The sun rises and sets over Kaua‘i, gentle tides rise and fall, the moon waxes and wanes, rain falls and the sun shines, and one day slips quietly into the next with little change. Men and women are born and die, and the passing of time in the days of ancient Kaua‘i was recalled by reciting the genealogy of nā ali‘i nui (paramount chiefs) in order from the first man, Kumu-honua, and first woman, Lalo-honua, through all their descendants down to the ali‘i nui who ruled the people at the moment these genealogies were chanted.

These pua ali‘i, exalted men and women, chiefs and descendants of chiefs, owned a genealogy that reached unbroken mai ka pō mai (from the time of darkness) to the present. These chiefs were considered to be directly descended from the gods themselves, from Kū, Kāne, Kanaloa, and Lono. These gods had created the first man and woman at ‘Ali‘i, the beach beside the mouth of the mighty Wailua river. Thus the genealogy of a chief that began with Kumu-honua and continued unbroken from the time of darkness proved that he or she was sacred, godlike, invested with the power of life and death and ruled as the child of the gods.

There were several such genealogies, but the one most often chanted for Kaua‘i’s pua ali‘i was the Kumu-honua genealogy.
The first thirty-six generations from Kumu-honua to Papa represent almost a thousand years of history. Even the best trained oral historian could not retain such massive history and genealogy, and there was no writing, therefore no books, in which this knowledge could be stored. Only a handful of legends recounting the adventures of certain ali’i nui have come down to us from that early time: Kini-lau-a-Mano, the great lover who ventured from island to island seeking new wives; Ke-ao-melemele, princess of the golden cloud in whose time the study of clouds as navigational aids and as clues to the future was first codified; Nu’u, who survived the great flood; and Hawai’i-loa, great voyager and discoverer of new stars and planets by which to navigate.

The legends of these chiefs and chiefesses are more than the mere retelling of heroic adventures. They are also a vast storehouse of accumulated information, of social mores with examples of good and bad behavior, and a general illustration of the best way to go about the business of living. They are also the way the Polynesians who settled and were born and died on Kaua‘i tracked the passage of time and the chronology of their history.

The genealogy of Kumu-honua and his wife, Lalo-honua, continues for thirty-six generations until the birth of Papa. Her story indicates that she was the first to lead her people into the great unknown of the Pacific Ocean and was the mother of all Polynesians. Later genealogists turned her into Papa, the Earth Mother, goddess of all the life-giving land, and changed her husband, Wākea, into the Sky Father, god of all that belongs to the heavens. It was a new beginning, an anchor point from which all subsequent generations descended.

With Papa and Wākea, the history of Polynesia and of the island of Kaua‘i begins. Behind them lay the mythical beginnings of the Polynesian people complete with the knowledge and culture accumulated over thousands of years. Ke-ao-melemele’s clouds and Hawai’i-loa’s navigational stars filled them with confidence that any islands to the east could be found and settled, and the way between the old and new homelands could be fixed in navigational lore.

Papa was a chiefess of high rank. It is not known where she lived, perhaps on Tonga or Samoa or even Fiji. She was, it is said, a handsome woman, noted in particular for her skill in fishing for pāpa‘i (crab), which she served raw with limu (seaweed).

Wākea, who was born on an island to the west, was the second
son of Kahiko and Kū-pūlana-kehau. When his older brother Lihau-'
ula inherited Kahiko’s land, Lihau- ula wanted to get rid of the
threat he saw in Wākea. His counselor tried to talk him out of it,
saying, “Don’t let us go to war with Wākea at this time. We shall
be defeated by him.”
Lihau- ula had a large force of men under his control while
Wākea had few, and so Lihau- ula went to war. He lost his life, and
the kingdom went to Wākea.
Immediately, Chief Kāne-ia-kumu-honua challenged him for the
leadership. Their armies fought, and Wākea and his men were
driven into the sea. There they bobbed in the ocean waves, with-
out food or shelter, too far from friendly land to swim ashore.
Wākea turned to Komo-‘awa, his kahuna pule (priest), and said,
“What shall we do to save our lives?”
“Build a heiau (place of worship) and pray to the gods,” Komo-
‘awa replied.
Wākea demanded to know how they could accomplish such a
thing, since there was no wood floating nearby to make a raft much
less a place of worship, and there were no pigs swimming with them
to offer as sacrifice.
Komo-‘awa said, “Lift up your right hand and form the hollow of
your hand into a cup by lifting up your fingers.” Wākea did so. “Now
form the fingers of your left hand into a cone and put the fingertips
into the hollow of your right hand.” Wākea obeyed. “This is the
heiau,” Komo-‘awa said. “All we need now are prayers.” Komo-‘awa
began to chant.
Wākea and his warriors gathered close to listen to the prayers.
When Komo-‘awa finished, he said, “We are saved. Let us swim
ashore.”
The warriors did not doubt the word of their priest and followed
Wākea ashore. In fury they engaged the enemy in battle and defeated
Kāne-ia-kumu-honua. Then Wākea looked about for a suitable wife.
The legends that remain are silent concerning how Wākea and
Papa met or where they lived. They did, however, produce a daugh-
ter, Ho’ohoku-i-ka-lani. She became a very lovely young woman.
Wākea fell in love with her and desired to sleep with her. He knew
Papa would be jealous and would not like the idea of him sleeping
with his own daughter. Wākea tried to find a way to keep Papa from
finding out. Once again he turned to Komo-‘awa, his kahuna pule.
“If you desire your daughter,” Komo-‘awa said, “then you must
declare certain nights of the month kapu (taboo) when you must be separated from Papa. I will tell Papa that this is the will of the gods, and she will pay strict attention to it since it comes from the gods. You must also forbid men and women from eating together, as well as restricting certain foods from being eaten by women.”

