

William Richards on Hawaiian Culture and Political Conditions of the Islands in 1841

Marshall Sahlins and Dorothy Barrère, editors

The following is the complete text of a letter from William Richards to Charles Wilkes, U.S.N., commander of the United States Exploring Expedition, datelined Lahaina, March 15, 1841. The letter, closely paraphrased by Wilkes in his narrative of the expedition,¹ is known only from the duplicate copy deposited in the State Archives of Hawaii. On the cover page is written, in the unmistakable scrawl of Robert C. Wyllie: "Found among Wm Richards papers 30 June [or Jany] 1851."

William Richards, of course, was in excellent position to serve as Wilkes' informant. Just to recapitulate the co-ordinates of his well-known career: Richards arrived in Honolulu in April 1823 in the second company of American missionaries and was stationed soon thereafter in Lahaina, home of many of the chiefs. He remained in Lahaina throughout most of his missionary career. His knowledge of Hawaiian is known to have been excellent—he is responsible for many translations of biblical and other works into Hawaiian—and as the letter to Wilkes documents, he was friend to the famous Hoapili and other chiefs. In 1838, Richards left the mission to become political counselor to the Monarchy. In 1842 with T. Haalilio he undertook a delicate mission to America and Europe to negotiate recognition of Hawaii's independence. Richards was commissioned Minister of Public Instruction in 1846. He died in Honolulu in November 1847.

Richards' manuscript should prove of interest to anthropologists and historians alike. The import of his general observations on Hawaiian culture needs no explication. Historically the manuscript is capital for its description of economic and political conditions leading up to the attribution of ministerial posts to foreigners in the 1840's and to the Great Mahele of 1846-1854. We have taken the liberty to clarify and expand certain of the cultural and historical implications in footnote. Naturally, we alone are responsible for points of interpretation.

The manuscript, including misspellings—perhaps due to haste in copying—has been left mainly as is. In a few places when the text clearly warrants it,

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letters and words apparently missed in the copy have been inserted in brackets to clarify the meaning.

Lahaina March 15—1841

Capt. Wilkes

Dear Sir

Previous to your departure from the Islands, I must acknowledge the reception of yours of the 9th Inst, in which you have done me the honor to propose several very important questions in relation to these Hawaiian Islands.

I beg you to receive this rather as an apology than as a full reply to those questions, for though I feel the deepest interest in the subject of them, and the strongest wish that they should be correctly answered, yet your very limited stay at this place removes all possibility of doing justice to a reply. The simple subject of the Government would require a volume to give a full view of it. I can not even enter upon the theory of it in its various branches but simply state a few facts respecting it.

“1st Title and successions of the Royal family”

On this subject there were no fixed laws, and practice was considerably various. Their best politions however, considered the right to the throne to descend to the next heir on the death of the last proprietor, males always taking precedence of females without regard to age as required in the constitution of Britain. Females inherited where there were no males of the same blood.

If a king deceased leaving children by different wives, then the rank of the mothers came into the account.

The late Kamehameha I had children by different wives. His two eldest, a daughter and a son, were both superceded by his younger children through another wife of higher rank. So also if a king deceased leaving a son and daughter by different wives, the daughter had a right to the crown provided her mother were of higher blood than the son's mother. This was the fact only two generations previous to the discovery of the Islands by Cook. The throne was held by Keakealani a female. She had half brothers, but they being of lower rank on the mother's side, she inherited. I find however but two well authenticated instances of the supreme power's being held by females, the one already mentioned, and another of remote date, by the name of Laea.²

An exception to the regular descent of the crown was often made by a partial right of the sovereign to nominate his successor.³ Thus he often willed the kingdom to one of the younger sons instead of the eldest, and sometimes willed it to another family. Where special reasons for this course existed it was approved by their best politicians.

But all these rules were often set aside, and probably in more than half the cases, personal valor took the precedence of blood, as in the case of Kamehameha I. Though a chief of very inferior rank, however brave, stood no chance in a contest for the crown. While at the same time, the lawful heir, if he were a weak, or a vicious man was almost sure to be supplanted by some braver or better chief.

War was considered almost a matter of course on the death of every king. During the life of the king he generally signified his wish in relation to the descent of the crown, and often a council of chiefs was called on the subject. If the nomination of the reigning monarch was popular with them, there was then little danger of difficulty, but if unpopular then the demise of the king was a signal for war.

If the king married to a woman of low rank, the right of his children by her to the crown was almost uniformly disputed. Hence it was a matter of the vast importance that the wife of the king should be of as high if not higher blood than any other female in the nation.

The king always looked with jealousy on any chief who had a wife of as high birth as his own. For this reason mainly, if there were several women of the same or nearly equal high rank, the king felt it important to secure them all as his wives, in order that there might be no possibility for competition on the ground of rank after his death, at least that there might be no danger of the crown's going out of his family. On this account and not on account of affection, Kamehameha I had five wives at the same time.

For the same reason kings often married their own sisters. It would have been from no other cause, for all the feelings and practices of the lower ranks were against incestuous connections. But kings thought it necessary. The grandparents of the present king on his mothers side were half brother and sister.⁴

The offspring of such a union, was of course the highest rank possible, & it was this rank that secured to the last reigning Queen her right to the crown.

The public feeling was so strong against the king's having heirs by a woman of inferior rank, that such children were often put to death in infancy by the high chiefs, lest they would lay claim to the throne, or to a higher rank than they were willing to allow them. Illegitimate children of kings by women of low rank were almost sure to be put to death in infancy, and sometimes by order of the father.

