

ANALYSING THE MOTIF OF “DWARF PEOPLE” IN POLYNESIAN MYTHOLOGIES, THEIR ORIGIN AND CHARACTERISTICS. PART I.*

Martina BUCKOVÁ

Institute of Oriental Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences
Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia
martina.buckova@gmail.com

This article analyses myths regarding so-called “dwarf people,” which were recorded in the region of Polynesia. According to many of these myths, these people were ancient ancestors of current-day Polynesians. Common characteristics of these people across various myths include their very short stocky stature, living in deep valleys and forests hidden away from others. All myths about Menhune highlight their exceptional skill in working with stone and building various structures such as shrines, waterways, ponds, roads, and others. Much Hawaiian mythology attributes many stone structures to their work. Anthropologists and scholars of religion favour the opinion that these “dwarf people” were purely mythical beings. However, since the discovery of skeletons of small people on Flores Island in 2003, this topic can now be viewed from a completely different angle.

Keywords: “Dwarf people”, Menhune, Polynesian mythology, Mu, Patu-pai-a-Rehe

Preface

The mythological systems of many nations and ethnicities often include tales of mysterious small humans commonly referred to as “dwarf people”. While in Oceania, myths concerning these beings are most commonly found in Polynesian mythology, they also appear in the regions of Melanesia and Micronesia.

* 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.

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Furthermore, these myths also exist in some form in Southeast Asia, specifically in Indonesia.

These beings bear many different names. For example on the Hawaiian Islands, they are designated Menehune, on Tahiti, the Cook Islands, Tuamotu and in the region of central Polynesia they are referred to as Manahune, while on the islands of Rarotonga and Mangaia they are called Manaune. Maori referred to them as either Manahua or Menehune. In spite of these different names, the look and behaviour of these people were always described practically identically. Even the similar names by which they are called are proof that it is indeed the same phenomenon and the specific terms are different merely due to various changes in the evolution of Polynesian languages.

Common characteristics of these mythical people include short stature, a stocky body, lush hair, a positive relationship with people, exceptional manual skills, especially when it comes to handling wood and stone, and their nocturnality and habit of sleeping during the day in deep forests and valleys.

It is probably Hawaiian mythology that features tales of these people the most. Due to the interest shown in the mythology of the Hawaiian Islands by ethnographers, missionaries and various amateur enthusiasts, it ended up being relatively extensively documented. Hawaiian myths describe these “dwarf people”, called Menehune there, as small, rarely seen and living in deep, inaccessible valleys and forests. Their main characteristics are physical strength and great skill in crafts and manual labour. While they are described as kind, they also like to play pranks on people. Their primary sources of food are various plants and fruit found in the wild, and fish.

The Hawaiian myth “Legend of the Floating Island” mentions that Menehunes were people who had no knowledge of fire or the useful arts, who lived on the natural fruits of the earth uncooked as they plucked them. Taro and sweet potatoes grew in abundance but were left untouched by the people because they had no means to cook them.¹

According to many myths, they liked playing games, dancing, making music and singing. They are very often associated with water, also enjoy cliff diving, and people say that if you hear the sound of splashing near a beach or waterfall at night, it is from a Menehune. The favourite activity of these small men was jumping off cliffs into the sea. They carried stones from the mountains to their bathing places, where they placed them in piles. Then, throwing the stone into the sea, the skilful swimmer would dive after it.²

¹ LYDGATE, J. M. Legend of the Floating Island. A Kauai Version Narrated by Mrs. S. Polani, of Kapaa. In *Hawaiian Annual*, 1924, p. 135.

² LUOMALA, K. *The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania*, p. 15.

Most myths concerning the Menehune on the Hawaiian Islands come from the islands of Kaua‘i, O‘ahu, Moloka‘i and Maui. Records about these myths from Hawai‘i are relatively sparse. There are records of only two myths describing Menehune from this island. One of them talks about Menehune building *heiau* – a shrine or temple in Napule, Hilo during just a single night. The second one is about them building a watercourse from the pond Ohialele to Kohala.³

As mentioned earlier, according to myths, Menehune were very skilled builders. Many stone buildings, including roads, temples – *heiau*, ponds and waterways, some of which survive to this day, are attributed to the Menehune.

