

Ha'amonga 'a Maui

On land | Tonga | about 1200 CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____

Date _____

Tonga's giant stone gateway may be a calendar, marking where the sun rises on the longest and shortest days.

Read the story

Around 1200 CE, the Tu'i Tonga, Tonga's sacred kings, ruled a large ocean empire. The 11th Tu'i Tonga, Tu'itatui, built Ha'amonga 'a Maui, which means the Burden of Maui.

The gateway is made of three blocks of coral limestone. Each upright is about 5 meters tall, and the top beam rests in notches cut into them. Each stone weighs around 30 to 40 tonnes.

Its name comes from a legend that the demigod Maui carried the stones here on a pole over his shoulder. In 1967, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV suggested that a carving on the top beam marks the direction of sunrise on the solstices, so it may have worked like a calendar.

How it ended

Over time, the royal center of the Tu'i Tonga moved to Lapaha, and the gateway was no longer the center of power. But it still stands where it was built, after more than 800 years.

Key words

- trilithon: a structure of two upright stones with a third laid across the top
- demigod: a being in myths who is part god and part human
- solstice: the longest or shortest day of the year

Wow facts

- Each stone weighs around 30 to 40 tonnes.
- A legend says the demigod Maui carried the stones on his shoulder.
- A carved mark on the top beam may point to the sunrise on the solstices.

Talk about it

1. How could a stone gateway help people keep track of the seasons?

2. Why do you think legends grow up around very big monuments?

Try this

Draw a map of Ha'amonga 'a Maui as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. In which country is Ha'amonga 'a Maui?

- A. Tonga
- B. Mexico
- C. Ireland
- D. Egypt

2. What does the legend say?

- A. Maui carried the stones on his shoulder
- B. A dragon built it
- C. It fell from the sky
- D. It grew from the ground

3. What might the gateway mark?

- A. Sunrise on the solstices
- B. The best fishing spots
- C. Where gold is hidden
- D. Volcano eruptions

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/haamonga-a-maui/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. It is on Tongatapu, Tonga's main island.
2. A. The name means the Burden of Maui.
3. A. A carving may point toward solstice sunrise.