

*Malamalama kā lā nui a Kane puka i Ha'ehā'e  
Apakan ke kukuna i ka 'ili kai o nā kai 'ewalu  
He ike makawalu ka'u e 'ano'i nei,*

## *Introduction*

*'O nā au walu o Kanaloa Haunawela noho i ka moana nui  
He Hu'akai ka makani o Lehua 'au i ke kai  
Kū'ono'ono kā lua o Kūhaimoana i ke kapa 'ehukai o Ka'ula  
'O Kū i ka loulou, ulu a'e ke aloha no Nihou moku manu  
Manu o kū i ka 'āhui, he alaka'i na ka lāhui  
'O Hinapūko'a  
'O Hinapūhalako'a  
'O Hina kupukupu  
'O Hinaikamalama*

*Hua kā 'ohua, lu'u ke koholā  
Aloha kahi lima kala, kia'i 'ia e ka 'ākala noho i uka  
Hanau ka pe'a, paka ka pe'ape'a i ke kai  
He 'ina'i ka 'ina, 'ono i ka huna o ka pa'akai  
Manomano ka ike lē'u o ka houpo o Kanaloa  
Kei i lā'au'au na 'āhāhā, 'o kū'u hūni ia  
Hanohano wāle ka 'āina kūpuna, 'o nā moku lē'ia  
No Papahānaumokuākea lā he inoa*

*- Na Kainani Kahauna'ele a me Halealoha*

*Native Hawaiian Culture and Papahānaumokuākea*

## Native Hawaiian Culture and Papahānaumokuākea

**“You only know where you are on the ocean by memorizing where you came from.”**

– **Nainoa Thompson**, Master Hawaiian Navigator

### Sailing to Papahānaumokuākea

The vast seascapes and tiny islands of Papahānaumokuākea, found uninhabited or abandoned at the time of Western contact in the 18th century, represent the outer limits of the story of Pacific voyaging and settlement—an epic migration that began more than 6,000 years ago, when groups of seafarers left the islands of Southeast Asia and voyaged east into the Pacific Ocean. By 1200 BC, their descendents had reached the islands of Tonga and Sāmoa in the mid-Pacific, now known as western Polynesia. Navigating using only natural signs and knowledge as they journeyed across vast expanses of open ocean, over the next two millennia these Pacific voyagers would explore and populate a 10-million-square-mile area of the Pacific bounded by the points of the Polynesian Triangle: Hawai‘i in the north, tiny Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the South, and the islands of Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the southwest. It was one of the greatest human migrations ever undertaken. Polynesia (“many islands”) now comprises an area strongly related in culture, in landscapes and in seascapes,

yet abounding in distinct cultural heritages uniquely adapted to the environment of each place.

Polynesian voyagers arrived in the isolated Hawaiian Archipelago around 300 AD. They found islands with fertile soils, abundant water, and reefs rich with marine life. In relative isolation from their ancestral origins, the Native Hawaiian culture evolved into a culture finely attuned to its immediate and unique natural surroundings. They created agricultural terraces along the hillsides; extensive water paddies for their staple food, *kalo* (taro), in the valleys; fishponds over the shallow reefs; and sustainable nearshore and pelagic fisheries management.

Where resources and land are obviously limited, as on an island, highly skilled resource management often evolves out of necessity. Native Hawaiians developed complex resource management systems and specialized skill sets to ensure that the fertile soils and rich reef and pelagic environments they found could be sustained for future generations. Traditional, sustainable practices, such as the Hawaiian system of *ahupua‘a* (land divisions inclusive of the deep sea through mountain peaks), utilized seasonal patterns in weather and their effects on species abundance and distribution, ecological zonation, and land-sea connectivity to manage resources effectively. The foundation of this culture was a nuanced awareness of, and responsive intimacy with, the patterns and processes of their specific natural environment.

Native Hawaiians explored and settled the archipelago, inhabiting the main Hawaiian Islands and venturing into the region to the northwest, now known as Papahānaumokuākea. This chain of far-flung islands and atolls, and the waters surrounding them, continue to be respected as a sacred zone, a place containing the boundary between Ao, the world of light and





the living, and Pō, the world of the gods and spirits, of primordial darkness, from which all life comes and to which it returns after death.

