**Ahupua`a**

The concept of private property was unknown to ancient Hawaiians, but they did follow a complex system of land division. All land was controlled ultimately by the highest chief or king who held it in trust for the whole population. Who supervised these lands was designated by the king based on rank and standing. A whole island, or mokupuni, was divided in smaller parts, down to a basic unit belonging to a single family.

Each mokupuni was divided into several moku, the largest units within each island, usually wedge-shaped and running from the mountain crest to shore. O`ahu was divided into six moku.

Each moku was divided into ahupua`a, narrower wedge-shaped land sections that again ran from the mountains to the sea. The size of the ahupua`a depended on the resources of the area with poorer agricultural regions split into larger ahupua`a to compensate for the relative lack of natural abundance. Each ahupua`a was ruled by an ali`i or local chief and administered by a konohiki.

Within the ahupua`a, `ili were smaller divisions (two or three per ahupua`a) that constituted the estate of the chief. Each `ili could be formed of noncontiguous pieces called lele, or jumps. Mo`o were sections of the `ili that were arable; usually these agricultural units did not extend to the sea. Smaller yet were the kuleana, or land tracts used by the common people for cultivation of crops. The size of kuleana, like the size of ahupua`a, depended on the natural fertility and abundance of the land.

The ancient ahupua`a, the basic self-sustaining unit, extended elements of Hawaiian spirituality into the natural landscape. Amidst a belief system that emphasized the interrelationship of elements and beings, the ahupua`a contained those interrelationships in the activities of daily and seasonal life.

Shaped by island geography, each ahupua`a was a wedge-shaped area of land running from the uplands to the sea, following the natural boundaries of the watershed. Each ahupua`a contained the resources the human community needed, from fish and salt, to fertile land for farming taro or sweet potato, to koa and other trees growing in upslope areas. Villagers from the coast traded fish for other foods or for wood to build canoes and houses. Specialized knowledge and resources peculiar to a small area were also shared among ahupua`a.

Although there was no private ownership of property, land tenure of the maka`ainana (commoners) was stable. They paid weekly labor taxes and annual taxes to the konohiki, or local overseer, who collected goods to support the chief and his court. The konohiki supervised communal labor within the ahupua`a and also regulated land, water and ocean use.

Stewardship of the land and its resources was formalized through the kapu system. The kapu (taboo) - administered and enforced by konohiki and kahuna, or priests - placed restrictions on fishing certain species during specific seasons, on gathering and replacing certain plants, and on many aspects of social interaction as well. In this way, the community maintained a sustainable lifestyle. Through sharing resources and constantly working within the rhythms of their natural environment, Hawaiians enjoyed abundance and a quality lifestyle with leisure time for recreation during the harvest season of the year. This lifestyle also encouraged a high level of artistic achievement. Many crafts, including Hawaiian kapa and featherwork, were the finest in the Pacific. Hawaiians devoted themselves to competitive sport and martial arts as well as expression through dance and chant, creating rich traditions that continue today.