Many myths speak of the Menehune as the original people of the largest island of Hawaiian Islands, Hawai‘i. However, after waves of migration from Tahiti they were forced to retreat northwest. Eventually, they were forced out to the very edge of the Hawaiian Islands, and the island of Kaua‘i became their last bastion. Hawaiians believed that they were frequently seen in the mountains, above Waimea, near perhaps to a place known as Waineki.⁴ In the Hawaiian legend about Kumuhonua, it is stated that Polynesians are descendants of Menehune, whose great grandfather was Lua Nu‘u.⁵

Katherine Luomala states in her books that Hawaiians are accustomed to speak of the Menehune as the real *kama‘aina* of the Hawaiian Islands. The term *kama‘aina* means, literally, “child of the land” and denotes the native-born of the islands. By extension, it has come to mean aborigines. According to present-day folk belief, which seems to exist at every social and educational level, the Menehune are the aborigines of the islands. They are regarded as real people. At the same time they are considered to be supernatural beings, and some people claim that the Menehune were real people who, over time, have been folklorised by later arrivals.⁶

Similarly, Thomas G. Thrum, who also researched myths about these beings, stated in his book “Hawaiian Folktales” that Hawaiians considered the Menehune to be their ancestors. They described them as very short and manually skilled. According to many myths, they had the power to perform a marvellous amount of labour in a short space of time, which has fixed them in the minds of

³ THRUM, T. G. Who or What Where the Menehunes. In *Hawaiian Annual* 1929, pp. 84–86.

⁴ 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, p. 70.

⁵ According to Hawaiian mythology, Lua Nu‘u was a man who built a huge ship and thanks to that he survived a massive flood.

⁶ LUOMALA, K. *The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania*, p. 4.

Hawaiians, many of whom point to certain traces of their work in various parts of the islands to substantiate the traditional claim of their existence.⁷

Many myths about the Menehune come from the island of Kaua‘i. Kaua‘i is the only island from the Hawaiian Islands where archaeological proof of contact with islands of the region of central Polynesia has been found. The culture of this island was influenced by contacts with central Polynesia as well as its isolation from the rest of the Hawaiian Islands. These cultural differences are visible in the different styling of *heiau* – shrines compared to the rest of the archipelago alongside various aspects of local culture.

Edward Joesting, in his book “Kaua‘i: The Separate Kingdom”, claims that it seems that Menehune was the name given by the Tahitians to the early settlers of Hawaii who had come from the Marquesas. According to mythology, the Menehune came to Kaua‘i on a cloud of three levels. Others say that they arrived on a floating island.⁸

There is a very interesting source of information concerning the Menehune originating from stories told by Hawaiian Kaiwa. These were recorded in the Hawaiian language and were translated and published in English by T. G. Thrum under the name “Story of the Race of Menehunes of Kauai”.⁹

This information is very interesting because this is not just one of the myths recorded back in the 19th century. Instead, it comes directly from one of the natives who insisted that his grandparents had a personal experience with these beings when they met them in the mountains in the Waineki region.

It is questionable whether myths about how the Menehune were ancient ancestors of Hawaiians that came from Southeast Asia to Polynesia are really to be believed. Based on the research of currently available sources, including records of Hawaiian respondents from the end of the 19th century and the rich mythology connected with these beings, we will attempt to clarify who these mysterious small people whose work can be seen in Polynesia to this day, most commonly on the Hawaiian Islands, really were according to the natives and mythology.

Appearance and Behaviour of the Menehune

In the manuscript of Solomon K. Kaulilili, which is kept in Bishop Museum, Honolulu, it is written that the Menehune were a very mysterious people. It states that formerly the name of these people was not known but later it was discovered

⁷ THRUM, T. G. *Hawaiian Folktales; a Collection of Native Legends*, p. 108.

⁸ JOESTING, E. *Kaua‘i: The Separate Kingdom*, p. 19.

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, p. 72.

that the name was Menehune because they were as numerous as the menehune shrimps in the sea.¹⁰ It should be noted that no other record explains the origin of their name in this way.

Every known myth and alleged eye witness describes the Menehune as very small, muscular people with long, lush hair.