The rank of a woman was not materially altered by her marriage to the king. She thereby acquired no authority in the government, and no special rights nor privileges, unless perhaps some presents of lands from her husband. But of these she was usually deprived at the death of the king, without retaining any right of dowry whatever, unless by mere courtesy. . . .

Under the new constitution [of 1840] the descent of the crown is regulated in the following words.

"His heir shall be the person whom he and the chiefs shall appoint during his lifetime, but should there be no appointment, then the decision shall rest with the Chiefs and the house of representatives."

Though the printed constitution allows great latitude in the appointment, yet they would doubtless be regulated by some of the general principles mentioned above, or by what may be considered here a kind of common law, which answers a very important purpose, when there is any authority by which it can be executed.

The present heir apparent is Prince Alexander the third son of Kinau and grandson of Kamehameha I.

Should the present king however have heirs of his own body, they will doubtless inherit notwithstanding the low rank of his wife.

“2nd Past & present political government.”

As far as there was a regular government it was mainly of a feudal character and vested in the various ranks of landlords from the king down. The power of each particular lord was generally supreme or nearly so, over his own vassals, nor was that power entirely confined to personal dependants. There was so much politeness, or respect, or fear, whatever it might be called, existing between the different chiefs, that any one chief might call on the dependants⁵ without much danger of giving offence.

Thus the people were often compelled to serve many masters, and often too out of the regular line of landlords landholders &c . . . As a general thing however each chief had his particular lands, & tenants, and agents and servants, and ruled his own little kingdom according to his own laws, being himself however entirely subject to his superior, as his own agents were to him.

Civil rights were very little respected, nor were they scarcely known to exist. There were some general rules however a kind of common law, which when violated, the offender was often and perhaps generally punished, particularly if the crime was of an aggravated kind. Kamehameha I in repeated instances punished murder by death. Grand larceny was a capital offence if the injured person had power to execute what was considered to be law, and the chiefs and even the king not unfrequently espoused the cause of the injured party, and inflicted punishment for flagrant crimes.

Adultery was often punished by death, which was usually inflicted by the cuckold party. Kamehameha however called on a number of his highest chiefs to act as executioners in a celebrated case which occurred a few years before his death.⁶

As far as there was any real system to the government, it was deeply interwoven with their religious tabus, as well as with their feudal tenures, and a full account of the government therefore, would embrace an entire history of the tabu & also of the feudal system.

The answer to your third question will throw some further light however upon the character of the Government, as has been in former times.

For an account of the present system of Government, I beg to refer you to the Polynesian, published at Oahu, commencing with the 35th number, which contains the Constitution of the Government. There has been no complete translation of the laws published. They are however soon to be translated and published entire in that paper.

Should you see any remarks in that paper over the signature, Friend of the Government, you may rely on their correctness as far as they refer to facts.

“3d Lands, how held formerly & at present.”

From the earliest periods of Hawaiian history, it appears that the tenure by which the lands have been held has in most respects been feudal, and the

origin of the feuds was nearly the same as among the Goths, the Huns, the Vandals, and other northern nations of Europe. A chieftain who could collect a sufficient number of followers to conquer a district or an Island, as soon as he had accomplished his object collected his victorious army about him for the purpose of dividing the spoil, or what they called "Cutting up the lands."

The leader or king took his choice among the best of the lands, and on these lands placed some of his own particular servants, as agents to superintend the cultivation for himself. The original tenants who were on the farms at the time they were seized by the invading army usually remained under the new conquerors, at least many or most of them, and by these the land was cultivated for the king under such new agents as he saw fit to appoint.

After the king had taken his choice, he then divided out the whole conquered territory among the leaders of his army, giving the most valuable portions to those who had acted the most distinguished part. In doing this, the king had full opportunity to show his skill & wisdom, for it was no easy task to give satisfaction in the division of the lands. Before the work was finished, difficulties often arose, and not unfrequently rebellions and new wars.

When the lands were thus divided, all those who had received portions were considered as owing fealty to the lord of their fee; and these feuds were the links of that chain by which the victorious king always expected to bind to himself and his interests, the whole body of the landlords. These landlords were the persons on whom the king relied to fight his battles, support him in all difficulties and aid him in all his plans. They of course had every inducement to support his authority, for just so far as his power was weakened their landed property became unsafe.

I speak of each of these persons who received lands as landlords because each one of these again divided out his particular fief into smaller portions, the tenants or possessors of which owed the same fealty, and performed the same duties, as a chief of the first rank did to the king.

These last divisions were divided and subdivided again, and thus carried on in many instances to the sixth or seventh degree. Thus an Island is divided into mokus or states—

A moku into Kalanas or counties,
A Kalana into Ahupuaas or townships
An Ahupuaa into Iilis, or plantations
An Ili into Moos or small farms.⁷

The last division was often in the hands of a single man, and where the Moos were small, the same man possessed more than one, and sometimes even a whole ili.

Every receiver of lands or feudatory was bound to his particular benefactor in the same manner as the first ranks were to the king, and thus a perfect feudal connexion was established between the king and his lowest subject through the various ranks of lords and tenants. By this means, the chiefs secured and retained their authority over the people—and the rich over the poor. The authority and controll was almost perfect. It was the only

system of governing with which the Hawaiians have been acquainted, and even to the present day, it is next to impossible to convince the elder chiefs that authority and subordinations can be maintained by any other means. An old chief said to me, "If we can not take away their lands, what will they care for us? They will be as rich as we."⁸

This bond by which the several classes of society were held together was much more frequently severed by the superior than the inferior. From the heavy demands made on the lower order by the higher, it would naturally be supposed otherwise, for each landlord had a right to tax his particular tenants at pleasure, and had a right to require not only military service, but daily labor in any and every kind of employment.

