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– ARTICLE –

# Hinterlands and Mobile Courts of the Hawai'i Island State

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ABSTRACT:

The eighteenth century Hawai'i Island state included more than 400 local communities divided among six districts, each with a resident elite. The king's mobile court of as many as a thousand people frequently moved from one highly productive district core to another. The 'capital' was wherever the king resided and in a sense hinterlands were anywhere the court was not. Hinterland residents included both commoners who provided nearly all the kingdom's productive work and low-ranked government officials with whom they negotiated the payment of taxes and double title to their lands, combining inheritance from parents and grants by resident officials. Ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence indicates that the worship of deified ancestors (*'aumākua*) in informal personal and family ceremonies, rather than the formal worship of the state gods, was the predominant form of religious observance among commoners, including those living in poorly producing 'extreme hinterlands' where governmental influence was attenuated.

## INTRODUCTION

During the late eighteenth century, the Hawai'i Island state, ruled by a succession of kings (*ali'i nui*), encompassed six districts with more than 400 named, local land divisions. Each of these units, known by its residents as their 'āina or home community, was also viewed by the governing chiefs as an *ahupua'a* or taxation unit (Sahlins 1992: 19–20). The royal court consisted of as many as a thousand people, including the king, his family, royal advisors, priests, genealogists, chiefs at various levels of the bureaucracy, messengers, and warriors, as well as craftworkers skilled at making canoes, temple images, feather cloaks, and prestige goods (Hommon 2013: 28).

The royal court was highly mobile in two significant ways. First, the 'capital,' was not in a single location but rather wherever the king resided at the time, usually in a 'royal centre' situated in the salubrious core of one district or another with ready access to highly productive fields and fisheries (Cordy 2000: 58; Hommon 1986: 67; 2013: 238–239; Kirch 2010: 165–171). These core regions were often the homelands of prominent chiefly families such the Mahi of leeward Kohala district or the 'Ī of windward Hilo district (Fornander 1969: 2). Among the reasons for a king's decision to move his court might be to distribute the burden of staple provisioning among the districts or to monitor the activities of a district chief whose loyalty was in doubt. ('Ī'ī 1959: 6; Kamakau 1992: 178, 203; Stokes 1991: 60, 70). In one three-year period (1779–1782) King Kalani'ōpu'u is said to have ruled from a succession of five districts as he moved his court from Kona to Kohala, then to Hāmākua, to Hilo, and finally to Ka'ū, from which he sent warriors into Puna, the sixth district, to capture a chief who had rebelled against his rule. (Fornander 1969: 200–201).

*Ali'i*, members of the chiefly class, constituting perhaps one to two percent of the population, occupied all the positions of centralised political power, military command, and ritual authority in the kingdom. The offices in the governmental bureaucracy roughly paralleled ascriptive ranking so that the office of king was occupied by a chief of high ascribed rank, chiefs of districts were usually of lesser ranks, and community chiefs (*ali'i 'ai ahupua'a*) tended to be of relatively low rank. As possessors of *mana*, which 'manifests the power of the gods in the human world,' members of the chiefly class were *kapu*, in a 'state of contact with the divine', compared to commoners who were *noa* or separated from the divine (Shore 1989: 164). According to Valeri (1985: 90) *kapu* was a relative state in that a low ranked chief was *noa* compared with a higher ranked chief and *kapu* to commoners.

The commoner (*maka'āinana*) class, the great majority of the population, provided nearly all labour, resource management, and production of necessities and wealth goods (Hommon 2013: 11). It seems likely as well that the common people, by applying their daily experience, were largely responsible for developing innovative technology such as the lithic mulching technique evident in the *kuaiwi*, the long low mounds of the Kona Field System (Major and Allen 2001: 96–97), the cowrie shell squid lure (*leho he'e*) (Kamakau 1976: 67–69), the numerous artificial fishponds (Kikuchi 1976: 295), and floodwater-irrigated colluvial agriculture (Hommon 1969; 2013: 75–77; Kurashima and Kirch 2011).