William H. Rice who recorded many Polynesian myths states in his book “Hawaiian Legends” that Menehune were a small people, but they were broad and muscular and possessed of great strength. He theorises that contrary to common belief they were not possessed of any supernatural powers, but it was solely on account of their tremendous strength and energy and their great number that they were able to accomplish the wonderful things they did. These pygmy people were both obedient and industrious, always obeying their leaders.¹¹

In “The Journal of the Polynesian Society”, Thomas G. Thrum translated stories of the native Hawaiian Kaiwa in which he states that the Menehune were known to be powerfully built, stout and muscular; their skin was red, their bodies hairy; their noses short and thick set, and their low protruding foreheads were covered with hair. They had big eyes hidden by thick eyebrows, and their set countenance was fearsome so that they were unpleasant to look.¹²

William H. Rice presents in his book “Hawaiian Legends”¹³ a version of a myth from the island of Kaua’i which describes the Menehune as a very short people but very intelligent and well organised. They took no food from other people’s land, but cultivated enough for themselves. Their favourite foods were *hau-pia*, a pudding made from arrow-root, sweetened with coconut milk; *pala-ai*, the squash, and *ko-ele-pa-lau*, or sweet potato pudding. They were also very fond of *luau*, the cooked young roots of the taro, fern-fronds, and other greens. They used elaborately-made and carved wooden dishes and utensils for their food. According to tradition, the Menehune were the ones who cultivated the wild taro, either on the *pali* or in the swamps, for they planted anywhere they could find room for a single plant.¹⁴

Based on her studies of myths concerning Menehune, Katherine Luomala noticed that very little is said about Menehune women and children. One of the myths about the Menehune mentions the female Analike – a Menehune female who was a girl who lived on an island that floated around the Pacific and who is

¹⁰ LUOMALA, K. *The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania*, p. 10.

¹¹ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, pp. 34–35.

¹² 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, p. 70.

¹³ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, p. 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

described as beautiful and very petite. She married the castaway chief Keaweahu of Kona Hawaii, who presumably was of normal size.¹⁵

All available sources agree on certain characteristics of their lives such as that they lived in caves, inaccessible valleys and mountains, and took a great interest in sport: spinning (*olo-hu*), quoits (*maika*), shooting arrows (*ke ‘a-pua*), hide-the-thimble (*puhenehene*), foot races, sled races, hand wrestling (*uma* or *kulakulai*), and diving off a cliff. *Kahunas*, soothsayers, astrologers belong to the company of the chief. “Story-tellers, fun-makers, minstrels, and musicians” furnish his amusement. The nose-flute and the ti-leaf trumpet, the ukeke stringed instrument, and the shark-skin drum are their accompaniments.¹⁶

William H. Rice also states that the favourite sport of these small men was to jump off cliffs into the sea. They carried stones from the mountains to their bathing places, where they placed them in piles. Then, throwing one into the sea, the skilful swimmer would dive after it. This was repeated until all the stones had disappeared. One of their bathing places was at Ninini, a little beach surrounded by cliffs. According to one of the myths, while the Menehune were carrying a large rock from Kipukai to Ninini, half of it broke off and fell into the Huleia River, where it is still used as a bridge called Kipapa-o-ka-Menehune.¹⁷

The myth of Ka-wai-a-Maliu is also connected with the Menehune. It states that the Menehune had a favourite place near Malowaa from which they jumped into the sea. Their leader saw that one Menehune, named Maliu, was missing. He quickly sent out a search party. In the meantime, the missing one, who had been visiting some Hawaiian home, saw the searchers and began digging at the spot where a spring came out from a coral rock. There he was found, and he explained that he had discovered this spring, where they could all drink good water. So his life was saved. This spring was called Ka-wai-a-Maliu, the Water-of-Maliu, and is still to be seen.¹⁸

Many myths state that they were very noisy. This is further confirmed by stories told by the Hawaiian H. Kaiwa which he heard from his grandparents and other Hawaiian natives. These stories were translated and published in English by T.G. Thrum under the name “Story of the Race of Menehunes of Kauai”. He states that their conversation was a kind of murmur, like the low growl of a dog; they were loud-voiced in their laughter.¹⁹

¹⁵ LUOMALA, K. *The Menehune of Polynesia and Other Mythical Little People of Oceania*, p. 18.