The consequence of this system was that the common laborers did not themselves receive probably on an average more than one third of the avails of their labors, while the different orders of chiefs received the remaining two thirds.⁹

The great amount however taken by the superiors was not the worst feature of this oppressive system. The remaining one third was not safe. Or rather there was no distinct dividing line by which the tenant might know and hold his own. If a man by uncommon industry, brought his farm to a higher state of cultivation than his neighbor, he was not thereby sure of having more for his own use, and he could not distinctly lay his hand on any article of value and say that was his own. But notwithstanding all these advantages which the superiors enjoyed over their inferiors, yet favoritism, jealousy, but more than all natural fickleness of character were so universal, that no landholder considered himself safe in his possessions, and therefore even ridiculed the idea of making extensive improvements. So insecure did the people feel themselves to be in the possession of their lands, that the more reflecting class always tried to obtain and often did obtain a small division under different chiefs, so that when they were dispossessed of one, they might be saved from starvation by the produce of the other.¹⁰

There were however customs, rules, and an acknowledged propriety of conduct in relation to taxation and dispossessions of lands. But there being no fixed law, nor courts of justice, or source of appeal, the people were in effect tenants at will, each particular class to their direct landlords. And what was more, it was usually the case that when a man was dispossessed of his lands, he was usually dispossessed of most, if not all of his personal estate which had been acquired either directly or indirectly from the lands he had possessed.

The greatest changes took place at the death of the landlords, when the right to the feuds descended to their heirs. These heirs almost as a matter of course would have a different class of favorites from their predecessors, and therefore would dispossess the old tenants, and put their personal favorites in their places. When the king deceased, great changes in every part of his dominions was the consequence. If a chief either of higher or lower rank deceased, then all the estates in his particular fiefdom, and those only, were affected. But among all the better classes it was considered improper to eject

the direct cultivators of the land and hence it was often the case that all the different ranks of chiefs were dispossessed, while the last dependants, the cultivators of the soil, were continued in their possessions. Had this always been the case it would have greatly mitigated the evils of the system.

This feudal tenure under the present system of government has not entirely ceased to exist, but it is greatly modified.

Indeed in principle it has nearly ceased, but in practice it continues to a very considerable extent.

The new laws define the rights of the different classes, and prescribe the rules by which each class shall be governed. Officers are also appointed to see that the rules are observed, and assess damages according [to] law where the rights of one class are invaded by the people of another class. No tax whatever can be laid and no property seized, not even by the king, except by express provision of law. No landlord can dispossess his tenants of their fiefs for the right of the tenants is declared perpetual.

The tenure therefore by which the lands are now held may be considered that of perpetual lease, subject to forfeiture for non payment of rent, the amount of which is regulated by laws in which the people have a voice and no new tax can be laid without the assent of their representatives.

The principle evils which now remain to weaken the tenure by which lands are held, are the ignorance of the officers of the new system, and their fear of acting against the interests of chiefs and persons of rank.

These evils however are fast diminishing.

One considerable improvement in the new system is the diminution of the number of lords over the same tenant. The present laws recognize but one besides the king. If there are more than one they must be in partnership, so as to have but one voice, and can lay no higher tax than could be laid by one.¹¹

“4th Mode of taxation.”

Under the former kings I believe that the royal tax was laid in accordance with a pretty regular system. It was annual, and was assessed by agents of the king appointed for the purpose, and was nearly the same every year. It was laid on the Iliis, on smallest divisions of land but one, and was about as follows.

One Ili was taxed

A hog	A fishnet	A cluster of feathers
A dog	A fish line	20 Kapas

A part of these last were nearly square for bed clothes, and a part narrow and long for female dresses. The size of the hog, dog, net &c varied somewhat according to the size of the Ili.

These taxes were paid by each class of inferiors to their particular superiors, and they again to theirs, till they were finally collected in one heap or yard in presence of the king. Vast amounts however were secretly retained in the hands of the various grades of chiefs. Besides this tax which was regularly assessed, there were some common rules which made it necessary to make presents to the king, especially when he was travelling.¹²

He and all his company which was said in the time of Kamehameha I to usually amount to a 1,000 men were entirely supported in their travels by the presents of the people. If a sufficient amount of presents was not brought, the people were in danger of having their fields plundered by the marauding parties of the king's attendants.

Besides these direct drafts on the property of the people the king had a right to call out all classes of [the] commun[i]ty to perform and every kind of labor which he desired. There were no established rules by which labor was assessed nor was there any limit to the amount. The manner in which the calls were made was usually for the king to give his orders to a chief of rank and he communicate his orders to the next rank of chiefs and they onward to the lowest tenants. If the work was one of magnitude then the king gave his orders to each of the chiefs of the first rank, and through them they were extended through all the different classes of the people.

On these public days, especially when building temples for their gods, or performing some labor in honor of the dead, the highest chiefs in the nation, both male and female were often seen carrying stones on their shoulders, or engaged in some other kind of manual labor.

Since the country has been visited by foreigners several new forms of taxation have been devised, some of which for a time bore heavily on the people, and none more so than the requirement to cut sandal wood. The amount of sandal wood cut during the first 30 years of this century must have been immense. The chiefs are able now to give account of more than 100,000 piculs, that is 1,000,000 dollars. A large portion of this was collected by taxation in one form or other. During my acquaintance with the business, the labor performed has been worth all that the sandal wood has been valued. Indeed it has been the hardest of all the ways in which they have attempted to raise money. But in the early period of the business it was not so. The above can be only a small portion of the whole amount of sandal wood carried from the Islands, but a very large amount has been cut on shares and not by taxation.¹³

Another new form of taxation has been by duties laid on the various productions of the Islands carried into the markets. Till within a year and a half, half of every thing carried into the market at Honolulu was claimed by the government. The proportions on the other Islands was much less, but was still a heavy tax on the people.

