

“Kokua Mai”

The reef played a vital role in the economy of the traditional native Hawaiian community. Trade was essential, and products gathered from the reef provided food, tools, medicines, jewelry, dyes, etc. to other areas of the ahupua'a. This commerce has been described in various terms, like bartering, trading, peddling, exchange, sharing, and gift-giving.

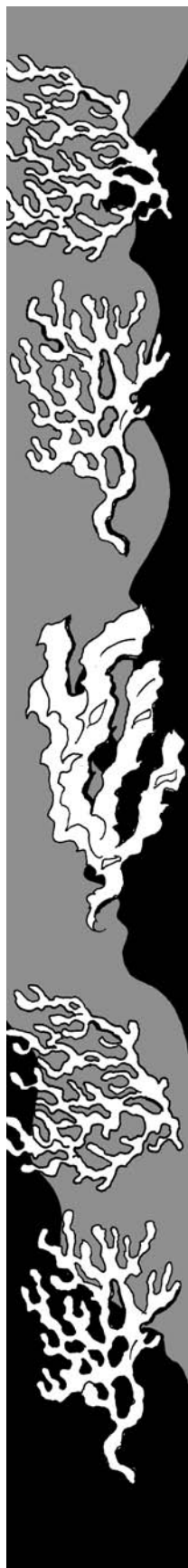
Social interdependence, or the need to rely on each other, was a necessity for maintaining the equilibrium of the community. Those who lived on the inland plains and/or the upland areas provided the resources needed by those who resided on the shoreline. Kalo (taro), uala (sweet potato), and maia (banana) could be exchanged for fish, shrimp, or limu. Coral utilized as an abrasive rubbing tool could be traded for olon_ fiber for the making of nets. This kind of economic integration tied the whole of the community together as an `ohana. Each group, of this sometimes widely-dispersed family, was an important element in helping the other survive.

Then, as it is now, there were probably some items that were thought of as having more value than others. For example, a chief may have had a particular food fish which he or she preferred over all else that the reef had to offer. Also, what value would a kalai wa`a (canoe carver) put on a fishing canoe with a hull carved of koa, manu and mo`o (gunnels) made of `ahakea, the `iako made of hau, and an ama hewn of wiliwili, all lashed together with cordage combined of coconut and olon_ fiber? Conversely, the kalai wa`a could not attempt to fell a tree from a mountain forest without first presenting offerings of fish from the sea.

In Kane`ohe Bay, one need not speculate on the resource of greatest value in socio-religious and governing terms. The ahupua`a of Kualoa was once famed for the “ivory that drifts ashore (Palaoa-pae)”. The combination of wind, current, and reef brought to the Kualoa shoreline the bodies of dead whales. The ivory that inadvertently came ashore with them was highly prized and whale’s teeth (Niho palaoa) could only be worn by high-born Ali`i. There was a time when, because of the ivory, the ruler of Kualoa was automatically considered the ruler of O`ahu.

In early Hawaiian times, the ruling class created the law of the land (kanawai). A system comprised of certain kapu (taboo) for different seasons would determine what kind of fish could be taken and what was to be left unmolested. Much of this was driven by the natural forces of nature, and often determined by the phase of the moon. As mentioned previously though, a chief may have a favorite food that he would place a kapu on so that none other save himself might cause to take repast of. An example that still exists is “Pa Honu” in Waimanalo. This very large manmade shoreline enclosure was built to hold turtles in captivity for a chief, so that one or more could be caught, prepared and served to him at his command and leisure.

Today the ruling class is our federal, state, and county governments. They create, legislate, enforce, and interpret the laws that affect our shoreline, reefs, and open-ocean. Some contemporary laws are holdovers of traditional kapu.



But with the huge increase of population and the excesses that have come with it since traditional times, will we be able to maintain the equilibrium of sustainability so desperately needed? Everyone will need to kokua by living right with the sea.

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