¹⁶ BECKWITH, M. *Hawaiian Mythology*, p. 327.

¹⁷ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, p. 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37–38.

¹⁹ Story of the Race of Menehunes of Kauai. In *Hawaiian Annual*, 1921, p. 114.

Their noisiness is also described in William H. Rice's book "Legends of Hawaii".²⁰ Even fish and birds were supposedly scared of how noisy they were. One myth states that when they had finished their work, the little men raised such a loud shout that the fish in the pond of Nomilu, across the island, jumped with fright, and the *mai*, the wary fish, left the beaches.²¹

Another myth recorded on the island of Hawai'i talks of how one of the Menehune broke the law and was condemned to death. He was turned into a stone which is still called Poha'-kina-pua'a and can be seen on the Waimea Canyon road. As the stone was being placed, such a shout was raised that it frightened the ducks on the Kawainui pond near Kailua, on Oahu.²²

A very similar motif is also found in the story about how the Menehune built the plain little hill called Po-po-pii. There they amused themselves by rolling down its slopes. They made so much noise with this sport that the birds at Kahuku, on Oahu, were frightened.²³

The myth "The Maid of the Golden Cloud" also states that the god Kane exiled the Menehune from the island O'ahu because of how loud they were.²⁴

Origin of the Menehune

Like other researchers, William H. Rice states that according to tradition, Hawaiians considered the Menehune to be their ancient ancestors. This is also the topic of a myth from Kumulipo, a chant telling a creation story. According to it, in ancient times there was one vast continent, stretching from Hawaii, including Samoa, Lalakoa, and reaching as far as New Zealand, also taking in Fiji. And there were some lowlands in between this higher ground. All this was called by one name, that is Ka-houpo-o-Kane, the Solar-Plexus-of-Kane (the great god), and was also called Moana-nui-kai-oo, the Great-Engulfing-Ocean. When the great flood came²⁵, Kai-a-ka-hina-alii, the Sea-that-Made-the-Chiefs-Fall-Down, submerging all the lower ground, leaving only specks of higher ground, now known as islands, above water. After the deluge there were three peoples: the Menehune, who were dwarfs or pygmies; the Ke-na-mu²⁶ and the Ke-na-wa. The Menehune destroyed many of these other people. One of the chiefs of the Ke-na-

²⁰ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, p. 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁴ WESTERVELT, W. D. *Legends of gods and ghosts*, pp. 149–150.

²⁵ Myths about a great flood are common in Hawaiian mythology and are well recorded.

²⁶ People who are called by the name "Mu" lived in the Wainiha valley in the Laau region of the island of Kaua'i.

mu had come to Hawaii from Kahiki.²⁷ These three nations settled on the island of Kaua‘i. According to the myth, some Menehune set out from this island and landed in New Zealand. They were led by the chieftain Maori-tu-raiatea and according to one of the traditions, the name Maori derives from the first part of this chieftain’s name.²⁸

Abraham Fornander states in his book “An Account of the Polynesian Race...” that the Menehune reached the island of O‘ahu thanks to Kahano, who led them there from the island of Kahiki. Kahano was a supernatural being who stretched his arms and reached all the way to Kahiki. Menehune used his arms as a bridge to cross the ocean and come to O‘ahu. There he made them servants of his dear Kahiki-ku-o-ka-lani who lived within the region of Kailua, Pauoa and Puowaina. The Menehune later built many important heiau – shrines: Mauiki, Kaheiki, Kawaewae, Eku, Kamoalii and Kuaokala.²⁹

Some authors such as Stacy L. Kamehiro argue that the Menehune could, in fact, have come to the Hawaiian Islands from Tahiti, as they consider Kahiki to be Tahiti.³⁰ As we stated before, opponents of this theory reject the notion that the mythical island of Kahiki that was supposed to lie to the west is identifiable with Tahiti. Instead, they propose that it could have been Fiji, which in Rarotongan bears the name Iti. The theory that the Menehune came from Tahiti is also opposed by many myths which state that when migratory waves from Tahiti arrived on the Hawaiian Islands, they were already inhabited, specifically by small people who gradually retreated into the mountains.