Duties were also laid on all the more profitable kinds of labor. Those whose special employment was the building of houses paid a heavy annual tax for the privilege. The same was true of those who were employed in washing clothes, and also in many other kinds of profitable business.

Another new form of taxation has been for money. This has been assessed sometimes on lands, but usually on polls. One year the amount received was about 25,000 dollars, but usually not half that amount.

All the above were government taxes.

In the same manner as the king taxed the lands and the people at large so each particular lord of a fief taxed his own vassals and the lands in their

possession. There was not however so much regularity among the lower classes as among the higher, and the oppressiveness of the system consisted mainly in the great number of lords over the same vassals some one of whom may be presumed to have disregarded all rule and justice and therefore scarcely none of the lower orders escaped the severest rigors of unrestrained tyranny.

No valuable article was considered safe in the hands of the lower classes, for if not directly plundered, some form of taxation would be devised by some one of the superiors by which it was sure to be taken from them, or they made to suffer for not presenting it of their own accord. Hence none of the lower orders even if they were able ever dared to live in a large house, cook a large hog, fish with a large net, or wear the first quality of dress.¹⁴

There was also a method by which the lower orders of chiefs often taxed the people to a very considerable extent in the name of the king, but without his sanction.

A report would be circulated that the king was about to visit a certain place. The head men, or lower classes of landlords would then give orders to have large houses built, hogs and other valuable articles made ready, and sometimes even cooked for the king. As the king did not arrive the head men turned all these preparations to their own advantage, and thus secured for themselves large and good houses, and sometimes too lived in quite royal stile.¹⁵

This whole system of taxation as described above is now abrogated. The right to tax the people is now confined to the government in which the people have a voice. The various classes of chiefs and landholders have now no right [to] tax even their own tenants for anything but labor and that is limited by law, and that is limited to three days in a month, which the tenant may commute for four dollars and a half per year.

The government tax is now all estimated in money, but is paid in a variety of ways. It is assessed on the polls and on the lands; The manner of assessment varies, the 1st year light upon the polls, and heavier on the lands, the next year heavier on the polls and light upon the lands. The poll tax must be paid in money, or if the time for collection passes and it is not paid, then twice the amount is required in produce. The land tax may be paid in money, or in arrow root, cotton, coffee—sugar—Turmeric, oil nuts, hogs &c at the market prices. Most of the land tax is at present paid in hogs, which can be turned to very little amount as there is no sufficient market for the pork.

The average rate of the poll tax from year to year, according the present laws, is as follows.

An ablebodied man	= 75 cts
An ablebodied woman	= 37½
A boy over 14 years of age	= 18¾
A girl over 14 years of age	= 9⅝

The land tax is assessed upon the Ilis, or smallest divisions but one. The amount is from 2½ to 10 dollars for each ili. The size of the ilis is such that I should think each one capable of supporting on an average 30 persons each.

In addition to these taxes the government has a right to the labor of all the people possessing lands, the number of days restricted to three in each month, which the tenant may commute however for four and a half dollars yearly.

At present there is no export nor import duty on any article of merchandise or production.

Estimating families at two adults and two children to a family, the present rate of the whole taxation of every kind and description would be to a family about eleven dollars and thirty cents; nine dollars of which may be paid in labor, one dollar in produce, and one dollar 30 cents in money. This is the highest estimate according to the principles of assessment. But the real government revenue must not be estimated by this calculation. For according to this, the revenue would be more than three hundred thousand dollars, whereas it is not probable that more than the value of fifty thousand is really collected, or realized. The defect in the system therefore is very manifest, and is discovered by the chiefs, and they design to change it as rapidly as possible. The want of a circulating medium, and of those productions which can be at once made available in the market, are the obstacles in the way.

I said that not more than fifty thousand dollars is actually received in every form by way of taxes from the people. This of course includes all that is paid for rent and in every way to all the lower ranks of chiefs. What the king actually receives in money is about fourteen thousand dollars annually.¹⁶

It should here be mentioned that all fathers having three children which they support themselves are freed from the labor tax for government. If a man have four children whom he supports himself he is then freed from all labor for his landlord as well as for the king. If he have five children he is freed from poll tax, and if he have six he is freed from the land tax and every assessment whatsoever.

Old persons also, and all who are feeble or sickly are freed from taxation. All the teachers of schools, and all the pupils in schools where the higher branches are taught are freed from taxation, unless they are landholders, in which case they pay the land tax.

“5th Statistics of crime.”

Of these there are none of any material value. The law never required a record to be kept until the current year. Some of the judges have kept a partial account of the sentences passed, but those records are so isolated, and are themselves so very defective, that they are not worthy of confidence.

Those little scraps that are published are calculated to mislead rather than otherwise. The whole number of executions for murder since the year 1826 has been three on Kawai, seven on Oahu two on Maui, one on Hawaii, 13 in all.¹⁷ One murder has been perpetrated on Hawaii, and the murderer committed suicide. During the same period there have been two cases of manslaughter, both originating in intoxication. Further than this I can not state with definiteness.

“6th Mode of punishment when capital.”

Formerly, capital punishments were usually inflicted secretly in the night. The kings and some of the chiefs had a particular class of servants, called “ilamuku”, or executioners, to whom the business of punishing capitally was usually entrusted. This class of men was much feared by the people, for there were no public trials, nor public sentence pronounced, and there fore whenever the executioner was seen abroad, there was general consternation, especially among those who were conscious of having committed offences, or incurred the displeasure of the king. They usually went in the night and attacked their victims with clubs or stones, without giving him any warning. If the executioner were discovered by the friends of the criminal they neither dared to give him warning, nor resist the executioner, lest they should incur the displeasure of the king.

