-rehe, which means “wild people”.³⁸ Pipi, the wife of Ira, the son of the famous chief Uenuku, is famed as an *uru-kehu*. Myths about people with brightly coloured hair and skin sometimes appear in Polynesian mythologies. F. W. Christian, in his book “Eastern Pacific Lands; Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands” states that the island of Moorea in the Tahiti archipelago used to be called the island of beings with golden hair.³⁹

The small percentage of Polynesians with brightly coloured hair are said to be descendants of Patu-paiarehe and Maori women.

According to Maori tradition, the Patu-paiarehe may be seen in the early morning. They are full-sized, dress in white, are not tattooed, and nurse children in their arms.⁴⁰ They are a very numerous people, merry, cheerful, singing like crickets. They work at night and cease working when the sun rises. Their skin is

³⁶ SMITH, S. P. *Hawaiki: The Original Home of the Maori; with a Sketch of Polynesian History the Papuan Race of Indonesia*, p. 96.

³⁷ WHITE, J. *The Ancient History of the Maori; His Mythology and Traditions*, Vols. 1–3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188–189.

³⁹ CHRISTIAN, F. W. *Eastern Pacific Lands; Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ TAYLOR, R. *Te ika a Maui, or New Zealand and Its Inhabitants*, pp. 153–154.

light. They are a peaceful folk and have guardianship of the sacred places. They use wooden and bone flutes called *putorino* and *koauau*. In New Zealand, in the region of Waikato, specifically the densely forested tall mountain range Pirongia was considered to be one of the main settlements of Patu-paiarehe. Here was their main village. Other than that, he mentions that in the Waikato region they also lived in the mountains of Rangitoto, Whare-puhunga, Maungatautari, and Taupiri.⁴¹

In many native villages of the Waikato and the King Country we find the story of Ruarangi and his wife Tawhai-tu, who was stolen by Patu-paiarehe. This couple lived in their house, “Uru-tomokia,” on the left bank of the Waipa, near the foot of the Hakarimata range. A chief of the Patu-paiarehe named Whanawhana carried the young wife through the mist to Hihikiwi peak and made her his own wife. Her husband found her in the forest and took her home, but Patu-paiarehe’s spell was upon her, and each evening bore her away to the mountain and returned her next day. The Patu-paiarehe were exorcised eventually by the spell of a tohunga, who bade Raurangi and Tawhai-tu paint themselves with kokowai ochre and make steam-ovens in front of a small purpose-built house, which was also daubed with kokowai. Whanawhana and several of his fellow fairy chiefs appeared in front of the house when darkness fell, but the tohunga’s rites and incantations protected Tawhai-tu, and they chanted a song of lamentation and vanished into the night.⁴²

Another place where Patu-paiarehe lived was an ancient volcano, Kakepuku mountain, a few miles from Pirongia. The elderly Pou-pataté, of Te Kopua, told J. Cowan the dramatic narrative of his adventure with the Patu-paiarehe on Kakepuku. Together with the tohunga Panapa, he went into the mountains to search for aka⁴³ which was to be used to make medicine for Pou-pataté’s grandfather. However, they failed to notice that they had entered a sacred forest belonging to the Patu-paiarehe. They gathered a few aka and squeezed their juice into a bowl. Suddenly, a strong wind started blowing, and strange voices could be heard. When he returned to the place where the tohunga was supposed to wait for him, he was not there, so he returned to the village by himself. The tohunga Panapa returned late at night. He said that Patu-paiarehe had kidnapped him and taken him to their village on Pirongia mountain. In fear, he called upon

⁴¹ COWAN, J. The Patu-paiarehe. Notes on Maori Folk-tales of the Fairy People. Part II. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1921, Vol. 30, No. 119, p. 142.

⁴² Their names were preserved in the oral tradition. Supposedly they were Te Rangipouri, Ruku-pouri, Tapu-te-uru, and Ripiro-aiti.

COWAN, J. The Patu-paiarehe. Notes on Maori Folk-tales of the Fairy People. Part II. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1921, Vol. 30, No. 119, p. 142.