Unlike the court, which traditionally occupied royal centers in the various district's core regions, the common

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class of the kingdom lived wherever they could make a living, ranging from the highly productive, densely populated cores to the most distant hinterland regions. The following sections present two views of the relationship between the royal court and its hinterlands. The first describes double land title and the negotiation between the court and hinterland communities during the yearly collection of taxes. The second focuses on the tenuous connection between the classes and between the central government and the least productive, most distant and sparsely populated hinterlands along the inter-district boundaries.

## MAKAHIKI TAX COLLECTION AND DOUBLE LAND TITLE

In English, 'hinterland' refers to a place that is remote or far from a coast, city, or centre of population. According to the 1865 edition of *A Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language* (Andrews 2003: 294), the word *kua'āina*, derived from *kua* (referring to either 'the back of a person or an animal…' or 'the top of a ridge or high land') is similarly defined as 'the back country; up the mountain, where there are no chiefs; the country in distinction from a village or city' and 'the inhabitants or people of the back country.' Though this definition, written nearly 90 years after first contact with the non-Polynesian world, may have been influenced by Western culture, the concept of remoteness from dense populations, from possibly demanding or oppressive chiefs, and from the shore where chiefs spent most of their time, may accurately reflect its original use. The definition in Pukui and Elbert's current dictionary (1986: 168) preserves the notion of remoteness from dense population and chiefly control.

I suggest that the phrase 'where there were no chiefs' in Andrews' definition is significant. While the influence of the resident district chiefs was probably accepted as a constant in the lives of commoners, the sudden, perhaps unpredictable sojourns of the royal court with its demands on a district's resources may have exacerbated the friction between the ruling class and the people.

Broadly speaking, the hinterlands might be thought of as anywhere the royal court was not. I suggest, however, that what was considered *kua'āina* depended only partially on a simple measure such as a community's geographical distance or the length of travel time from a royal court, but rather more directly on the degree and frequency of influence that government officials were likely to exert there.

This brings us to the second aspect of the royal court's mobility: the collection of taxes, especially during Makahiki. Throughout the year the common people provided the chiefs with a continuous supply of staple foods such as taro and sweet potato (Sahlins 1992: 50–51). During the four-month-long Makahiki Festival each year the king presided over two additional collections. In the first of these the people paid *'auhau* (in-kind taxes) in the form of dogs and chickens as well as *waiwai* (wealth or prestige goods) such as loincloths, skirts, mats, fishing nets, and brightly-colored bird feathers used in the making of chiefs' capes, helmets and god images. The king held the collected goods in large storehouses for distribution among members of his court in proportion to their prominence and position in the political hierarchy ('Ī'ī 1959: 121; Kamakau 1964: 21; Malo 1951: 142–147, 195; Sahlins 1992: 50).

The second collection took place during a 23-day-long procession led by a chief representing Lono along the circum-island trail (*ala loa*; Malo 1951: 142–150), a traditional event that may have been viewed as an extended intrusion of the court into the hinterland. It would not have been feasible for a single group to conduct the tax collection ritual described by early 19th century Hawaiian scholar David Malo in each of the island's more than 400 *ahupua'a* in 23 days, so perhaps the procession was either limited to the district hosting the court at the time or was conducted simultaneously by mid-level chiefs in each district. In either case, the procession(s) would stop at each *ahupua'a* community along the way to ritually accept, on behalf of the god Lono, the *ho'okupu* (tribute or tax) that had been collected under the direction of the resident *ahupua'a* chief. The amount of *ho'okupu* offered was expected to be proportional to the size of the *ahupua'a*, probably measured in quantities of goods produced (Campbell 1967 [1822]: 110; Hommon 2013: 103–104; Kamakau 1992: 176; Malo 1951: 145). According to Malo (1951: 145–146; see also Sahlins 1992: 50), if the tax collectors ruled the offering inadequate, the *ahupua'a* chief was stripped of his position and the community was 'plundered' until the appropriate amount had been collected.