Some of the criminals, more especially those whose crime was a violation of their religious tabus, were seized either secretly or openly by the officers of the priests, and remanded to the temples where they were either stoned, strangled or beaten to death with clubs, and then laid on the sacrificial alter where their carcasses were often left to putrify. There were comparatively few executions except for violation of religious tabus, though there were some, which took place by order of the chiefs, and others in conformity to their rules of private revenge.

A high chief, Kanihonui, whom Kamehameha I sentenced to be executed was put to death in the following manner.

The king first armed secretly a considerable body of soldiers, whom he kept concealed in a large house, so that he might easily quell a rebellion should one be excited on the occasion. He then sent a silver coin to Kalaimoku (the late Wm Pitt) who understood this secret signal, having previously heard of the crime committed by Kanihonui. Kalaimoku then repaired to the house of the king where he received his orders. Several of the highest chiefs were directed to aid in the execution. The compassion of the chiefs was excited in favor of their relative and the[y] sent several messages to the king to solicit his pardon. But the king was inexorable, and threatened the messengers that they should be the substitutes of the criminal if his orders were not quickly obeyed. The chiefs seeing that entreaty was in vain went openly to the house where the convict was,—deliberately put a rope around his neck—passed the ends through the opposite sides of the house; when those on the out side took hold and pulled till he was strangled. This manner of execution I think was quite unusual.

After the introduction of edged tools, and especially axes into the country, beheading secretly in the night became a rather common form of execution. The last instance of this took place in the year 1822 I think.¹⁸ It was in the reign of Kamehameha II and was for the same crime as the above. The king sent an ilamuku in the night, who found the criminal fast a sleep, his wife lying by his side. The executioner gently pulled the woman’s head one side, and then with a broad axe instantly severed the head of her husband from his body.

In the year 1824, an officer in the fort at Kauai was guilty of treason, in attempting to give up the fort to a company of rebels. By order of the late Wm Pitt, he was taken bound on board vessel under pretence of being sent to Oahu. But at midnight he was taken on deck, stabbed and thrown overboard in mid-channel.¹⁹

This I think was the last government execution in the form of an assassination. From that time capital offences have been regularly tried by jury, and executions have been by hanging. The first case of this kind was I think in the autumn of 1826. The gallows has always been erected in a public place, and multitudes have witnessed the executions.

“7th How governed, by law customs or will?”

I think I may properly answer, by a union of the three. There was a considerable number of definite tabus or laws the violation of which was pretty uniformly punished. These however were mostly connected with their religious systems, but not entirely so.

They had also some established customs which it was dangerous to violate. These customs and tabus in a very considerable degree regulated and restrained the will of persons in authority, for a chief who notoriously violated these, universally became unpopular, and therefore was almost sure to be supplanted by some more worthy competitor for authority. Many instances of this kind are related in their traditional histories.

For an account of some of these allow me to refer you to the History of Hawaii, as published in the Hawaiian Spectator, with which Mr. Brinsmade can furnish you.

Kamehameha I was particular to publish certain laws, and I have never heard any complaint that he did not act up to them himself.

I think it can not with propri[e]ty be said that any king governed according to his will. There were powerful restraints imposed on that will, by custom, by fear of other chiefs, and by the counsels of a certain class of men whose business it was to rehearse proverbs and instruction, as handed down from their ancestors. The same class of persons often prophesied of judgement in case their instructions were not regarded.

But notwithstanding these restraints on the will of the sovereign, he nevertheless, if a bad man, found means to break over a gr[e]at many of the tabus and rules, and when the people were oppressed they had no redress but in rebellion.

“8th Traditions.”

For these I must refer you to the Hawaiian Spectator as above. You will find comparatively few recorded, but more there than in any other book. I would add to them here, but the subject is too extensive, and my limits too short.

I might add as another book worthy of consultation on the above subject, Lectures by Shelden Dibble published in N. York 1839.

“9th Mythology.”

The mythology of the Hawaiians is complicated, and extensive, too much so to enter upon it here, nor is there any one book that gives a full view of

the subject. The various communications of the missionaries scattered through the Missionary Herald, contain about all that I have seen printed on the subject.

“10th If any knowledge of Astronomy.”

Of the system by which the heavenly bodies are regulated, the Hawaiians had no knowledge. With a few of the most noticeable facts in relation to the planets they were acquainted. They were somewhat accurate observers of some of the phenomina of the heavens. There was a class of persons whose profession it was to watch the motions of the stars. The late Hoapili with whom I have often conversed on the subject was accounted one of their most skillful astrologers. From him I learned that they had names for many of the largest stars, and principle constellations. They were acquainted with five planets, which they called “traveling stars.” Hoapili was so much in the habit of observing these, that he could at any moment tell the then present positions of each.

Their names were as follows.

Kawela — Mercury
Naholoholo — Venus
Hoomanalonalo — Jupiter
Holoholopinaau — Mars
Makulu — Saturn

Hoapili said he had heard from others that there was one more traveling star, but he had never recognised it, and was acquainted with only these five. The more distinguished fixed stars and constellations not only had their distinct names, but the people were in the habit of observing them so accurately that they judged of the hour of the night quite as correctly as they did the hour of the day. This remark applies most particularly to the fishermen and those persons whose employment called them to be out considerably in the night.

