Some Problems With Beachcomber-Books: The Example of Samuel Patterson's Writings

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The investigation of the early contact history of Europeans and the peoples of the Pacific islands has elicited interest in a literature with its own peculiar problems and merits: the books written by or in behalf of the so-called "beachcombers". Since the publication of Maude's pioneer article in 1964, increasing numbers of scholars have devoted themselves to the different aspects of beachcomber studies. Furthermore, beachcomber books which are not easily accessible are being re-edited, and manuscripts are being published for the first time.

One of the beachcomber narratives which still awaits a critical new edition is the account of the adventures of Samuel Patterson which has hitherto been published twice: 1817 and 1825. Patterson's book of 1817 was published as a benefit edition in favour of the author. In the preface, the editor describes the process of its composition:

The following work is principally published from a collection of papers, put into the hands of the compiler by Mr. Patterson. He appears to be a credible man, and has for a number of years supported a good standing as a professor of the christian religion. His nerves are so affected by his sufferings, as that he is incapable of writing himself, and the deficiency of his papers has been filled up by the compiler, under his inspection.

The preface is signed by a certain "Ezekiel Terry, Vicinity of Wilbraham," Massachusetts, under the date of May 1, 1817. Patterson's trustworthiness is moreover witnessed by a Reverend Timothy Merrit and a certain Abel Bliss, jun., "a Literary and Religious Character," both from Wilbraham.

In 1825, a second edition of Patterson's account was published. As the author says in the preface of this new book, the aim of the second

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edition was to raise a sufficient sum of money to enable him to return to Oahu, Hawaii, where he has left a wife and two children.\(^7\)

The present essay is an attempt to evaluate the Hawaiian episode of Patterson's account. This evaluation may shed some light on the problems of working with beachcomber books when trying to reconstruct island society of the early contact period. It will be shown that Patterson's account contains distortions of the political and social situation of the Hawaiian islands at the time of Kamehameha I, and that these distortions are due to Patterson's contacts, probably with missionary circles in the United States. They pertain to his alleged purchase of a tract of land from Kamehameha, and to the allegedly rightful claims of Kaumualii—ruling chief of Kauai and Niihau—to the "throne" of all the Hawaiian Islands. However, it is not intended here to treat all those problems completely and exhaustively. This remains to be done as part of a critical new edition of Patterson's narrative. My present purpose is only to describe briefly some of the problems which come to the fore when dealing with Patterson's books.

First, the alleged purchase of a tract of land is dealt with, followed by a treatment of the way Kamehameha's character is described by Patterson. Finally, I will attempt to explain the inconsistencies in Patterson's account by referring to his probable contacts with members of missionary circles who were in favour of Kaumualii and his son, Prince George Kaumualii. Before these topics can be considered, however, some historical background information is necessary.

Patterson's stay in Hawaii falls within the period of Kamehameha's struggle for complete dominance of all the Hawaiian Islands. Between 1782 and 1795, Kamehameha succeeded in bringing under his sway all the Hawaiian Islands except Kauai and Niihau which were separated from the remainder of the archipelago by a wide channel. From 1795 till 1810, Kamehameha tried in vain to conquer Kauai and Niihau. Finally, in 1810, an agreement was reached between Kamehameha and Kaumualii which stipulated that the latter should recognize Kamehameha as his suzerain and retain Kauai and Niihau as a kind of tributary kingdom. The antagonism between the two ruling chiefs continued, however, clouding Hawaiian history until Kamehameha's death in 1819. This became evident in the episode of the failed Russian annexation of the Islands, in 1816. Kaumualii consented to the establishment of a Russian fort at Kauai, after the Russians had been expelled from Oahu.\(^9\) The antagonism between Kamehameha and Kaumualii is the background against which Samuel Patterson's Hawaiian account must be evaluated.

