

All high crimes have usually been punished with death. This was, however, previous to 1824. The executions were more like assassinations than judicial punishments. Formerly among a chief's retinue were executioners, called ili-muku, to whom the business of punishing capitally was committed. These persons became well known to the people, and as no trials or any sentences were promulgated, even to see these men abroad created general consternation, as the people knew not where the blow was to fall, and all those who were conscious of having committed any offence against the king considered themselves in great peril. The victims were usually attacked in the night, without giving them any warning, with clubs and stones. Such was the fear entertained of the king's authority, that even if the executioners were discovered, the nearest friends did not dare to give warning, or assist in resisting them.

Those who had violated the religious taboos were seized, either secretly or open, by the officers of the priests, and carried to the temple, where they were stoned, strangled, or beaten to death with clubs, and then laid on the altar to putrefy. These constituted the great majority of executions in former times; some indeed, were by order of the chiefs, and in conformity to their rules of avenging private wrongs.

A high chief, Kanihouni, was sentenced by Kamehameha to be put to death. As he was possessed of great power and influence, many precautions were taken to quell any rebellion that might arise from the attempt. He was executed in the following manner. The king caused a number of soldiers to be armed, who were concealed in a neighbouring house; he then sent a silver coin to Pitt (Kalanimoku), who, having heard of the crime committed by Kanihouni, immediately understood the secret signal. He at once repaired to the king's house, where he received his orders, and several of the high chiefs were also ordered to aid him in the execution.

Kamehameha I. was greatly importuned to grant a pardon to Kanihouni, for all the higher chiefs were his relations; but he was inexorable, and finally threatened them, if his orders were not carried into effect, he would cause some of them to be substituted instead of the criminal.

The chiefs, finding that entreaty was in vain, went openly to the house of Kanihouni, and put him to death in a very unusual manner. A rope being put around his neck, and the ends of it being passed through the opposite sides of the house, they took hold of them and strangled him.

After the introduction of edged tools, and especially axes, beheading