

THE MYSTERIOUS STONES OF TONGA

by 'Ana Maui Taufe'ulungaki



Near the small village of Niutōua in Tonga, there are three large stones. Two are standing up. The third stone lies across the top of the other two. This stone **structure** is called the Ha'amonga 'a Maui (the Burden of Maui). It is also known as the trilithon (“tri” means three), and some people call it “the king’s stone clock”.

Many things about the Ha'amonga are a mystery. Nobody knows for sure when it was built, who built it, why it was built, or how it was built.



WHEN WAS IT BUILT?

People have different ideas about when the Ha'amonga was built.

- Some say it was built about 800 years ago. At that time, Tonga ruled many Pacific islands. The Tongan people sailed between the islands on large **kalia**.
- Some say it was built just over 1,000 years ago. That was when a man named 'Aho'eitu became the first king of Tonga.
- Some say it was built nearly 3,000 years ago. That was when the first people arrived in Tonga from the west. (They were called the Lapita, and they are the ancestors of the Polynesian people.)

WHO BUILT IT?

Because the stones are so big, some people believe that the Ha'amonga was built by Maui. "Only a god could do work of this size," they say. This is why the structure is called the Ha'amonga 'a Maui. Others say the Lapita people built it.

However, many people think that the Ha'amonga was built by King Tu'itātui in 1200. There are other stone structures nearby. We know some of these structures were built about the same time, so the idea that King Tu'itātui also built the Ha'amonga makes sense.

Langi Heketā
(the royal
burial tombs)

'Esi Makafa'akinanga
(the king's stone throne)

Paepae 'o Tele'a (stone
platforms for royal houses)

Ha'amonga 'a Maui

This is an artist's impression of what the area looked like in the time of King Tu'itātui. Today some of these stone structures are overgrown.

WHY WAS IT BUILT?

Some people think that the Ha'amonga was a gateway to King Tu'itātui's house. Other people say it was built to show the king's power. A lot of people were needed to build the Ha'amonga. King Tu'itātui had to be very powerful to rule that many people.

Tonga has no written history about the things that happened long ago, but it does have an **oral history**. Tamale, the chief of Niutōua, is an oral historian. He says that the king built the Ha'amonga to teach his children some important lessons.

King Tu'itātui had two sons and a daughter. The king said that the two upright stones stood for his sons. He wanted to show his sons that they should work together for the good of Tonga.

The **lintel** stone stood for his daughter. The other two stones hold up the lintel. In the same way, the king wanted his sons to support their sister. This was a way to show the importance of women in Tonga.

Fatafehi
(the king's daughter)

Talaiha'apepe
(the king's son)

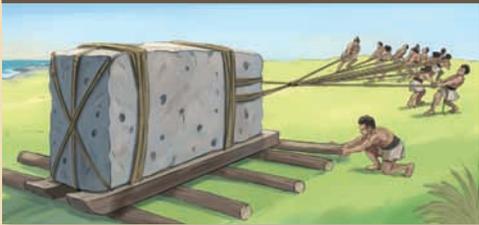
Talaiha'atama
(the king's son)

HOW DID THEY BUILD IT?

Tamale says the Ha'amonga was made like this:



People cut big blocks of stone from rocks on the coast.



Then hundreds of people dragged the stones to the building site using strong ropes.



They dug two huge holes for the side stones.



Once the side stones were in place, they used earth to make a ramp.



Then they dragged the lintel stone up the ramp and onto the side stones.



After that, they took away the earth ramp.

KING TAUFA'AHAU TUPOU IV'S IDEA

In 1967, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV suggested another reason why the Ha'amonga was built. He said that it was a kind of stone clock. There are V-shaped marks on top of the lintel stone. The king said that on the shortest and longest days of the year, when the sun rises, it shines through these marks.

If the Ha'amonga was a clock, it would have been very important to the Tongan people back then. They could have used it to keep track of the seasons. It would have helped them to work out the right time of the year to leave on their long ocean voyages. It would also have helped them to know when to plant and harvest their crops.

NOT THE ONLY ONE

The Ha'amonga is similar to ancient stone structures found in other parts of the world. Stonehenge, in England, is one well-known example.



Stonehenge, England

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HA'AMONGA TODAY

The Ha'amonga 'a Maui is very important to the people of Niutōua village. Every year, the children of Niutōua primary school dance a special dance around the stones.

The United Nations is thinking about adding the Ha'amonga to its list of **World Heritage sites**. This makes it important to all of Tonga – and to the whole world as well.



GLOSSARY

kalia: ocean-going canoes

lintel: a piece of timber, stone, concrete, or steel that goes across the top of a door or window frame to make it stronger

oral history: spoken history passed down from generation to generation (people told their children what happened, those children told their children, and so on)

structure: something that is built from several parts

World Heritage site: a place that the United Nations thinks should be protected because it's so important



The Mysterious Stones of Tonga

by 'Ana Maui Taufe'ulungaki

Text copyright © Ministry of Education and Training, Tonga 2017

The images on the following pages are copyright © Crown 2017:

2–6 (illustrations) by Scott Pearson

3–9 (background pattern) by Adam Pryor

The image on page 7 by www.twin-loc.fr from goo.gl/jwq55k is used under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY 2.0).

The photographs on the following pages are used with permission:

2 (top) copyright © Adam Pryor

8 copyright © 'Isikeli Oko

9 by Adam Pryor copyright © Ministry of Education and Training, Tonga

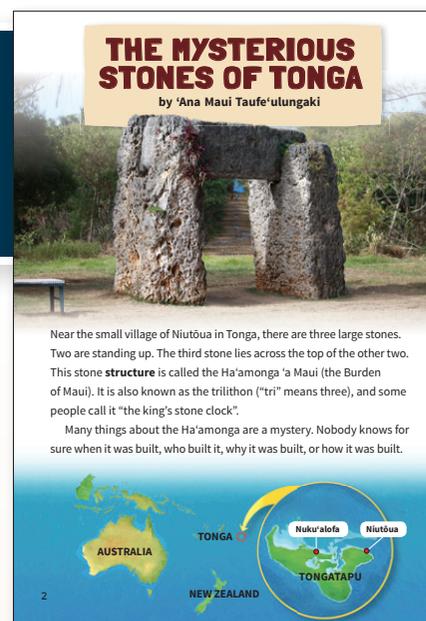
For copyright information about how you can use this material, go to:
<http://www.tki.org.nz/Copyright-in-Schools/Terms-of-use>

Published 2017 by the Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz

All rights reserved.
Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 1 77669 052 7 (online)

Publishing Services: Lift Education E Tū
Editor: David Chadwick
Designer: Adam Pryor
Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 2 AUGUST 2017

Curriculum learning areas

English
Social Sciences
Technology

Reading year level

Year 4

Keywords

ancient monuments, Burden of Maui, Ha'amonga a Maui, history, king's stone clock, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, King Tu'itātui, Lapita, Maui, mystery, Niutoua, oral history, Pasifika history, standing stones, stone monuments, technology, Tonga, World Heritage Site