Patterson visited Hawaii three times. At first, he arrived on the Yarmouth (Capt. D'Wolf) and went ashore on the island of Hawaii on
December 16, 1805.\textsuperscript{10} He left on the \textit{Hamilton} (Capt. Lemuel Porter), early in February 1806.\textsuperscript{11} On September 3, 1806, he came back as a passenger on the \textit{Pearl} (Capt. John Ebbets) and left the islands again in October the same year on the \textit{O’Cain} (Capt. Jonathan Winship), only to return on the \textit{Tamana} (Capt. John Hudson) at an unknown date latter in the same year, or in 1807.\textsuperscript{12} On July 19, 1807, he finally left the islands on the \textit{Maryland} (Capt. Jonathan Perry, jr.). Thus, Patterson’s contact with the Hawaiian people extended over a period of approximately a year and a half, from December 16, 1805, till July 19, 1807, with two interruptions of about six months each. During this period, he married a woman who bore him two children, and he managed a tract of land given to him by Kamehameha. The stay on Hawaii, however, was an interlude only, for we meet him on June 20, 1808, as a passenger of the American brig \textit{Eliza} which foundered south of the island of Nairai (Fiji), that day.\textsuperscript{13} His stay in the Fiji Islands does not seem to have been a very happy one, as is demonstrated by his account of the misfortunes which occurred to him and his comrade, Noah Steere. No wonder, then, that he indulged in remembering the Hawaiian episode, which must really have been a golden one, compared with his other adventures. But why did he express such an ardent desire to return to Hawaii? Was it just the nostalgia of a beachcomber who was unable to re-adjust himself to the American way of life?

\textbf{The purchase of a tract of land}

When comparing both editions of Patterson’s book, one finds considerable divergences concerning the alleged purchase of a tract of land from Kamehameha. In the preface of the second edition, Patterson claims to have purchased from Kamehameha a tract of Oahu land of about 60 acres for 40 dollars.\textsuperscript{14} Patterson describes at first how he and his comrades had been invited by Kamehameha to attend a feast where great amounts of kava were consumed. The crucial passage in the first edition which refers to the acquisition of land reads like this:

The next morning he [Kamehameha] called me to him with the rest of my companions, and told us that he had given to each of us a place on the other side of the island; and then sent some of his men with us to show us the spot. On looking the land over we found it produced numerous kinds of vegetables; great quantities of canes; hogs, and fowls; and tapper trees. . . . We were highly pleased with our land. We then returned to the emperor and told him \textit{we were much delighted with his present}.\textsuperscript{15}

This text was altered completely in the second edition:

The next morning we told the Emperor we should like to settle on the Island, to which he appeared much pleased and \textit{I offered to purchase a tract of land to which he agreed and I paid him forty dollars, and my companions did the same}.\textsuperscript{16}
Thus, in the second edition Patterson and his companions were no longer “much delighted” with Kamehameha’s present, as they had been in the first edition. Now, we read only: “we were highly pleased with our land”. It must be stated that Patterson never fails to convey the idea to the reader that he has purchased the land, because on the same page, when talking about his marriage with the daughter of “Ruer Ruer”, he says: “A short time after I commenced cultivating the land which I had purchased...”

The character of Kamehameha

Patterson is one of the few narrators known to me who is decidedly negative concerning Kamehameha’s personality. In the first edition, we read, for example:

Tamaamah is about sixty years old, an artful and sagacious man, and extremely avaricious. He wants everything he sees. He is continually soliciting presents from Europeans, who visit him, but is not liberal in his returns. Tamoree [Kaumualii], king of the island of Atooi [Kauai] is the rightful sovereign of all the Sandwich isles, and Tamaamah is an usurper.

This passage sounds the more unworthy of belief when we compare it with the passage quoted above where Patterson referred to the tracts of land given by Kamehameha to him and his companions, which made them “much delighted with his present”.

It is true, especially in later times, that Kamehameha was anxious only to have whites on his islands “who knew some trade or mechanic art, and were sober and industrious”, and it is also true that whites who proved unable to raise the yearly tribute for Kamehameha faced being expelled from the islands. Turnbull states that Kamehameha “… is not only a great warrior and politician, but a very acute trader, and a match for any European in driving a bargain. He is very well acquainted with the different weights and measures, and the value which all articles ought to bear in exchange with each other. . . .” According to Shaler, however, Kamehameha enjoyed “… unbounded popularity with the common people. . . .” In 1801, in any case, Kamehameha was reported to be “… very well disposed towards the white people who ship at these islands . . .” and Campbell, who lived about a year, from 1809 to 1810, on Oahu states that

. . . since Tamaamah has established his power, he has regulated his conduct by such strict rules of justice, that strangers find themselves as safe in his port as in those of any civilized nation.