In this way and for this reason, Wâkea began the tradition of four nights of prayer each month. No longer were men and women to eat together, and women could no longer eat pork, niu aleleo (coconuts with brown husks), and niu hiwa (coconuts with green husks). Women could no longer eat manō (shark), ulua (jackfish), honu (turtle), honu’ea (hawkshill turtle), or red fish such as kūmū (goatfish). They were also restricted to eating only two varieties of banana, the mai’a iho lena and mai’a pōpō’ulu.

These laws were put in place, and on the first kapu night, Wâkea slept with his daughter, and Papa did not know it.

The second time, however, Wâkea overslept. Komo-’awa, who had been keeping a lookout, chanted to awaken him.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Moku ka pawa}, & \quad \text{The predawn darkness is breaking}, \\
\text{Lele ka hoku}, & \quad \text{The morning star appears}, \\
\text{Haule ka lani}, & \quad \text{Fallen is the chief}, \\
\text{Moakaka i ke ao malamalama}, & \quad \text{Visible in the light of day}, \\
\text{Ala mai, ua ao e!} & \quad \text{Awake, day has come!}
\end{align*}
\]

Still, Wâkea did not hear. After the sun rose, Wâkea wrapped the bedsheet around him and dashed for the men’s eating house. Papa saw him, found Ho’ohoku-i-ka-lani in the sleeping house from which Wâkea had run and, furious, confronted Wâkea. The two quarreled. It ended when Wâkea spat in Papa’s face, thus formally divorcing her.

Papa sailed to Tahiti where she took a new husband. She is said to have died and to have been buried in Tahiti. It is also said she returned to Wâkea and bore him at least one more child, Ka-māwae-lua-lani-moku.

Wâkea, freed of his jealous wife, continued his relationship with his daughter. Ho’ohoku-i-ka-lani’s first child was premature. He was given the name Hāloa-naka. He did not live long, and his body was buried beside the house. From this burial place grew a kalo (taro) which became the staple food of Polynesia. Wâkea named the leaf of this plant lau katapalili (quivering leaf) and the stem hāloa
(long stem). Thus it was that the kalo plant was considered semi-sacred and life-giving, worthy of much respect and care.

Ho’ohoku-i-ka-lani gave birth to another son whom they named Hāloa after his dead brother. From Hāloa, it is said, descend all the Polynesians. Kaua’i historians claim that a younger brother of Hāloa discovered and settled this island.

This was Chief Ka-māwae-lua-lani-moku, son of Papa and Wākea, who traveled to this island with his wife, Kahiki-lau-lani, and her two paddlers Kō-nihinihi and Kō-nahenahe. Because of his good deeds, the great number of his descendants, and the prosperity of his reign, people began to call the island Kau-a’i (“Place of Abundance”).

Kau-a’i also means “to place around the neck,” referring to the fact that only the most favored children were carried seated on the necks of their parents, the way Wākea carried his daughter Ho’ohoku-i-ka-lani as an infant.

Kaua’i is also the name of the youngest son of ancient voyager Hawai’i-loa. His wife was Wai-‘ale’ale, and her name was given to the lake beside the highest peak of the island. The word Kaua’i itself is older than Hawai’i-loa; its true meaning is lost in the mists of the cosmic night from which Kaua’i’s ruling chiefs descended.

Kū’alu-nui-kini-akua

Whether Ka-māwae-lua-lani-moku and Kahiki-lau-lani ever lived on Kaua’i is unknown. It is more certain that one day, not too many generations after Papa and well before the descendants of Nana’ulu came to Kaua’i, a voyaging canoe commanded by Kū’alu-nui-kini-akua approached the island from the west. Nothing is known of him except his name and that he had a son Kū’alu-nui-paukū-moku-moku and a counselor named Pi‘i-ali‘i. The genealogy of the first Kaua’i settlers is broken, for they lost their lands and identity after a long war to new, vigorous, and more warlike adventurers. Only a few names remain of these first settlers and their descendants, the most famous connected to two almost mythical groups of people, the Menehune and the Mû.

Kū’alu-nui-kini-akua stepped ashore at the mouth of the Waimea river. It was an ideal place. There was abundant water from the swift rivers and streams that flowed within a protected canyon complex. The climate was warm and dry, useful for people who wore clothes of beaten bark. The area was cooled by Wai-paoa (“Scooped Water”),