⁴³A plant similar to a grapevine.

his ancestor who was a great *tohunga*, after which his spirit came to help him. The Patu-paiarehe chieftain Te Wanawhana a Te Rangi-pouri decided not to punish him and let him go. He was supposed to be punished because he had let Pou-pataté gather *aka* even though it was considered “*mahi tohunga*”, the work of the *tohunga*.⁴⁴ In many myths, the Patu-paiarehe are presented as guardians of sacred places who would punish those that do not respect the gods of the forests.⁴⁵

In the oral tradition of the Ngati-Maniapoto tribe, we can find a myth which talks about a girl who wandered too far into the mountains while gathering *tawa* and ended up on Patu-paiarehe’s sacred place. Rua-tane caught her and kidnapped her. She ended up in their village on the tallest peak of the mountain range of Te Aroha. Eventually, others from her tribe came to her help and freed her.⁴⁶ This myth also presents Patu-paiarehe as living in tall mountains and guarding sacred places.

The partly wooded mountain of Ngongotaha, rising above the south-west shore of Lake Rotorua, was the principal haunt of the Patu-paiarehe people in Rotorua country. J. Cowan recorded stories told by Tohe-te-Matehaere from the local Ngati-Ihenga tribe. The name of the tribe of Patu-paiarehe at Ngongotaha and other places in this neighbourhood was Ngati-Rua. Many people from the Patu-paiarehe were supposed to live there. They possessed supernatural powers, some looked like Maori, some looked white, but most of them were *kiri puwhero* – people with reddish skin⁴⁷ and hair of a golden or reddish colour – *uru-kehu*. Their eyes were either blue or brown.

They were about the same height as ourselves. Some of their women were very beautiful, very fair of complexion, with shining fair hair. They wore chiefly the flax garment called *pekerangi*, dyed a red colour; they also wore the rough mats *pora* and *pureke*. In disposition, they were peaceful; they were not a war-loving, angry people. Their food consisted of the products of the forest, and they also came down to this lake Rotorua to catch *inanga* (whitebait). J. Cowan also presents the commonly reoccurring motif that they hated the steam coming out of cooked food.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Meaning “the work of a *tohunga*, a high priest”.

⁴⁵ COWAN, J. The Patu-paiarehe. Notes on Maori Folk-tales of the Fairy People. Part II. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1921, Vol. 30, No. 119, pp. 143–144.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–146.

⁴⁷ A tradition of the tribe Ngati-Tahu also mentions people with reddish skin who were supposed to be the first inhabitants of the South Island. According to this tradition, they arrived there by boat from the west or the northwest.

⁴⁸ COWAN, J. The Patu-paiarehe. Notes on Maori Folk-tales of the Fairy People. Part II. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1921, Vol. 30, No. 119, pp. 147–148.

In the tradition of the Ngati-Ihenga a lament was preserved which was supposed to be sung by Patu-paiarehe when Maori burned down a large part of the forests on the hillsides of Ngongotaha. They no longer felt safe in their villages, so they moved northwards to Pirongia and Moehau.

*E muri ahiahi
Ka hara mai te aroha
Ka ngau i ahau,
Ki taku urunga tapu,
Ka mahue i ahau
I Ngongo' maunga
Ka tu kau noa ra.
Te Ahi-a-Mahuika
Nana i tahu mai-i.
Ka haere ai au ki Moehau,
Ki Pirongia ra e,
I te urunga tapu—e.
E Te Rotokohu e!
Ki ata akiaki kia mihi ake au
Ki taku tuahu ka mahue iho nei.*

*He ra kotahi hoki e,
E noho i au;
Ka haere atu ai e,
Kaore e hoki mai,
Na-a-i!⁴⁹*

Night's shadows fall;
Keen sorrow eats my heart,
Grief for the land I'm leaving,
For my sacred sleeping-place,
The home-pillow I'm leaving,
On Ngongo's lofty peak,
So lone my mountain stands
Swept by the flames of Mahuika,
I'm going far away,
To the heights of Moehau, to Pirongia,

⁴⁹ COWAN, J. The Patu-paiarehe. Notes on Maori Folk-tales of the Fairy People. Part II. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1921, Vol. 30, No. 119, p. 149.

To seek another home.
O Rotokohu, leave me yet awhile!
Let me farewell my forest shrine,
The tuahu I’m leaving.

Give me but one more day;
Just one more day and then I’ll go,
And I’ll return no more!