It was by the particular position of the planets in relation to certain fixed stars and constellations, that the prophets grounded their predictions in relation to the fate of battles, the success of new enterprise &c, &c. The contiguity of these planets to certain fixed stars was considered to be a sure indication of the speedy death of some high chief. The goddess of the volcano was also supposed to hold intercourse with these traveling stars, and from their movements therefore the people often predicted hers.

The motions of the stars in the vicinity of the north pole attracted their attention considerably and were often a subject of dispute among the astrologers. These they said were “traveling stars, but they travel regularly, whereas the others wander here and there.”

Of the true manner of accounting for these phenomina they had not the most distant conception.

Their best chronologists measured time by means both of the moon and fixed stars. They divided the year into twelve months, and each month into thirty days. They had a distinct name for each of the days of the month and commenced the numbering on the first day that the new moon appeared in

the west. This course made it necessary to drop a day about once in two months, and thus reduce their year to twelve lunations instead of three hundred and sixty days, which they numbered according to their *theory*. This being about eleven days less than the sidereal year they discovered the discrepancy, and corrected their reckoning by the stars.

In practice therefore the year varied, having sometimes twelve, and sometimes thirteen lunar months. So also they sometimes numbered twenty nine and sometimes thirty days in a month.

Though their system was thus broken and imperfect, still, as their chronologists could tell the name of the day and the name of the month on which any great event occurred, it was generally easy to reduce their time to ours by a reference to the phase of the moon at the time. But when the change of the moon takes place about the middle of our calendar month then we are liable to a mistake of a whole month in reducing their time to ours. We are also liable to another mistake of a single day from the uncertainty of the day that the moon was discovered in the west. Having nothing to rely upon except merely their memories, they were also liable to numerous mistakes even in their own method. . . .

Eclipses were uniformly considered to be brought about by an attack of the gods on the sun & moon, and always presaged a war, the death of some high chief, or some other disaster.

The ability of foreigners to predict eclipses, and other astronomical phenomena at first created the highest astonishment. The first almanac published by the American missionaries predicting the phases of the moon, eclipses, tides &c in 1834 was received by them with great interest, and tended much to confirm their belief in the testimony of the missionaries every subject.

They however were however themselves in the habit of referring the tides to the action of the moon, and when they could see the moon were able to tell the state of the tides.

Though they thought much of their success depended on their acting as it were in unison with the heavenly bodies, yet as they were unable to calculate even the most simple of all the movements of the planets for any length of time before hand, they were unable to plan their battles or their enterprises with reference to any particular position of those planets, and therefore, when the time arrived and they saw that position to be what they supposed unfavorable, they were often at once discouraged, and gave up their enterprise or fled from their enemies even though not pursued.

Could one of their ancient warriors have known enough of astronomy to have calculated even a few of the more simple celestial phenomena, it would have given him a vast advantage over those who had not that knowledge; for he might then have planned his attacks and his enterprises in conjunction with the heavenly bodies, and his followers seeing their position favorable would have been imbued with undaunted courage while his enemies would have fled in dismay, thinking that they were contending not only with human armies, but with the stars in their courses too.

The first little book which was published containing some of the true principles of astronomy awakened their surprise, and they at once brought forth the common vulgar objections to it.

Hoapili the astrologer mentioned above, said however, respecting the figure of the earth, "Stop, do not be so quick with your objections to the foreign theory. Let us look at it. This is what I have always seen. When I have been far out at sea on fishing excursions, I always first lost sight of the beach—then the houses and trees—then the low mountains and last of all the high ones. So when I returned, I first saw the high mountains, then the lower ones, then the trees and houses, and last of all, the beach. I think these foreigners are right, and that the earth is round.

"11th If any knowledge of Navigation."

The Hawaiians were in the habit of sailing frequently from one Island to another in the group and were frequently out of sight of land, both on these voyages and on their fishing excursions, but still they can hardly be said to have any knowledge of navigation. They were pretty accurate observers of the weather, and of certain atmospheric phenomena, & their observation of these together with the heavenly bodies when in sight, enabled them to sail a little distance from land with considerable safety.

They scarcely ever went out of sight of land except by accident.

When they found themselves in these circumstances, they relied mostly on the heavenly bodies if in night. If not, they were able to judge of the points of compass by the wind and state of the atmosphere, there being considerable difference in the appearance of the weather according to the direction of the wind. The appearance of the clouds in the vicinity of or in the direction of land afforded them another beacon. Probably very few Hawaiians have ever been lost at sea by mistaking the points of compass and sailing away from land. Their disasters arose from the frailty and smallness of their canoes, which being in some manner disabled by stress of weather, they were prevented from shaping their course in the direction they desired.

Their skill in the management of canoes was perhaps unexampled, especially in the surf. But since the chiefs have possessed foreign vessels, there is sailing to a distance in canoes[sic], and the people are probably losing a portion of their skill.

They do well in the management of their own vessels. No one has ever been lost by being driven away from land. The science of navigation is now taught in the Seminary and a considerable number have made proficiency in the study.

"12th Whether they have any domestic happiness"

I think I may answer in direct terms, there was nothing among the Hawaiians that was worthy, or that could even bear the name of domestic happiness in a civilized community.

But it would convey a false idea to leave the subject with merely this remark. In order to do justice to this subject it would be necessary to enter into a full detail of all those positive and negative qualities which are necessary

in order to constitute a heathen, and a barbarian. It would then be necessary to make out a scale by which to mark all the grades between their state and that of christian civilization. But neither your stay at the islands nor my numerous avocations would allow of this.

I will say, however, that in the darkest days of the nation, there were some striking instances of domestic attachment.

