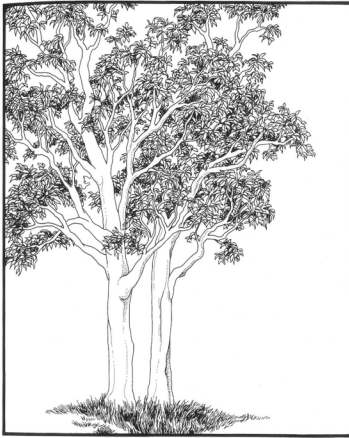


The Sandalwood Trade

For many years western trading ships had stopped in Hawaii to restock supplies, hire sailors, and spend the winter months to avoid storms. Hawaii's location between the China and America made it a good stopping place.

From the 1780s until the early 1800s foreign traders carried furs from the Native American Indians of the Pacific Northwest to China. The valuable furs came from fur seals and sea otters. As it became harder to get those furs the traders began to search for other items their Chinese customers might want. In Hawaii they found great forests of prized 'iliahi, or sandalwood. "Iliahi ranges from shrubs to large trees and is endemic, or found only in Hawaii. 'Iliahi was similar to a fragrant wood that Chinese artisans had long imported from India.



'Iliahi, or Sandalwood (Santalum spp.)

Hawaiians had for many years used small amounts of 'iliahi to make pieces for their 'ukeke, a Hawaiian stringed musical instrument. From the heartwood of the 'iliahi Hawaiians also used small chips of wood to keep their kapa smelling fragrant.

Chinese merchants were eager to buy 'iliahi. Many Chinese enjoyed the smell of the wood. They had long used a similar sweet-smelling wood for temple carvings, in funerals and in incense sticks. They found the Hawaiian 'iliahi even more fragrant than the wood they had previously used. They preferred 'ililahi wood and used its oil in cosmetics, medicines, and perfumes. Chinese merchants wanted as much 'ililahi as they could buy.

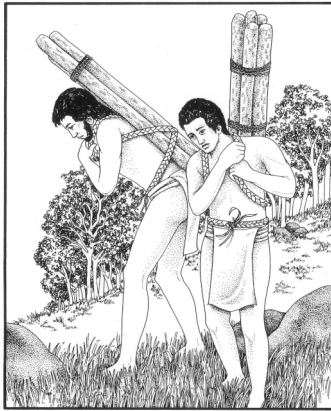
During Kamehameha I's reign, all lands, and with this all 'iliahi, in Hawaii were under his control. This meant he held a monopoly, or complete control, on the 'iliahi supply. He placed a kapu on the trees and forbid the cutting of young trees. This assured a steady supply of 'iliahi for years to come.

Kamehameha gave his chiefs power to collect limited amounts of wood for him. He promised they could keep a small amount of the wood they collected to exchange with foreign traders for things they wanted. Kamehameha then exchanged the rest of the 'iliahi for guns, ships, and other goods.

The chiefs saw some of the goods Kamehameha I received and they, too, wanted these things. After Kamehameha died, they took their requests to Liholiho, Kamehameha II.

In exchange for supporting him as king, the chiefs asked Liholiho if they could keep all the 'iliahi they gathered and trade it themselves. Liholiho gave them his permission. By doing this he gave up royal ownership and control of the 'iliahi.

The chiefs saw that the more 'iliahi they harvested or gathered, the more foreign goods they could get for themselves in trade. So they sent their maka'ainana to harvest large amounts of 'iliahi from the nearby forests.



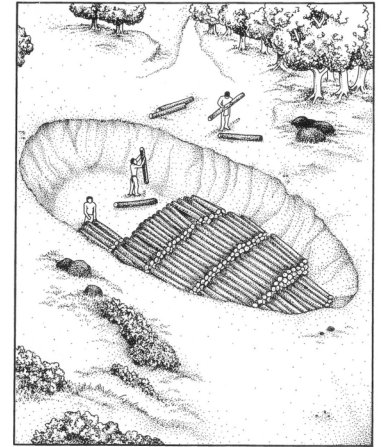
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Maka'ainana hauling 'iliahi logs to the measuring pits

The Chiefs had their workers cut down the trees, trim them into six-to-eight foot logs, and chip or peel off the outer bark with adzes. Men and women then used carriers braided from the leaves of the ki, or ti, plant to haul these logs to the measuring pits which other maka'ainana had dug.

The storage pits had been dug as long as wide and as deep as the body of a ship. The pits measured the amount of 'iliahi needed for a trade. A full pit equaled one shipload. The Chinese purchased

the 'iliahi by the picul, a unit of weight equal to about 133 pounds or 60 kilograms.

By the 1820s trade in 'iliahi began dying out because few trees were left near the villages. Unlike Kamehameha I, the chiefs had not saved the young trees to provide a future supply. But still there was a demand for the wood.



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A full storage pit measured one shipload of 'iliahi

The chiefs sent the mak'ainana far into the mountains to find new supplies of trees. No one was left at home to grow food or to catch fish. Now when people returned to their homes from the cutting 'iliahi there was nothing to eat. Many Hawaiians died of starvation or of illnesses caused by the lack of food.

Kamehameha I had kept a kapu on cutting 'iliahi. But, under Liholiho, in 1819 the controls on harvesting were ended. In their rush to collect wood the chiefs ordered even young trees to be cut down. Soon there was little 'iliahi worth gathering in Hawaii. As the supply dwindled the trading of 'iliahi came to an end.