

The Significance of Heiau Diversity in Site Evaluations

Hawai'i archeologists and ethnohistorians of the late-19th and early-20th centuries relied on credible Native Hawaiian informants to identify and describe the functions of *heiau*, places of Native Hawaiian religious worship. Today, after over 200 years of westernization, such informants are not always available or acknowledged. Yet *heiau* remain highly valued among modern Hawaiians who strive to perpetuate Hawaiian spiritual values and practices.

Federal and Hawai'i state historic preservation laws authorize western-trained archeologists, rather than non-archeologically-trained Hawaiians, to determine the functions of sites and their significance, potentially distancing Hawaiians from their cultural sites. This includes assessments regarding whether or not an unrecorded site is a *heiau*. If archeologists assess a site to be *heiau*, they will often be asked to suggest a more specific site function. These archeological evaluations affect decisions regarding site preservation and the ability of Hawaiians to continue their religious practices. Yet, as important as such archeological decisions are, few agreed upon criterion, processes, and standards have been established within the discipline to make them.

What most archeologists do when evaluating whether a site is *heiau* is to compare the site in question to *heiau* with which they have become familiar—they apply an ethnographic analogy. If the site is similar to ones from the archeologist's

experience, then the site is generally deemed a *heiau*. If it is dissimilar, the site is usually rejected as being a *heiau*. The same process is typically followed to determine the specific religious function of a site thought to be a *heiau*. If it is similar to the often war-related *heiau luakini* known to the archeologist, then she or he will likely suggest

such a label. If the site looks more like those the archeologist recalls were agricultural *heiau māpele*, then it will often be called that.

Applying ethnographic analogies to determine site function is often a sound method when dealing with site types that are thoroughly recorded and that display a consistent and limited range of physical expressions. Identified *heiau*, on the other hand, exhibit tremendous diversity in their sizes, shapes, environmental settings, and functions (Kamakau 1976; Malo 1951; McAllister 1933; Stokes 1991; Summers 1971). Hence, without full knowledge of such diversity, archeologists will base their assessments on a limited sample of *heiau* sites. Such a confined subset of a highly varied population will almost certainly provide a skewed perspective. Using this perspective to develop an ethnographic analogy may produce inaccurate results. These dilemmas become clear when one considers three main issues:

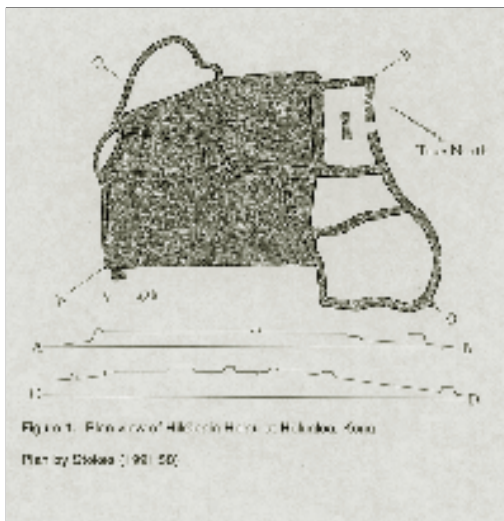
- the tremendous physical diversity *heiau* exhibit;
- the necessary broad and non-physical nature of an accurate definition of the term *heiau*;
- the problems involved in assessing the specific religious functions of *heiau*.

How physically diverse are *heiau*? A common notion of *heiau* is that they comprise a set of human-built structures that are made up of one or more of these elements:

- rectilinear terraces;
- rectilinear enclosures;
- rectilinear platforms;
- rock mounds; or
- upright stones.

While such descriptions encompass a majority of *heiau*, there are numerous examples of well-documented ones that fall outside of these parameters.

The notion of *heiau* being rectilinear is not a firm rule. Kamakau (1976:135) noted that some *heiau* were rounded. Thrum (1907:42, 45) recorded two such *heiau*, Pā'ilio at Kīlauea on Kaua'i and Hakika at Paliluahine on O'ahu. A related example is Hikāpaia *heiau* (figure 1) that is perhaps best described as a free form. The definition of its name records the Hawaiian intent that its architecture not follow rigid rules of rectilinear construction. The second half of its name, "*paia*," means walls. The first half, "*hikā*," refers to something



RIGHT, FIGURE 4.