Papahānaumokuākea is as much a spiritual as a physical geography, rooted deep in Native Hawaiian creation and settlement stories. Many oral traditions say that Native Hawaiians are genealogically related not only to the living creatures that make up the land and ocean ecosystems, but to the islands and atolls themselves. In relatively recent times, the islands of Papahānaumokuākea have become known as the Kūpuna (Revered Elders or Ancestors) Islands, in part because they are geologically older than the main Hawaiian Islands, and because, according to Hawaiian oral tradition, these islands themselves are ancestors to Native Hawaiians. Thus, Hawaiians not only look to their Kūpuna

Islands for *‘ike* (knowledge), but they also have a deeply embedded *kuleana* (privilege and responsibility) to care for their *kūpuna*. Each island is a teacher; each island has its own, unique message to impart.

### Where Nature and Culture Are One

The most famous Hawaiian creation chant, the Kumulipo, tells of the birth of the world from the darkness of Pō, beginning with the simplest known form of life, the coral polyp, and progressing to the more complex forms (see Appendix B for more text from the Kumulipo). As time passes, life begins to be created in sibling pairs, a land creature or plant for every sea creature or plant. These twins almost always share similar names; they are often also linked in real-life cycles, with one blooming on land as the other becomes fertile or abundant in the sea.

O ke au i kāhuli wela ka honua  
 O ke au i kahuli lole ka lani  
 O ke au i Kūka‘iaka ka lā  
 E ho‘omālamalama i ka mālama  
 O ke au o Makali‘i ka pō  
 O ka walewale ho‘okumu honua ‘ia  
 O ke kumu o ka lipo, i lipo ai  
 O ke kumu o ka Pō, i pō ai  
 O ka lipolipo, o ka lipolipo  
 O ka lipo o ka lā, o ka lipo o ka pō  
 Pō wale ho-‘i  
 Hānau ka pō

At the time when the earth became hot  
 At the time when the heavens turned about  
 At the time when the sun was darkened  
 To cause the moon to shine  
 The time of the rise of the Pleiades  
 The slime, this was the source of the earth  
 The source of the darkness that made darkness  
 The source of the Pō that made night  
 The intense darkness, the deep darkness  
 Darkness of the sun, darkness of the night  
 Nothing but night  
 The night gave birth

– From the beginning of the Kumulipo: A Hawaiian Creation Chant

Hānau ka Manauea noho i kai  
 Kia‘i ‘ia e ke Kalo-manauea noho i uka  
 He pō uhe‘e i ka wāwā...  
 Hānau ka Puakī noho i kai  
 Kia‘i ‘ia e ke Lauaki noho i uka  
 He pō uhe‘e i ka wāwā...

Born was the *Manauea* moss living in the sea  
 Guarded by the *Manauea* taro plant living on land  
 Darkness slips into light...  
 Born was the *Puakī* seaweed living in the sea  
 Guarded by the ‘*Aki* ‘*aki* rush living on land  
 Darkness slips into light



Polynesian origins and distinctive adaptations to the archipelago; it is also a last remaining “place of abundance” for oceanic apex predators and migratory birds, where a uniquely Hawaiian natural world continues in its entirety.

Biologists speak of Papahānaumokuākea’s ecosystem, dominated by apex predators, as a rare benchmark for an intact marine system. Native Hawaiians experience this as a natural environment

The intense observation of the complex kinship of all things in the natural world, on which Hawaiians depend for their physical sustenance and voyaging prowess, is also coded into the Hawaiian creation story. The strong interweaving of these natural elements are the roots of the Hawaiian culture, language and spiritual understanding.

that hews to ancestral behaviors, rhythms, and proportions, where the ecological and spiritual links have not been frayed or broken. Native Hawaiians who have been to Papahānaumokuākea note that *uluu*, or hunting jackfish, behave more boldly in Papahānaumokuākea than they do in the main Hawaiian Islands. Along with sharks, they own the waters. They attack birds sitting on – and flying immediately above – the water, and will look swimmers directly in the eye in the form of a challenge to one’s ability in, and responsibility to, those waters.

Papahānaumokuākea is an expansive Hawaiian natural and cultural seascape, encompassing both land and sea, in which these relationships are vibrant and largely unfettered by human development. It is an immense associative cultural seascape – a Hawaiian place where man is, as in the Kumulipo, the little brother of the land and sea. And it is a place where Hawaiians can go to immerse themselves in this foundational understanding, ensuring the continuity of the generational bond and commitment to this sacred place.