Widows and widowers were in some instances known to commit suicied or pine away with grief at the death of their companions. Similar evidences of attachment between parents and children were sometimes exhibited. But these were rare cases, and it is not to be supposed that during the prosperous state even of those families where they existed, there was any thing more than a kind of instinctive affection, which even all the force of heathenism could not eradicate.

Almost all the habits of the people were at variance with the first principles of domestic happinesses.

The highest principle of their religious system was that a man and woman must not eat together.

The marriage institution could hardly be said to exist among them though they had some rules designed and calculated to limit their licenciousness, and impose restraints in relation to other evils.

Traditionary accounts lead me to believe that in former generations, the marriage institution was more regarded than it was when foreigners first came to the Islands. If so there was doubtless then more of domestic happiness. But what seems to afford abundant evidence that no great degree of happiness existed is the fact that in their songs, elegies and other poetic effusions we find no figurative allusions to it, nor any terms even, in the language, adequate to express it.

Another evidence of the same is found in the fact that parents and females especially were unwilling to have children, their uniform wish to commit the care of them to others, especially if numerous, and more than all in the prevalence of infanticide.

Since the introduction of christianity and a regular form of marriage, and some rules regulating the observance of the institution there have been very visible changes for the better, and domestic happiness has doubtless increased.

But the improvement has not been so rapid as many would suppose. I know several families however, the members of which seem to find their principle happiness in each other, and I am confident that the wish which is now very rapidly increasing among all classes of society and among both sexes to become parents, will have an important bearing on this subject, and be the means of introducing a new epoch in the history of the domestic relations of the Hawaiians. . . .

“13th Amusements”

This is too extensive a subject to be taken up at large in this letter. Their amusements were pretty numerous, and many of them of an athletic kind, though not requiring the severest trials of strength.

A favorite amusement of the chiefs was sliding down hill on a long narrow slead, upon which they prostrated themselves, and then having the slead ballanced on the edge of a very steep hill they started it with the foot and were precipitated down the hill with immense velocity often to a distance of half or even a whole mile. Thus they went from the top of Diamond Hill far out upon the plane of Honolulu, and at other places to a much greater distance.

Rolling a smooth round stone was another favorite amusement and one which tended to strengthen the arms more than any other with which I have been acquainted.

On ground where the descent was scarcely perceptible I have seen the stone rolled a hundred and thirty rods.

Throwing the spear and various other exercises with it was also an amusement as well as a military exercise. With this weapon they were very expert.

Playing on the surf board has always been and continues to be a very favorite amusement. As you have doubtless seen this, I need not describe the process.

The dance was an amusement which was practiced perhaps to a greater extent than any other. There was a great variety of dances. Some of them consisted mainly in the recital of songs accompanied with much action as was calculated to give them force. Other seemed to consist mainly in action. Sometimes a single girl was the actress, again, a large number united. Their motions were anything but graceful. Their motions were regulated by music, which consisted of a kind of drumming on various hollow vessels, as calabashes, tubs, and a kind of drum made by drawing a piece of shark skin over a short piece of a hollow log. . . .

Every variety of song was rehearsed and acted on these occasions, from the most sentimental to the most lascivious, and the action always echoed to the sense.

Sometimes a single voice rehearsed the song—sometimes a number chanted in unison.

The first summer I spent in Lahaina scarcely a night passed in which I did not hear the noise of these assemblies, and they were uniformly scenes of lewdness and vice.

But the most numerous class of all their amusements was their games of chance. Of these they were specially fond. These games were peculiar to themselves. The one most practiced by the chiefs was that of placing several bunches of kapas in a row, and then one man took a stone and hid it under one of the tapas. His antagonist guessed the place of the stone, and the one who was oftenest right won the game.

They never played at games of chance without a wager, nor indeed at any game of skill. The wager seemed to constitute the charm of most of their amusements. It was an accompaniment of their down hill slides—their play in the surf—their plays with the spear their rolling the stone—their flying the kite &c. . . .

They gambled away their property of every kind—their clothes—their food—the crops upon their land—the lands themselves—their wives—their husbands—their daughters, and even the very bones of their arms and legs.

At present cards is a common amusement and it is accompanied with its usual evils.

“14th Diseases and the treatment of them by the natives.”

I must refer the answer of this question to Dr. Judd. I will remark however, that formerly there were no physicians, and no medical treatment of diseases whatever. There was a practice however on certain occasions, and especially after eating hastily of some particular kinds of food, of drinking sea water in such quantity as to produce a cathartic operation.

There was an epidemic disease which prevailed in the reign of Alapai, the predecessor of Kalaiopuu, who was king when Cook was here. The practice of medicine took its rise at that time, and from that time there has been a distinct class of practicing physicians. Their number however and their practice was quite limited until a great pestilence which prevailed in time of the reign of Kamehameha I, since which time there has been no want of native physicians or native medicines. For particulars as to the nature and credit of their practice I must refer you to the *Medical Faculty*.

“15th Modes of burial of chiefs and common people.”

After the death of a chief or the king, the corpse was permitted to lie one day, during which time the royal sorcerer was engaged in incantations to procure the death of some person as a sacrifice or peace offering to the gods for the prosperous reign of the new king. The corpse was then carried to the temple where it lay eight days. On the ninth or tenth day it was neatly enclosed in leaves of the dracaena in the same manner as meat is for cooking. The body was then placed in the ground and covered to the depth of about eight inches. A slight fire was then kindled over it so as to keep it at about the natural temperature of the living body. This was for the purpose of hastening the process of putrification. As soon as the flesh could be slipped from the bones the six long bones of the arms, and the six long bones of the legs, were taken out and nicely cleaned in some perfumed waters. The[y] were then fastened together, the bones of the arms standing on the bones of the legs. The head was then taken and having been cleansed in the same manner was placed on the top, and the whole wound up in kapa and deified, if the bones of a king. But if merely a high chief, they were deposited in a cemetery. In times of public commotion the bones of the kings though thus deified were immediately concealed by the friends lest they should be obtained by the enemy and treated with disrespect. Some kings gave charge during their lifetime to have their bones concealed at once. This was the charge of Kamehameha I and it has never been known what was done with his remains.