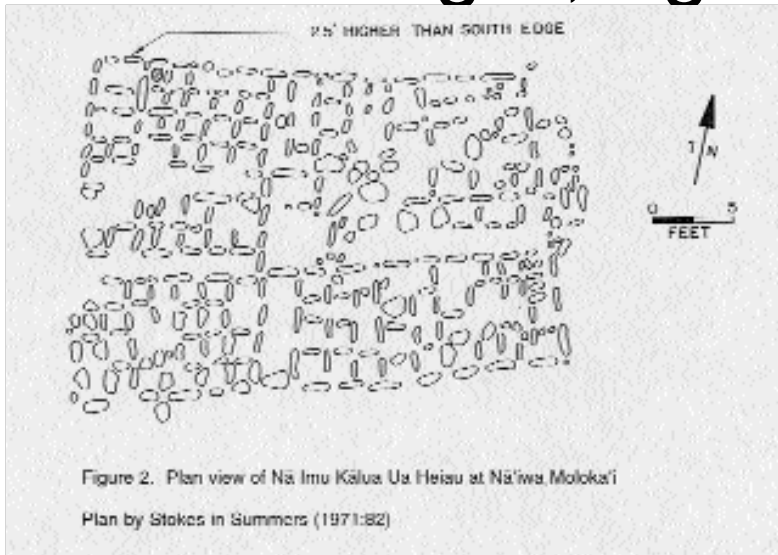


Figure 2. Plan view of Nā Imu Kālua Ua Heiau at Nā'iwa, Moloka'i
Plan by Stokes in Summers (1971:82)

and also used them as sighting points to relocate bountiful fishing grounds (Sterling and Summers 1978:236)

Earthworks represent a fifth type of non-stereotypical *heiau*. An example comes from Niuli in Kohala where Stokes (1991:172) recorded *heiau* Pohāküpā. Its name describes how it was likely created, “*pohā*” meaning to break or crack, and “*küpā*,” to dig or scoop. Pohāküpā was a more than 3,800 square feet rectangular compartment dug 4.5 feet deep into the ground which was paved with *ʻili ʻili* (stone pebbles) and furnished with two small platforms.

These non-stereotypical *heiau* were ones prominent enough to be remembered and recorded by the early 1900s. If one added unreported *heiau* that families and groups of specialists used in more personal settings, the range of diversity would stretch to *heiau* that today could be misidentified as having been used for other purposes such as habitation. An example of this is the males’ *hale mua* where gods of the *ʻohana* (extended family) were worshipped.

The non-stereotypical *heiau* examples also necessitate the recognition that a definition of *heiau* relies on a Hawaiian cultural perspectives rather than empirical traits that archeologists have selected. The consistent feature of *heiau* comes from the Hawaiian cultural view of them as places of worship where *mana* (supernatural or divine power) is concentrated and transferred through religious practices. The *mana* of a *heiau* originates from its associated deities in their spirit forms and tangible body forms in the environment. Those who create and use the *heiau* further enhance its *mana* through their labor, prayers, and offerings. A deity’s *mana* increases as faithful worshipers present *hoʻokupu* (offerings) at the *heiau*. Worshipers also gain *mana* by being in the presence of the deities, communicating with them, and receiving inspiration and support from them.

Such a culturally-based *heiau* definition encompasses all recorded examples of this diverse

which spreads like vines, as do the features of this *heiau*.

There are also sites that do not match the stereotype of *heiau* being composed of terraces, enclosures, walls, mounds, or upright stones. One such *heiau* is Nā Imu Kālua Ua at Nā'iwa, Moloka'i which consists of a series of open compartments on the ground, each about two feet square, formed by flat stones placed on edge at right angles to one another (figure 2; Stokes in Summers 1971:81).

Sacred places on a landscape with no built structures are another category of *heiau*. At Honomuni on Moloka'i, Stokes was taken to a “level stretch of grassy land” which was *heiau* associated with washing the bones of deceased *aliʻi* (Stokes in Summers 1971:144-45). It was called Kapukapuahakea. Thrum (1907:38) recorded three such sacred places among Kaula *heiau*, Naulili at Makaweli, as well as Ka`ahu and Kopahu at Waimea.