In principle, the yearly tax revenue required of an *ahupua'a* community was ultimately determined, following consultation with advisors, by the king, who might decide to increase the tax rate for reasons ranging from personal aggrandisement to complex political maneuvering in preparation for war (Hommon 2013: 104; Kamakau 1992: 105–106). However, to avoid the widespread disruption of an unexpected tax increase, a wise king would heed tradition as described in Malo's observation that '[i]t was proper for the *ali'i nui* to protect and care for his own *maka'ainana* because they were the full body of his chiefdom. There were many *ali'i* who were killed by the *maka'ainana* because they were oppressed' (1996: 266). Three of the eight assassinated chiefs Malo names were kings; the rest were district chiefs.

To avoid the necessity of discharging *ahupua'a* chiefs and plundering their communities, not to mention the killing of kings, tax collection seems to have benefitted from the application of what I have called the 'Makahiki accounting system.' Such a system would have been based on widely known information such as a community's size, its previous tax revenues, and its census of men available for public works and military duty (Hommon 2013: 32–33, 103–104; Kamakau 1976: 47–48). To reduce the risk of repression from above or rebellion from below, various par-

ticipants including *ahupua'a* residents, *ahupua'a* chiefs, tax collectors, and the king, may have applied such information to arrive at estimates of an *ahupua'a*'s tax liability that could be negotiated with the other parties.

I suggest that two of Marshall Sahlins' observations in *Anahulu: The Anthropology of History in the Kingdom of Hawaii* (Kirch 1992; Sahlins 1992), the study of Kawailoa and other *ahupua'a* of Waialua District, O'ahu, sheds light on the key role played in tax collection and other matters by common *ahupua'a* residents of the Hawai'i Island Kingdom's hinterland. First, Sahlins reports that documents pertaining to the early- to mid-19th century *Māhele* land reform show that

> [t]he common people who are native to an area hold their land by a double title: as successors of their parents or grandparents and by grant or consent of the headman. If in the first capacity they are *kama'āina*, children of the land, in the second capacity they are 'companions in [or of] the land,' *hoa'āina*, usually glossed as 'tenants' relative to the 'lord' (*haku'āina*). In the domestic realm people 'inherit' (*ho'oili*) by the dying breath of their familial predecessors. But as concerns the political dimension, they are 'given' (*hā'awi*) the land by the *ali'i* or *konohiki*. In short, the chief grants the land one inherits from one's ancestors (Sahlins 1992: 178).

Second, Sahlins finds documentary evidence that a chief of Kawailoa *ahupua'a* was sometimes aided by prominent commoners or 'big men' of the *'ili'āina* (neighbourhoods) of Kawailoa who took an active role in ensuring that the community fulfilled its tax obligation (Sahlins 1992: 208).

As we have seen, the lives of the Hawaiian chiefly and commoner classes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries differed significantly in work, social status, wealth, ritual practice, and political power. Yet despite the seeming gulf between the classes, in Sahlins' Waialua study we find evidence for not a simple superposition of an aristocratic stratum over a common one but rather complex socioeconomic interaction between chiefs and commoners in the community context. It appears that common residents and *ahupua'a* chiefs mutually recognised land tenure by double title and that they cooperated to negotiate, produce, and gather each community's equitable taxes. I suggest, in light of shared norms and histories of the Hawaii islands, that community chiefs and commoners interacted in similar ways in the hinterland communities of the Hawai'i Island State.

## *'AUMĀKUA* WORSHIP AND THE EXTREME HINTERLANDS

Hawaiian religious practice is here considered to have consisted of two ritual traditions, one based on the worship of the gods (*akua*), the other primarily on the worship of deified ancestors (*'aumākua*). *Akua* worship was managed by chiefs, and *'aumākua* worship by both chief and commoners.

In what follows I suggest that ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence supports the view that in a variety of ways *'aumākua* worship was far more influential in the lives of commoners than was *akua* worship. I further suggest that commoners' relationship with the *'aumākua* may have been bolstered by the attenuation of the royal court's influence with distance from the royal court, particularly in what are called here the extreme hinterland regions along the inter-district boundaries of the kingdom.