The Hawaiian archaeologist S. M. Kamakau, who collected a large number of local myths, recorded a myth about the chieftain Kealii-Wahanui who ruled over the region of Honua-ilalo and was infamous for oppressing the Menehune. The god Kane sent Kane-apua and Kanaloa to take them to the land of Ka-aina Momona-a-Kane which was considered to be an ancient continent located in the Pacific Ocean. This continent was then supposedly flooded and only the currently known islands were left above sea level.³¹

²⁷ A mythical island located to the west, from which ancestors of Polynesians arrived. According to linguistic theories, the root of this word is “hiki”, in various languages also appearing as “hiti”, “whiti” and “iti”, and could be related to Viti-levu which is the second largest island in the Fiji archipelago. It is also possible that it refers to the Fiji archipelago as its name is Iti in the Rarotongan language.

²⁸ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, pp. 33–34, 36.

²⁹ 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. 23.

³⁰ KAMEHIRO, S. L. *The Arts of Kingship: Hawaiian Art and National Culture of the Kalākaua Era*, p. 41.

³¹ 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. 99.

The myth about Kanehunamoku also talks about a mythical island inhabited by the Menehune. However, in this myth, it is called Kueihelani.³²

John M. Lydgate and Thomas G. Thrum recorded myths which talk about the homeland not only of the Menehune but also of a people called the Mu. One of the myths, “The Legend of Kanehunamoku the Phantom Isle; Home of the Menehunes and Mu” was published by Thomas G. Thrum in “Hawaiian Almanac and Annual” in 1906. Another myth, “Legend of the Floating Island. A Kauai version narrated by Mrs. S. Polani, of Kapaa” was published by John M. Lydgate in “Hawaiian Annual” in 1924.

Even though both talk about a floating island inhabited by “dwarf people”, they are two different myths. In the version published by Lydgate, this island is called Ka-aina a Kane-huna-moku – Kane’s hidden island, which sometimes appears in the ocean, has beautiful valleys, waterfalls and its peaks reach up into the sky.

In Thrum’s version of this myth, the gods Kane³³ and Kanaloa³⁴ created a floating land called Kueihelani, to which Kanehunamoku was exiled, being a land moving about on the surface of the clouds in the midst of utter darkness, and so they all lived without the slightest idea that they were on a land moving in space driven hither and thither over the deep blue ocean by the varying winds. It was only at night, however, that this mysterious land would be in motion, like the spirit of the distressed.³⁵ The Menehune who lived here did not know the use of fire. The young Hawaiian Keawe-ahu managed to end up on this island by accident when his kin tricked him into leaving their boat and abandoned him. He fell in love with the daughter of a local chieftain and taught the Menehune how to use fire and cook food.

According to one of the theories, the Hawaiian Islands were settled in two waves. The first wave came from the Marquesas Islands while the second one arrived from Tahiti. Tahitians slowly forced the native inhabitants, whom they called Manahune, to retreat into the mountains. The word “Manahune” in Tahitian means “commoners”. This theory is backed by a population census from the year 1820 ordered by the ruler of the island of Kaua’i, Kaumuali’i, in which 65 people registered as belonging to the Menehune nationality.³⁶

³² The Legend of Kanehunamoku the Phantom Isle; Home of the Menehunes and Mu’s. In *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual*, ed. T. G. Thrum.

³³ One of the four most important gods together with Ku, Lono and Kanaloa. Considered to be a god of the sky and creation.

³⁴ Kanaloa was a god of the ocean, death and the underworld.

³⁵ The Legend of Kanehunamoku the Phantom Isle; Home of the Menehunes and Mu’s. In *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual*, ed. T. G. Thrum, p. 141.

³⁶ JOESTING, E. *Kaua’i: The Separate Kingdom*, pp. 20–22.