Consequently, Europeans who proved to be able craftsmen could always expect to be rewarded with material and social benefits during Kamehameha’s reign. Let us turn once more to Campbell who gives the
following summary statement concerning this aspect of the relationship between strangers and native chiefs:

Many inducements are held out to sailors to remain here. If they conduct themselves with propriety, they rank as chiefs, and are entitled to all the privileges of the order; at all events, they are certain of being maintained by some of the chiefs, who are always anxious to have white people about them.27

We may conclude that, among the early Europeans, Patterson stands rather alone with his negative statement about Kamehameha, which is the more questionable because it is preceded by the description of the benefits granted to him and his companions. It is worth noting that Patterson gives a negative description of Kamehameha in both of the editions of his book.28 In the first edition, however, this account is anomalous because it is immediately preceded by a description of Kamehameha’s benevolence. In the second edition Kamehameha’s liberal donation of land, canoe and servants is converted into Patterson’s purchase. The author’s intention, we may infer, can only have been to make the negative characterization of Kamehameha more believable.

What is the reason for Patterson’s tendentious description of Kamehameha’s character, and for his contradictory treatment of the question of purchasing land? The following pages propose an explanation which might shed some light on this riddle.

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Kaumualii, ruling chief of Kauai and Niihau, and a most persistent opponent of Kamehameha’s attempt to annex the two islands, had a son who was mainly referred to as “Prince George Kaumualii”. When Prince George was a nine-year-old boy (1805), his father sent him to the United States to be educated.29 According to the “Missionary Register” for 1818, page 52, quoted by Adelbert von Chamisso, Prince George was educated, together with some other Hawaiians, in a missionary school in Cornwall, Connecticut.30 In 1819, after many vicissitudes (among other things, the young man entered the US navy and fought the British), he returned to Kauai. Missionary circles in the United States vested high expectations in his stay in the States. These circles believed that Kaumualii was the rightful sovereign over all the Hawaiian Islands and that Kamehameha was a usurper.31 Moreover, Kamehameha was well-known for his staunch religious conservatism.32

According to Damon, there exists ample evidence that missionary circles expected that a future reign of Prince George, as the “rightful heir” to the Hawaiian “throne”, would be very helpful to missionary enterprise.
The belief that Prince George was the rightful heir to the Hawaiian throne seems to have been rather widespread among Europeans at that time. This was probably due to the fact that the chiefs of Kauai were holders of the highest-ranking kinship titles in the Hawaiian archipelago. However, the confusion of social eminence due to high kinship titles, and actual political authority, was a permanent source of European misinterpretations of Polynesian political life. The better informed observers like Adelbert von Chamisso, however, realized rather early that those who claimed that Prince George was the rightful heir to the Hawaiian throne revealed an “incomprehensible ignorance” (“unbegreifliche Unkunde”).

Everything indicates that Patterson had contacts with the missionary circles referred to above. This becomes obvious when we read the following excerpts from the “United States Gazette for the Country”, No. 1620, Vol. XVI, Philadelphia, December 6th, 1816:

We have conversed with a gentleman who has recently arrived from the Pacific Ocean. He states that it is not correct, as has been reported, that Tamaamah has conquered all the Sandwich Islands. ... It is true, that Tamoree [Kaumuali] went down several years since, and made a surrender of his island to Tamaamah; but he has since thought better of it, and has concluded not to yield without a struggle.