Natural landscape features such as rock outcroppings also served as *heiau*. A related pair of O`ahu *heiau* are natural geological features. These are Alāla (figure 3) and Wailea (figure 4). Fishermen prayed and gave offerings at these sites



class. An archeological definition of *heiau* relying on physical traits would overlook the full range of *heiau* diversity.

Given this situation, one can begin to see the parallel problem of applying ethnographic analogies to identify the specific religious functions of sites recorded only generically as *heiau*. The security of such evaluations would depend on how well and uniquely *heiau* functional classes are defined in available records. Researchers would need to answer four major questions for them to rigorously evaluate the specific religious function of a given *heiau*.

- What are the various functional class possibilities for any religious site?
- What physical traits do all examples of a given functional type display (i.e., what are the critical attributes for each functional type)?
- What are the physical critical attributes unique to each functional class?
- Does the site in question display unique physical critical attributes of a given functional type?

Even identifying all possible functional classes is problematic; early ethnohistorians and archeologists, on which we rely today, use *heiau* terms that may relate to function or other possible *heiau* attributes. Some *heiau* terms that are often thought to be functional types could as well denote architectural forms (Valeri 1985:177). Alternatively, labels may relate to a Hawaiian classification system not well understood by us today and which may define *heiau* by the offerings made within them, the status of those who used them, or may be labels for *heiau* dedicated to sets of related deities.

One way archeologists have avoided but not resolved the problem of insecure and incomplete descriptions of all functional classes is to simply

compare a *heiau* in question to well-described of functional types. *Heiau luakini* could be considered such a thoroughly documented class. *Luakini* are often thought to be dedicated by a paramount chief to one or more war gods who are invoked to assist in war and the general prosperity of a nation and who receive human sacrifices.

If one were to address the smaller question of whether a site is *duakini*, the next step would be to determine if all *luakini* display uniformity in one or more traits, or in other words, to identify critical attributes of this class.

Architectural expectations archeologists have used in evaluating whether a site is *luakini* is that it have a “flat, unifying, rectilinear foundation . . . on which the features all sit” (Cordy and Dye n.d.:10). However, counter examples to such a stereotypical view exist. Maui ruling chief Kahekili offered human sacrifices to Kāne at *heiau* Malumaluakua in Wai`ehu (Walker 1931:142). This *heiau* was “a level spot without evidences of walls or platforms” situated in the middle of a *kukui* grove and marked by “a large rock in the center.”

Another example not meeting archeological expectations for *luakini* is Helekū *heiau*. Chief Alapa`inui built this *luakini* in Hälawa Valley, Moloka`i. It comprises “a collection of small pavements, pens and terraces” situated on a slope forming a disunited set of structures at varied elevations (Stokes in Summers 1971:173, Figure 81). Moreover, Alapa`inui built another *heiau*, Kakau, in nearby Hälawa Iki that was also situated on a slope and disjointed in relation to the horizontal and vertical arrangement of its components (Stokes in Summers 1971:169, Fig. 80). Alapa`inui dedicated Kakau to the war god Kükä`ilimoku which strongly suggests it too was a *luakini*. These non-stereotypical *luakini* are further representations of *heiau* diversity—perhaps a building style of Alapa`i`skahuna *kuhikuhipu`uone* (a priest who advised on building and locating *heiau*) or a style of the Hälawa area. These examples illustrate the lack of physical uniformity among recorded *luakini*.

Another critical attribute that has been suggested for *luakini* is that they be comparatively large, reflecting the sizable labor pools accessible to paramount chiefs who are said to have commissioned them. Yet this feature cannot be confirmed as a unique critical attribute of all *luakini*. The dimensions of many smaller *luakini* overlap with those of *heiau* dedicated to such activities as hula, fishing, *kapa* making, and medical healing. While the average size of all *luakini* would surely be larger than averages for other classes, the size of any single site cannot be securely used to assert that it is or is not *duakini*. There is a lack of



physical uniformity within even the well-documented *luakini* class.

Further confounding the issue of identifying unique attributes of a functional class of *heiau* is that Hawaiian oral traditions relate that many were committed to multiple functions which often cross what are stereotypically perceived as functional class boundaries.