Cowan’s respondent Heia stated that in the Ngongotaha mountains, Patu-paiarehe are still living. “On dim and cloudy days, and when the mists descend and envelop the mountain side, the thin voices of the Patu-paiarehe people may be heard, high up on the mountain, and also the music of their flutes (*putorino*). It is not well to go out hunting wild pigs on the mountain slopes at such times.”⁵⁰

According to tradition, in the South Island of New Zealand Patu-paiarehe lived in tall mountains above Lyttelton harbour and on Banks peninsula in the mountain ranges of Te-Poho-o-Tamatea, Te Pohue, Hukuika, Te U-kura and in the mountains of the Akaroa region. “On quiet, cloudy days,” said the old legend keeper of Rapaki, “our *kaumatuas* could often hear the thin voices of the tribes of the mist, crying out to each other and singing fairy songs and playing plaintive music on their wooden and bone flutes, the *putorino* and the *koauau*. They were heard also on windless nights when sounds carried far, and our people were careful to avoid the hills at such times as they imagined the Patu-paiarehe would be abroad”.⁵¹

In the myths of the Ngati-Tatu tribe it is said that the O-te-patatu peak was a place where Maori and Patu-paiarehe used to hunt *titi* – muttonbird. Cowan's respondent Tikao talked about how the Patu-paiarehe hunted them so much that they became completely extinct.

Myths about Polynesians coming into contact with a nation with fair skin and hair are not exclusive to the Maori mythology. Hawaiian myths talk about an ancient ancestor named Hawaii-loa. He was one of their best sailors, and during one of his numerous journeys, he arrived at the shores of a vast country or continent called Kua-hewa-hewa.

⁵⁰ COWAN, J. The Patu-paiarehe. Notes on Maori Folk-tales of the Fairy People. Part II. In *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1921, Vol. 30, No. 119, p. 149.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Returning from this country, he brought with him two white men, *poe keokeo kane*, whom he married on his return home to Hawaiian women.⁵²

Records of Wyatt Gill from the island of Mangaia also mention people with fair skin. They were called *keu*. The term *Te anau keu a Tangaroa* described fair-skinned descendants of the god Tangaroa.

Myths about people with fair skin appear throughout Polynesia. The simplest explanation would be that some time in the past Polynesians came in contact with white-skinned people. It is highly unlikely that dark-skinned Polynesians all across the region came up with the same idea of fair-skinned people by mere chance.⁵³ It is important to note that this topic has yet not been researched. The biggest issue in such research is the absence of a writing system in the past in Polynesia. The only exception is the *rongorongo* writing system from Easter Island; however, as of now, no one is able to read it. This means that the only source of information is myths preserved through oral tradition.

Myths about people with an exceptionally small stature and amazing manual skills appeared not only in Polynesia but their variants also appeared in other parts of Oceania. For example, Fiji is also home to myths about forest-dwelling people. According to tradition, these people were very short, good-looking and had lush hair. Their name was Veli. They liked woods and springs, lived in hollow trees and caves, and grew bananas, coffee, and other fruit. According to A. Brewster, myths concerning the Veli could, in fact, be a throwback to the original inhabitants whom they called Viti.⁵⁴

Other than the Veli, according to Fijian tradition, similar beings named Luve-ni-wai, meaning “children of water” also lived there. Like the Veli, they were also supposed to reside in forests and mountains and were supposed to be short, good-looking, and long-haired. Allegedly they taught the local people many songs and dances.⁵⁵

Even on the island of San Cristóbal in the Galápagos Islands, myths about beings very similar to those appearing in Polynesian mythology have been

⁵² FORNANDER, A. *An Account of the Polynesian Race; its Origins and Migrations and the Ancient History of the Hawaiian People to the Times of Kamehameha I*, Vol. 1, p. 135.

⁵³ SMITH, S. P. *Hawaiki: The Original Home of the Maori; with a Sketch of Polynesian History. The Papuan Race of Indonesia*, p. 98.

⁵⁴ BREWSTER, A. *The Hill Tribes of Fiji; a Record of Forty Years' Intimate Connection with the Tribes of the Mountainous Interior of Fiji with a Description of their Habits in War & Peace; Methods of Living, Characteristics Mental & Physical, from the Days of Cannibalism to the Present Time*, pp. 88–89.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 222–224.

recorded.⁵⁶ They believed in the existence of two different kinds of small beings. One of them were Kakamora who could have dark but also light skin, had long hair, were very strong and liked to sing and dance. They didn't eat cooked food, were peaceful, and very skilful. The second kind of such small people were Masi. While they were described as physically strong, they were also supposed to be not very intelligent. Masi were skilled craftsmen, and they could build canoes and work skilfully with stone. They are very reminiscent of the Menehune from Hawaiian mythology.⁵⁷

To this day, we still do not have any satisfactory explanation as to who these mythical beings, whose work can still be seen, actually were. It is very interesting that despite some differences between these myths, mainly caused by language differences and distance between islands and archipelagos, there are many identical elements between them. The most common shared motif is these people's very short stature and long hair. Many myths talk about how some of them had light skin and light or reddish hair. Another shared characterisation is that they live in deep valleys and inaccessible mountains, they like water, and their diet is mainly composed of fruit found in the forests, and fish. They had exceptional skills when working with stone and wood, building many impressive structures such as shrines, roads, and canals which they used to channel water into ponds and lowlands. Naturally, the builders of these structures were often considered to have supernatural powers due to the fact that these structures were often built from a type of stone that had to be transported over great distances. The quality of the work was also exceptional and unrivalled by Polynesian buildings, which were usually wooden and rather simple.