Both *akua* worship and *'aumākua* worship were based on the concepts of right (*pono*) and wrong (*hewa*) and the *kapu* system. Both forms of worship were performed in structures and locations designated for the purpose, and both required prayers and sacrifices. Though usually invisible and omnipresent, *'aumakua*, like *akua*, could appear in *kino lau* ('four hundred bodies'), many animal, vegetable, or mineral forms (Pukui *et al*. 1972: 36)

Professional priests (*kāhuna pule*) of the chiefly class, in behalf of the kingdom as a whole, managed *akua* worship, consisting of complex, sometimes days-long ceremonies in major temples (*heiau*) usually dedicated to two ancient gods, Kū and Lono (Valeri 1985: 109–111).

*'Aumākua* worship differed in significant ways from *akua* worship in that it consisted of relatively brief, simple ceremonies performed daily at a multitude of small structures in many locations widely distributed in virtually every community around the island on behalf of virtually every individual and family.

> [Kū, Lono, Kāne, and Kanaloa] were distant, awesome deities, concerned with the mighty forces of land and sea, storm and calm, light of day and dark of night. As major gods, their help was invoked for major causes and great events. For the needs and solaces of daily life, Hawaiians called on their own personal ancestor gods, the *'aumākua* (Pukui *et al*. 1972: 24).

> With one's '*aumakua*, a human-to-spirit communication was possible. One spoke to an *aumakua* through ritual and with reverence, but without the almost paralyzing awe of the *akuas* or impersonal gods sometimes inspired. Therefore, an *'aumakua* could also be a 'spiritual go between' passing prayers to the *akua* (Pukui *et al*. 1972: 35).

Unlike sanctions (including summary executions) for violations of *kapu* related to *akua* worship, which were meted out by human agents, rewards and punishments by *'aumākua* were manifested directly and personally in peoples' lives in forms such as

> 'when a shark *'aumakua* brought fish to their canoe, protected them by warning of potential danger, or saved them when they were in trouble. The *'aumakua* makes its warnings, reprimands and guidance known in dreams, visions, physical manifestations, or just the nagging feeling that something was wrong' (Pukui *et al*. 1972: 37–38).

Evidence of *'aumakua* worship in the archaeological record includes a variety of relatively small, simple structures interpreted as fishing shrines (*ko'a*) and other occupational shrines, altars, *Pohaku o Kāne* and a variety of stone uprights, or god-stones (*'eho*) standing alone or as elements of stone structures, as well as the most formal of these structures, men's houses (*hale mua* or *mua*).

> The *Mua* was the men's eating and lounging house, and their sanctuary. At one end was an altar (*kuahu*) dedicated to the family *'aumākua* whose effigies stood there. Here the head of the household prayed and performed necessary rites sometimes without, sometimes with the aid of a *kahuna pule* [professional priest], when came the time for the rites of the life cycle such as birth, cutting the foreskin, sickness and death. Here the family rites during the monthly days of *kapu* were performed. The common daily worship would seem to have consisted in offering a bit of food (*hanai'ai*) at the time of eating. (Handy and Pukui 1972: 95–96)

When a man developed expertise in, for example, fishing or fishhook making 'this was due only partly to individual training. The training was superimposed on the *mana* (special power or talent) each had received from his *'aumakua*.' (Pukui *et al*. 1972: 37)

The general term 'occupational shrine' applies to structures where skilled experts (*kāhuna*) worshiped *'aumākua* of their given profession. When an expert canoe maker found a tree suitable for making a hull, for example, he called upon six named *'aumākua* of canoe making and 'all the *'aumākua* of the mountains' before felling it (Kamakau 1976: 119).

The most commonly known of occupational shrines are fishing shrines, small stone structures in the form of cairns, platforms, or enclosures, usually with pieces of unworked coral on or incorporated in structural elements and often, one or more free-standing or incorporated 'uprights,' stones usually 30 to 60 cm in height that are or were intended to stand with their long axes vertical. Prayers were recited and offerings left by fishermen requesting and thanking family *'aumakua* or gods for a good catch. Along the shore of Kaho'olawe, a 116 km² whole island *ahupua'a*, were at least 69 structures identified as fishing shrines, suggesting that such shrines were built and used by individual resident fisherman (Hommon 1980).