In fact, the boundaries separating *heiau* functional classes are not distinct. This is not surprising when one considers that Hawaiians worshipped countless deities whose genealogies, histories, domains, and worshippers were interrelated. Indeed, why would we expect Hawaiians across time and space to compartmentalize their religious sites into neatly delineated and unique types based on physical traits that we might be able to perceive today without having been immersed in the culture that created them?

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from even an incomplete survey of the literature is that archeological evaluations of the religious functions of sites are laden with layers of uncertainty. The ability of archeologists to determine if a site is *heiau* and if a site served a given specific function, depends on the degree of uniformity *heiau* exhibit as a comprehensive class and as subclasses based on function. This empirical uniformity simply does not exist. There truly are no physical features that *heiau* share. The same can be said for functional subclasses of *heiau*. Stereotypical ethnographic analogies cannot be used to assess if a site is *heiau*. Equally problematic is the parallel problem of using stereotypical ethnographic analogies to determine the specific religious functions of *heiau*. This is true even when applied to such well described classes as *luakini*.

If archeologists continue to use stereotypical ethnographic analogies of *heiau* in assessing site function and significance, an unknown proportion of sites used for religious purposes, and which Hawaiians consider culturally significant, will be lost. What will be saved is a more narrow array of religious sites that meet the stereotypical archeological expectations of *heiau*.

If archeologists remain unaware of the problems of stereotypical views of *heiau*, they could easily overestimate and misrepresent the validity and reliability of their site function and significance assessments. Or even more egregiously, they might assert that their stereotypical definitions of *heiau* based on physical traits should be afforded higher authority over culturally derived Hawaiian assessments.

This is precisely what happened with Kukuiokāne *heiau* (figure 5) which was destroyed in 1990 to build a portion of the H-3 highway

which will provide a fourth traffic corridor connecting the windward and leeward sides of O'ahu. Despite the public outcry and protests from Hawaiian religious practitioners and cultural experts who evaluated the site to be Kukuiokāne *heiau*, the Hawai'i State Historic Preservation Division followed the assessment of Bishop Museum archeologists that the site was an agricultural terrace and allowed bulldozers to level the top of it, cover it with dirt, and pave it over for the H-3 highway. In retrospect, the lead archeologist that investigated the site is "convinced" that he made a mistake and that the site was part of Kukuiokāne *heiau* (Williams 1991:7).

The limitations and insecurities involved in archeological assessments of the religious functions of sites need to be recognized during the historic preservation process and acknowledged to such audiences as Native Hawaiians over whose cultural patrimony archeologists are often given control.

Note

* *Heiau* are a type of sacred place in Hawaiian culture which were built as places of worship, offering, and sacrifice. While *heiau* are considered to be the most enduring and significant architectural forms from Hawaiian culture previous to western contact, no two were exactly alike in form or layout. The spiritual use of any *heiau* also widely varied, and *heiau* existed for the purposes of healing, war and human sacrifice, husbandry, fishing, agriculture, and to promote rainfall, to name but a few. In this article, C. Kēhauana Cachola-Abad suggests that, despite attempts by western scholars to define and apply a typology to *heiau*, their full significance and complete range of material character have not been adequately understood.

This article well illustrates the increasing interest of cultural resource managers in issues of sometimes competing cultural interests. For more in-depth background on cultural and sacred sites, the reader is referred to CRM Special Issue Volume 16, 1993, "Traditional Cultural Properties," edited by Patricia Parker, as well as National Register Bulletin 38, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties*. The National Park Service has been at the forefront in recognizing the sensitivity of sacred and cultural sites for native peoples and it is hoped that the dialogue will continue long into the future.

References

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Pu`uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park is not only a reminder of how life was lived by Hawaiians prior to western contact in the late 1700s, it is a reminder of the seemingly sudden changes that came about in the society after that contact. Traditionally, *kūlanakauhale pu`uhonua*, or cities of refuge, were places of sanctuary and renewal for Hawaiians who had broken the *kapu*, or sacred laws, a violation punishable by death; safe places for noncombatants during times of battle; and refuge for defeated warriors. *Pu`uhonua* provided protection, forgiveness, and absolution to those able to reach its walls.