That the gentleman who had recently arrived from the Pacific Ocean and whom the authors of the journals had conversed with was Patterson, becomes intelligible when we read the following lines which are nearly a word-for-word rendering of the text which was published by Patterson in the following year:

Our informant represents Tamaamah to be an artful, sagacious man, and extremely avaricious. He wants everything he sees. He is continually soliciting presents from the Europeans, who visit him, and dislikes giving anything in return. ... Tamoree is the rightful sovereign of all the Sandwich Islands. Tamaamah is a usurper.

The authors of the newspaper article must have known the manuscript of Patterson’s book and probably knew him personally, too. Moreover, Patterson claims to have had contacts with Prince George whom he calls “a particular friend of mine”. According to Patterson, Prince George had promised to give him back his land “... when he came to the throne, to which he was the presumptive heir. ...” Again, on the same page, Patterson claims that

if I would go out to the Islands, he would restore my property to me and give me a good situation when he came to the throne.

Patterson also claimed to have been in good relationship with Kamehameha’s kalaimoku whom the Europeans called “Billy Pitt”. This
"Billy Pitt", says Patterson, has now, in 1825, become king of all the islands (!)

... and I have assurances which convince me he will do everything I desire, to make me comfortable and happy with my family [sic!] should I return to Waohoo, which is my firm intention to do as soon as I can raise a sufficient sum for that purpose. 

All these statements are embraced by affirmations that it is Patterson's aim to raise a sufficient amount of money for the return journey to the Hawaiian Islands:

My principal object in publishing this second edition is to acquire a sufficient sum to enable me to return to the Sandwich Islands. . . .

Summing up, we may conclude that Patterson was probably in contact with missionary circles who had an interest in the education of Prince George Kaumualii. These circles clung to the idea that the young Prince was the "rightful heir" to the Hawaiian "throne" and that Kamehameha, who was averse to Christian religion, was a usurper. Prince George's future succession to the throne would greatly facilitate missionary work in Hawaii. It is my opinion, therefore, that Patterson speculated on the financial aid of those circles. The second edition of his book, in particular, was designed to agree with the missionaries' negative attitudes towards Kamehameha. Divergences in the first edition, as to Kamehameha's character and behaviour, were eliminated in the second one in order to make the negative description of Kamehameha more worthy of belief. Thus, the second edition agrees even better with the attitudes prevalent among missionary circles in New England.

Furthermore, there is a tendency towards self-elevation in Patterson's two books. Take, for example, the story of his marriage with the daughter of an important Hawaiian chief. In the first edition, after expressing his joy about Kamehameha's grant of a tract of land, Patterson writes:

He then gave us a canoe and servants to wait on us, and to till our ground, and told us to take wives of any women we saw on the island, excepting the chiefs' wives.

In the second edition, however, there is a supplement which is lacking in the first:

A short time after I commenced cultivating the land which I had purchased [!], I married the daughter of Ruer Ruer, one of the richest inhabitants of the Island, by whom I had two children during my stay.

There is no reference to his marriage in the earlier edition. Thus, a marriage which Patterson originally did not consider to be important enough to be mentioned, becomes a union with a high chief's daughter in the edition of 1825. Furthermore, he is now a good friend of Prince
George and Billy Pitt. Considered together with the purchase of land which was still granted to him by Kamehameha in the first edition, we get the impression of Patterson as a person of consequence in Hawaii. In the preface to the second edition, all this is preceded by a tearful description of his sufferings and misfortunes; and later he appeals to his future readers in the following manner:

Let every person who reads this simple statement of facts compare his own misfortunes with mine, and if he has a spark of humanity warming his bosom, if he knows how to value the blessings he enjoys, and is capable of deriving pleasure from the exercise of benevolence; if in short he is an American, he will not, he cannot withhold the little pittance I ask, by refusing to pay the trifling sum demanded for the work which contains the faithful narrative of my sufferings.47

The list of subscribers at the end of the book—an impressive one, indeed—shows that Patterson was successful in this respect, at least.

Finally, a few words remain to be said about the value of the second edition as a source for the ethnographical reconstruction of Hawaiian culture. On the title-page, for instance, we read: “Second edition, enlarged”. This is misleading, because there is a paragraph on Hawaiian religion from the bottom of page 70 to the third quarter of page 71 of the first edition which is omitted completely in the second edition. Hence, it is obvious that the latter edition has not been enlarged, but rather abridged. Enlarged it was only with some statements that reveal Patterson’s intention: to raise a sum of money by selling his book to pious Christian readers who were favourably inclined towards missionary work in Hawaii.