These and other natural encounters can often be considered *hō’ailona*, natural signs communicated by ancestors and gods who manifest themselves in nature. These signs occur most clearly in a place like Papahānaumokuākea, where nature has not been subjugated. Atmospheric activities, too, such as rainbows, rain, wind and cloud formations, can express either godly or ancestral approval of proposed actions in this sacred place or provide warning. (When a group of Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners voyaged from Kaua’i in the main Hawaiian Islands to Mokumanamana—an island of paramount spiritual importance—in Papahānaumokuākea for the summer solstice in 2007, they reported having seen clouds in very unusual formations: “They appear

Today, Papahānaumokuākea’s pristine habitats are valued in part because they are a baseline for what a marine environment would look like without human exploitation. For Native Hawaiians, Papahānaumokuākea is a baseline for the culture. Nihoa and Mokumanamana, the two islands closest to the main Hawaiian Islands, possess intact archaeological sites that illuminate shared



almost human in form and resemble people walking toward the Northwest. These cloud formations are all signs that help the expedition members prepare mentally, physically and spiritually for the journey. (Tsuha 2007).

Today, we praise Papahānaumokuākea's high rates of marine endemism in a world where ecological diversity is imperiled. For Native Hawaiians, each endemic species occupies an induplicable place in the spiritual as well as physical universe. It is not only a member of the family of nature, but a path to meaning and understanding. When a species is lost, that understanding is lost forever.

Native Hawaiian resource management, which relies heavily on the interconnectedness of land and sea (and is reflected in spiritual and artistic works such as the Kumulipo) informs the current management of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Across the globe, very few natural sites, however well protected, blend the management of terrestrial, marine, and cultural resources in this way. In an age that realizes that our planet is small and our resources finite, Native Hawaiian cultural knowledge, as seen through the current management of Papahānaumokuākea, can provide a fine example. The dualistic pairing of land and sea organisms in the Kumulipo maintains "the theme of survival, urgency for life and preservation of the species with procreation and evolution as the sinew.... The dichotomy of land-ocean pairing strengthened the notation for procreation and survival of the species" (Kanahele, 1997).

The Native Hawaiian relationship to Papahānaumokuākea has evolved along with the living Hawaiian culture, but Papahānaumokuākea continues to be considered a sacred region, and its people have maintained a vital connection with it. William Ailā, a member of the Papahānaumokuākea Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group, says, "Access to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands allows

Hawaiians to make connections with the land, the ocean, the fish, the sharks, the monk seals – and the spirits and our ancestors that are still there. The Monument region is not strictly a scientific laboratory; it's a place that has its own life force."

### Navigating Into the Future

Ancient Polynesians navigated by the art of wayfinding, using natural observations often missed by modern sailors, such as the stars, ocean swells, clouds, sun, seabirds and reflections in the sky of distant, aquamarine waters in atolls. Today, after 600 years without traditional inter-archipelagic voyaging, there is a Pacific-wide resurgence of the ancient art and skill of wayfinding (non-instrument navigation), spurred by the journeys of *Hōkūleʻa*, an 18-meter, double-hulled sailing canoe built in Hawaiʻi to test the voyaging capabilities of such canoes and their navigators.

As in generations past, the contemporary apprentice Hawaiian wayfinder's first open-ocean training ground takes them from the main Hawaiian Islands into Papahānaumokuākea, the Kūpuna Islands. A Native Hawaiian saying, "*Nānā i ke kumu*," means "Look to the source." It contains a subtle double meaning: while *kumu* means source, it also means teacher. This saying offers insight into the important role that *kūpuna*, who are also teachers, play in traditional Hawaiian society. Hawaiians are exhorted to turn to their *kūpuna* for knowledge, and to in turn respect and care for those *kūpuna*, as we must all learn from Papahānaumokuākea and respect and care for this unique place.

Papahānaumokuākea is a truly mixed site, where not only nature and culture are one, but where two seemingly opposite ways of thinking—spiritual and scientific, indigenous and western—can learn to coexist, to find common cause, to witness and care for the earth, and to navigate into the future.



*Calf Cowry or leho*  
(Photo: Susan Middleton & David Liittschwager)