In 1961, Congress created a national historical park at Pu`uhonua o Hōnaunau, the last remaining historical site of its kind, and it received National Historic Landmark status in 1966. Since then, the NPS has worked to restore the 180-acre site to its appearance in the late 1700s, before Kamehameha II abolished the Hawaiian system of *kapu* in 1818, influenced perhaps by newly-arrived western and Christian people and ideas. The interpretation of the park allows visitors to step into the past and experience first hand what Hōnaunau and the Hawaiian community might have been like in that bygone era.



There are three *heiau* that lie within the great stone wall that surrounds the refuge at Hōnaunau, giving the area sanctity. (The stone wall has been repaired but is for the most part the original wall built in the 1500s.) Hale o Keawe *heiau*, originally a temple mausoleum where the bones of at least 23 chiefs had been placed prior to 1818, has been reconstructed. `A-le`ale`a *heiau*, built before 1550, is a temple platform that at one time may have had several grass houses on it, and it is thought to have replaced the old *heiau* of which rubble still marks the site. Among the *heiau* sites are stone artifacts that are associated with legends of the *ali`i*, the Hawaiian chiefs,



and a specially made stone for the game *kōnane*, which visitors can teach themselves, using rules for the game from the visitor center. Petroglyph carvings, ancient tide-pools, and native plants also help convey the atmosphere of the area's history.

Adjacent to the refuge at Hōnaunau lie the royal palace grounds and He-lei-pālala, fishpond of the ruling chief. Reconstructions of Hawaiian houses used by the chiefs and commoners have been erected using *ōhi`a* wood framework and *ti* leaves and *pili* grass for thatching, setting standards for other *hale pili* reconstructions at interpretive sites throughout the state. Part of the experience of the place of refuge is to encounter Hawaiians from the local community who continue to practice their skills at weaving, carving, net fishing, and gathering shellfish along the shoreline here. The experience is a self-guided one, allowing the visitor to be absorbed into the atmosphere and spirit that pervades the park site.

The park remains a refuge in many ways. Secluded and quiet, away from the busy roadways and modernized world of the Big Island, Pu`uhonua o Hōnaunau is a sanctuary from the outside world and the often commercialized tourist sites in the area. It also retains its sense of sacredness and the special history associated with *pu`uhonua* among visitors and locals.

—Text from NPS park brochure.



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Fundamentals of Historic Preservation Training Course

University of Guam
January 13–24, 1997

The University of Hawai`i Historic Preservation Program—Micronesian Training Initiative and the National Park Service (NPS) Pacific Great Basin Office—Cultural Resources Training Initiative, along with the University of Guam and Guam Historic Resources Division, Department of Parks and Recreation, are coordinating a two-week training course directed at the SHPO staffs and preservationists in the Western Pacific region, including Guam, Palau, the Marshall Islands, American Samoa, the Northern Marianas, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Funding is being provided by a grant from the National Park Service.

Using the University of Guam as the venue, the course will offer information on the basic issues of historic preservation—the "hows" and "whys" of the field. It will include basic terms and definitions used in the field; an overview of the world history of preservation; an introduction to conservation theory; an outline of both North American and European preservation efforts, as well as more recent efforts in other parts of the world; an introduction to the principal organizations world-wide; preliminary information on preservation treatments of wood, masonry, and metals, as well as paint analysis and more recent materials; fundamental information on documentation; preservation law; archeological resources and their protection; and discussion of traditional culture and

cultural preservation issues as they apply to the Pacific region in particular. The course is intended to introduce attendees to the field in the broadest sense so that they may put their own efforts into perspective.

Lectures will be taught primarily by Drs. William Chapman and William Murtagh and a variety of other lecturers and discussion leaders familiar with issues of preservation in the Pacific. Speakers will address topics including, the people and cultures of Micronesia; European and Asian colonization of the region; World War II in the Pacific, and material culture of World War II.

Jennifer Malin and Lowell Angell of the University of Hawai`i Historic Preservation Program are Coordinators of the course. The training program is aimed at a wide audience, including Historic Preservation Office staffs, government officials, planning department personnel, representatives of citizen-based historic preservation organizations, and private sector architects, archeologists, landscape architects, historians, preservationists, as well as school, college, and university teachers who would benefit from the training. For additional information about the Fundamentals of Historic Preservation Training Course, please contact:

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