NOTES


3 Cf. James F. O’Connell, A Residence of Eleven Years in New Holland and the Caroline Islands . . . (Boston: 1836), which has been critically edited by Saul H. Riesenberg and published in Melbourne, 1972.

Samuel Patterson, *Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of Samuel Patterson, Experienced in the Pacific Ocean and Many Other Parts of the World, With an Account of the Fleejee and Sandwich Islands* (From the Press in Palmer, Mass.: 1817; Second edition, Providence, Rhode Island: 1825).

Patterson, 1st ed., p. iii.

Patterson, 2nd ed., pp. 8–9.


Patterson, 1st ed. p. 65; 2nd ed. pp. 67–68. It is beyond doubt that Patterson first came to Hawaii in 1805—one has only to go back to page 54 in the 1st edition and to page 56 in the 2nd edition. He does not tell us the name of the ship, speaking only of a “snow” with a master named D’Wolf. In the work of Bernice Judd (*Voyages to Hawaii before 1860*, [Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 2nd edition 1974, pp. 11, 81]), however, we learn that a ship called Yarmouth came to the island of Hawaii on December 8, 1805, with Patterson as a passenger. The Yarmouth left on December 22, the same year. The name of its master is not mentioned in Judd, but the Yarmouth is referred to as a “snow”. Hence, the snow of which D’Wolf was the master and which is mentioned by Patterson can only have been the Yarmouth.

Judd, p. 11.

Cf. Judd, pp. 11, 81 as a source for the dates of the arrivals and departures of the ships. There is a contradiction, however, between pages 11 and 81: on page 11, we learn that the Tamana arrived some time in 1806, but on page 81 we learn that Patterson came as a passenger on the Tamana in 1807. In the list of the arrivals and departures of ships in Judd’s book, however, there is no reference to the Tamana for the year 1807.

Patterson, 1st ed., p. 82.

Patterson, 2nd ed., p. 8. Land allotments, however, were not considered to be foreign property even if the strangers had to pay for them. Land was held under the authority of a chief as long as the foreign land-holder behaved according to the custom. Foreigners never became freehold titleholders in the first two decades of the 19th century. Cf. Caroline Ralston, *Grass Huts and Warehouses* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977), pp. 88–89.

Patterson, 1st ed., pp. 67–68; italics mine.

Patterson, 2nd ed., p. 70; italics mine.

Ibid., p. 71.

Ibid.

Patterson, 1st ed., p. 70.

Ibid., p. 68.


26 Campbell, pp. 210-211.

27 Ibid., pp. 165-166.

28 Patterson, 1st ed., p. 70; 2nd ed., p. 73.


33 cf. von Chamisso, p. 147.


35 According to Davenport, the term *ali‘i* meant in Hawaii 1) the class of the aristocrats; 2) the sacred social rank of a member of this class; 3) a political office. See William Davenport, "The Hawaiian Cultural Revolution: Some Political and Economic Considerations" *American Anthropologist*, 71 (1969), pp. 3-4, p. 19, fn3). It was one of the main reasons for Europeans' misconceptions of native political processes in the early contact period that high-ranking titles did not necessarily entail an equal amount of political power.

36 See von Chamisso, p. 147.

37 Damon, p. 10; italics mine.

38 Ibid.; cf. Patterson, 1st ed., p. 70.

39 Patterson, 2nd ed., p. 8.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 *Kalaimoku* was the term for a senior advisor and a kind of superior officer. This office is sometimes compared to that of a Prime Minister. Cf. Kuykendall, p. 10.

43 Patterson, 2nd ed., p. 8.

44 Ibid., p. 7; cf. ibid., pp. 8-9.

45 Patterson, 1st ed., p. 68.

46 Patterson, 2nd ed., p. 71. The name of this chief is given as *Kirurerure* on page 8 of the same edition.