McCoy and Nees (2014) have recorded 233 shrines with a total of 863 uprights in a 6,144 ha area of Mauna Kea's summit region above an altitude of 2,800 m. These range from single uprights to structures with as many as 27 uprights as well as pavements, mounds, and platforms. McCoy and Nees propose that those sites that contained possible offerings (consisting of lithic artefacts related to nearby adze manufacture) may have served as occupational shrines and suggest that those without such evidence may have been erected by visitors on pilgrimages to visit the gods and *'aumākua* who resided at the summit.

McCoy and Nees (2014: 31–32), summarizing several sources, suggest that stone uprights were not intended to be 'actual representations of the gods' (or, I suggest adding, the *'aumāukua*) but rather 'abodes' or 'places to inhabit' provided by worshippers. A well-known type of such an abode is a *Pohaku o Kāne*, or stone of the god Kāne, which

> was a place of refuge, a *pu'uhonoa*, for each family from generation to generation. It was not a *heiau*; it was a single stone monument (*he wahi'eoeo pohaku ho'okahi*), and a *kuahu* altar with ti and other greenery planted about. When trouble came upon a family for doing wrong against an *'aumakua* god, by being irreligious, or doing any of these defiling things, the cause for this trouble was shown to them by dreams, or visions, or through other signs sent by the god. It was pointed out to them what sacrifices to offer, and what gifts to present, to show their repentance for the wrong committed by the family. They were to go to the *Pohaku o Kāne*, their *pu'uhonua*, where they were to make offerings to atone for their wrongdoing (*mohai hala*) and to pacify the god (*mohai ho'olu'olu*). (Kamakau 1964: 32).

In short, it is clear that *'aumakua* ritual was the predominant form of religious observance among commoners. In contrast with the relatively rare instances of *akua* worship that commoners might witness, daily *'aumakua* worship was a constant throughout their personal, family, and professional lives.

Evidence of the remarkable persistence of *'aumakua* worship in the everyday lives of commoners is exemplified in the childhood of Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui (1895–1986), author and co-author of numerous key sources on Hawaiian culture. Some 80 years after the abolition of the formal *kapu* system, including the official worship of the gods, she was educated in traditional Hawaiian practices and beliefs by her maternal grandmother in Ka'ū District (Pukui *et al*. 1972: viii). That *'aumakua* worship persisted in Ka'ū into the 20th century is demonstrated by the fact that Pukui 'memorized names of all her family *'aumākua* as part of her childhood education. She learned a total of 50 names' (Pukui *et al*. 1972: 36).

Hawai'i Island's inter-district boundary regions, the most distant hinterlands from the districts' royal centers,

tended to have limited agricultural potential. As I have suggested elsewhere, the resulting sparsely distributed populations in these regions appear to have required extensive land bases to support viable local communities, resulting in unusually large *ahupua'a* (Hommon 1986: 65).

In 1907 John F. G. Stokes conducted a survey of Hawai'i Island's 187 known *heiau*, the locations and most of the names of which had been preserved in the memories of local residents and other sources. The maps in the published version of Stokes's survey, edited by Tom Dye, show *heiau* distributed relatively densely throughout much of the central, agriculturally productive regions of each of the six districts (Stokes 1991: 40, 114, 137, 155, 160, 165).

This pattern is consistent with the observation that the primary physical expression of the worship of the *akua* and the application of political power and influence by governing chiefs was the construction and use of *heiau*. In contrast to high *heiau* densities in the district cores, Stokes's survey documents few if any *heiau* in most of the *ahupua'a* in the six inter-district border regions. I suggest that these regions were the kingdom's 'extreme hinterlands' not only in the sense that they were most distant from the royal centres in the district cores, but also, because their paucity of *heiau* indicates a relative lack of interest, activity, or influence in these regions on the part of kings and district chiefs.