Many myths from the islands of Kaua‘i and O‘ahu speak of how the Menehune were the first inhabitants of these islands while others say that they came there from different islands. However, traditions agree that when Tahitians came to these islands, they were already inhabited by people called ka poe Nenehune or Menehune. According to tradition, they were descendants of the Menehune, whose ancestor was Lua-nu‘u. The Menehune most probably inhabited all the islands of the archipelago but myths point mainly to the island of Kaua‘i. The reason for this is most probably the fact that Kaua‘i is the last big island at the northwest end of the Hawaiian Islands. If it is true that they were the original inhabitants of these islands who were gradually forced to retreat by migrants from Tahiti, it would make sense that they fled northwestwards, eventually all the way to Kaua‘i. From there they most probably further retreated to the desolate rocky islands of Nihoa and Necker. This theory can be based on the discovery of many stone terraces and statues. While nowadays Kaua‘i Island’s valley of Waimea is uninhabited, traces of ancient inhabitants, for example, petroglyphs etched into stone walls, can be found there.

The gradual relocating of the Menehune northeastwards was most probably reflected in local myths, but the reasons given for this relocating are inconsistent. William H. Rice recorded a tale which speaks of how the Menehune used to live in the valley of Lanihuli on the island of Kaua‘i. Their chieftain disapproved of the fact that many of the Menehune were marrying Hawaiian women. This worried him greatly as he was anxious to keep his race pure. Eventually he decided to leave the islands. Only their first-born sons were to leave with them while their Hawaiian wives would be abandoned. At twilight, at a time settled on in advance, they left the island for an unknown destination.³⁷

The Hawaiian king Kalakaua who reigned from 1836 to 1891 was the author of the book “The Legends and Myths of Hawaii: the Fables and Folk-lore of a Strange People” in which he published various Hawaiian myths and traditions. Under the influence of Christian missionaries, he even argued that the Menehune were descendants of one of the lost tribes of Israel.³⁸

However, his theory did not meet with the approval of scientific circles. Under the influence of the teaching of missionaries, Samuel Marsden came up with a similar theory that suggested that the Maori could be one of the lost tribes of Israel.

Myths concerning the Menehune are most common on the Hawaiian Islands. However, they also appear in Tahitian mythology. On Tahiti, Menehune are called Manahune, which is caused merely by a difference in languages. Sidney P.

³⁷ RICE, W. H. *Hawaiian Legends*, pp. 39–44.

³⁸ KALAKAUA, D. *The Legends and Myths of Hawaii: the Fables and Folk-lore of a Strange People*, p. 37.

Smith argues that they were real people who inhabited Tahiti in ancient times. He introduces Teuira Henry's³⁹ term "Ari'i o te tau Manahune" which means "chieftain from the times of Manahune". In the genealogy of Paumotu, we can find the information that one of the chieftains was called Tangaroa-Manahune. According to the traditions of the island of Mangaia, in ancient times the island was inhabited by a tribe called the Manaune. Similarly, in traditions from Rarotonga, we can find the Manahune described as small people.

In the Maori and Rarotongian languages, the word "manahune" means scar or body mark. According to S. P. Smith, this could refer to Papuans or Melanesians who marked themselves with scars instead of tattoos and he offers two possible theories which explain the origins of the Manahune. Either they were part of the first migratory wave in the Pacific region or they were taken as slaves by Polynesians who undertook journeys to Indonesia.⁴⁰

S. P. Smith considers the second theory to be more likely to be true. The history and traditions of the inhabitants of these parts of Southeast Asia confirm that they used to be inhabited by Negritic tribes. According to Smith, Polynesians most probably had contact with them and took them as slaves.⁴¹

Even though Smith's theory is interesting, in our view it is unlikely to be correct. If we assume that it is right, it would mean that Polynesians from Hawaiian Islands, New Zealand, Tahiti and other islands would sail fairly often westwards all the way to Papua. Even if that were true, the number of slaves they would be able to bring back to their islands would be relatively small. A theory that appears to be more realistic, assuming that the myths describe real beings, would be that it was an early wave of migration to Polynesia, which originated in western regions and travelled eastwards. That would mean that Negritic people would have been the first inhabitants of several Polynesian islands and were later forced to leave them by the succeeding migratory waves.

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³⁹ A highly regarded historian, linguist and ethnographer, who worked on Tahiti at the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century. He was the author of many important books concerning Tahitian culture.

⁴⁰ SMITH, S. P. *Hawaiki: The Original Home of the Maori; with a Sketch of Polynesian History The Papuan Race of Indonesia*, p. 105.

⁴¹ Ibid.

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