All these facts point to Oceania being settled in multiple migratory waves. It is likely that in the past this region was actually home to ethnicities that slowly died out or emigrated, as the art of working with stone did not evolve any further in Polynesia. We can also find myths that talk about how new waves of people replaced the original people.

Katherine Luomala considered them simply to be mythical beings, similar to dwarves in European folklore. However, she wrote her works when the archaeological discoveries in Southeast Asia were yet to be made. In 2003, skeletal remains were found on the island of Flores. Anthropologists argued that these remains belonged to a separate *homo* branch, later dubbed *homo floresiensis*. To this day, it is not completely clear what kind of evolutionary

⁵⁶ It is important to note that the Galápagos Islands are more than 10,000 kilometres away from New Zealand, and about 8,000 kilometres from the Hawaiian Islands, where myths about the so-called dwarf people were most common.

⁵⁷ FOX, C. E. *The Threshold of the Pacific*, pp. 138–154, 293, 345–346.

line these remains belong to. However, the theory that they have many similarities with *Australopithecus* is favoured. The skeletons and tools found in their vicinity are approximately 20,000 years old.⁵⁸ Due to the fact that migratory waves in Oceania were moving from west to east, it is possible that these myths describe real ancient inhabitants of these islands. There are still many things unclear about this topic, and the research concerning it is still in its infancy. This is mainly due to the fact that no finds such as those on Flores Island have been made since. It is possible that myths about people of very short stature were not merely fiction, but only archaeological findings would be able to prove this theory.

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⁵⁸ DOREY, F. *Homo floresiensis*. *Australian Museum*. [cit. 10 May 2020]. Available from <<https://australianmuseum.net.au/homo-floresiensis>>.

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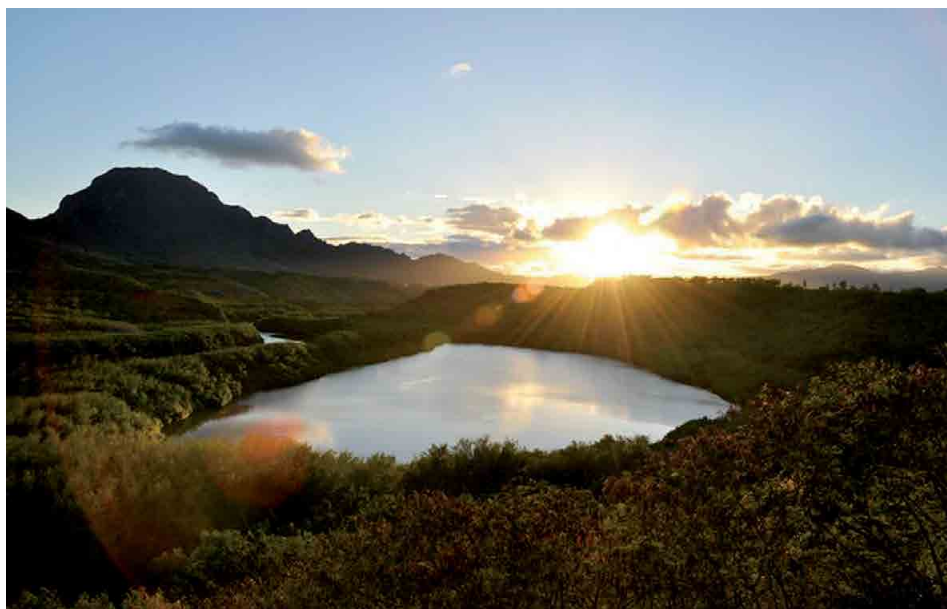
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Bucková, Fig. 1. Mookini heiau, Hawai‘i



Bucková, Fig. 2. Ili‘ili‘opae heiau, Molokai



Bucková, Fig. 3. Alekoko pond, Kaua'i



Bucková, Fig. 4. Kiki-a-Ola watercourse, Kaua'i