An example of these extreme hinterlands is the borderland between the Kona and Ka'ū districts that includes eight contiguous *ahupua'a* in southernmost Kona and two in southwestern Ka'ū, together forming a region with about 48 km of coastline, about 11 percent of that of the whole island. In this region, Stokes (1991: 112–113) recorded four *heiau*.

One of these, Kalāwahine *Heiau* in Kapu'a Ahupua'a, Kona, which he did not see, was reportedly 'built by Kalāwahine, a *kahuna*.' The other three were in Ka'ū. At Kaupoku *Heiau* in Manukā 'magical bananas' reportedly grew. Halepōhāhā Heiau in Kahuku *Ahupua'a*. was '[s]aid to have been used for human sacrifices and to have been built by 'Umi.' ('Umi-a-Līloa was a renowned ruling chief of the early seventeenth century.) About Malina *Heiau*, also in Kahuku, Stokes reports no information other than its location.

Unlike most core region *heiau*, whose locations tend to evidence chiefly interest and activities near the shore where most of the people lived and worked, the three *heiau* listed above whose location is known are located between 5 and 15 km from the shore. Whatever their functions it seems that influencing the coastal residents was not one of them, though wars may have drawn kings to make use of 'Umi's *heiau* from time to time.

The *ahupua'a* southeast of the Ka'ū-Kona border is Manukā, much of which, according to Allen and McAnanay (1994: 24), who surveyed it in 1977, 'is covered with rugged *a'ā* lava flows that are inhospitable to habitation and archaeologists.' With an area of 98 square kilometers, it is nearly ten times as large with a coastline 15 times as long as an average Hawai'i Island *ahupua'a* (Hommon 2013: 12, Table 1.1). Among the sites mapped recently in Manukā by McCoy and Codlin (2016), of interest here are structures that appear to represent the two forms of Hawaiian ritual practice. They interpret one pair of enclosures as *heiau*. Measuring 413 and 152 sq. m., respectively, they are within the roughly 100–400 sq. m. range of structures found elsewhere in Hawai'i that are thought to have been *heiau* for *'ili'aina* neighborhoods (Hommon 2013: 90). The Manukā structures' location on the Kona-Ka'ū boundary, however, suggests that they may have served as the sole venue in the *ahupua'a*, and perhaps the entire region, for regularly scheduled, *ali'i*-sponsored *akua* worship, in the form of Makahiki tax collection (McCoy and Codlin 2016: 415)

In contrast to the apparent paucity of evidence for *akua* worship, suggesting attenuated *ali'i* influence in Manukā and the Kona-Ka'ū boundary region, McCoy and Codlin's research tends to support the persistence of *'aumākua* worship among presumed common residents of the *ahupua'a* in this extreme hinterland far from any royal centre. They report evidence, including upright stones, unworked coral, and middenin structures that they interpret to be *hale mua* in four out of five household clusters (2016: 424, 427).

## SUMMARY

I have explored two facets of the relationship between the 18th century Hawai'i Island royal court and the commoners in the hinterlands who provided the court with food, wealth, labour, craft production, and the management of resources. In the first section I have suggested that these services were negotiated among community residents, community chiefs, the king, and other governmental officials, particularly with regard to equitable tax collection, the central element of the 'Makahiki accounting system.' I have further suggested that this process of cooperatively calculating tax liability, together with the mutual recognition by commoners and chiefs of a double land title, tended to reduce the likelihood of conflict between the people and the government. In both respects, the hinterlands seem to have served as the venue for negotiations that served the interests of both commoners and chiefs.

In the second section I have made two related observations based on ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence. First I have suggested that the predominant form of religious observance among commoners was the daily worship of deified ancestors (*'aumākua*) by individuals and families rather than the worship of the ancient gods (*akua*) performed for the kingdom by professional priests and other members of the chiefly elite. Second, I have suggested that sparsely populated communities in relatively unproductive communities in the six inter-district boundary regions were examples of 'extreme hinterlands' where government activities and influence were attenuated and *'aumakua* worship thrived.

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