The common people were usually buried or deposited secretly in caves during the night. Their was a great fear among the people lest their bones should be made use of after their death for arrows or for fish hooks, & it was this which led to secret burials—The present form is the is [sic] the same as in the U.S.A.

“16th Modes of barter or exchange of property.”

There was formily very little exchange of property. Their most valuable article was the birds feathers of which their wreaths and cloaks were made. These were the gold of the country, and were sometimes used as a circulating medium but not often. There were no settled and fixed forms of exchange.

“17th Times of eating & sleeping”

These were very irregular. Those who had a supply of food and fish would often [eat] six or eight times in the twenty four hours. It was a very frequent practice to rise in the night to eat. This was especially true of those who had fish brought in at evening or in the night. The same persons who when fully supplied ate a half a dozen times a day, at another time when they had less to tempt the appetite ate perhaps once a day, and it is no rare thing to go two or three days with scarcely no food at all, and then on the succeeding days eat proportionably more. There was indeed no regularity among any class of people.

They were also as irregular in their hours of sleep as in their meals. The day and the night were much alike in this respect. They seemed scarcely to have a choice. They were not only irregular as to the time but also as to the amount of sleep.

These same irregularities in food and sleep continue to the present time in a great degree. They are greatest among the higher classes.²⁰

“18th Manner of communicating at a distance before the introduction of writing.”

The kings had a class of men whom they called runners who went with great rapidity to carry their messages to the remotest part to which they could go. They also had a select class of men to row canoes on express. The[y] frequently gave to the runner or messenger some sign by which the people might know him to be a true man.

The article generally chosen was some ornament which the people had seen worn by the king. The article chosen by Kamehameha I during the latter part of his reign was a silver coin, or rather a kind of medal about three inches diameter; the same mentioned above in connection with the execution of Kanihonui. A man who carried this medal secured the full confidence of all that he was a true messenger of the king.

Among the common people there was very little communication at a distance. They sent simple messages to each other as they had opportunity but but [sic] rarely trusted important business to be transacted by others, but generally went in person. They had no hieroglyphics or secret symbols by which they could communicate their ideas through the sight. They were therefore were greatly astonished when they found that foreigners had a method of conversing with persons at a distance.

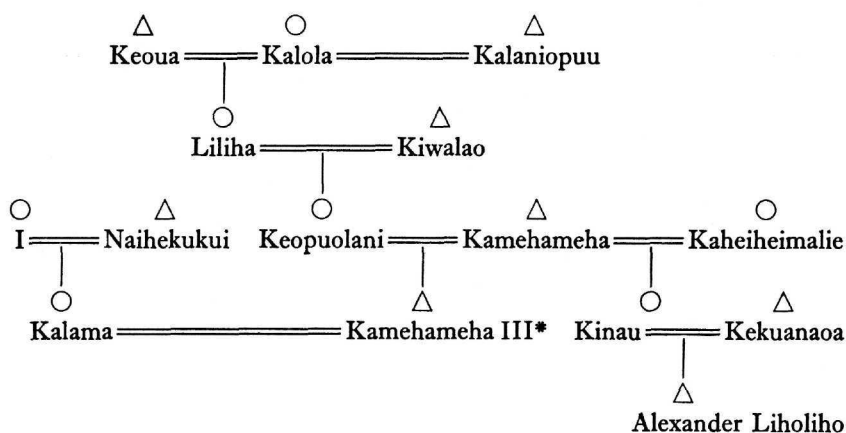
Thus, Sir, in a very hasty and imperfect manner have I attempted the mere outline of a reply to your important questions. I regret my inability to do it in a more perfect manner.

Several of the subjects were too extensive to allow even an outline of an answer in this letter. But what I have written you may rely upon as correct, for you have it not on my authority only but also on the king's as I have read the above to him and he pronounces it the truth.

Be pleased Sir to accept the assurance of the high consideration and este[e]m with which I remain very truly your most obedient servant.

To Charles Wilkes Esq
 Commander of the U.S.A.
 Exploring Expedition

Fig. 1



* King at time of Richards' account

NOTES

- ¹ Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, During the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1845), vol. 4, pp. 31-48.
- ² The only Laea to be found in available chiefly genealogies is Laea-nui-kau-manamana, a male. Samuel M. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* (Honolulu: The Kamehameha Schools Press, 1961), p. 2; Abraham Fornander, *An Account of the Polynesian Race* (London: Trubner, 1880), vol. 2, pp. 76, 114. By traditional accounts the mother of Keakealaniwahine, Keakamahana, was also a ruler of Hawaii island. Kamakau, *op. cit.*, p. 61; Fornander, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
- ³ As Richards' own account suggests, "regular descent of the crown" was itself exceptional. The several principles of succession provided various possibilities of legitimation, and the reigning chief's choice of heir—taking into account also the connections by adoption and residence of potential successors—was probably decisive.

- ⁴ The reference is to Liliha and Kiwalao, both offspring of Kalola (f), the former by Keoua (also father of Kamehameha I) and the latter by Kalaniopuu. See Figure 1. The daughter mentioned in Richards' next passage is Keopuolani.
- ⁵ The phrase "of another" was probably left out in recopying. Richards' observations on the proliferation of overlords in this and the succeeding paragraph perhaps reflect conditions of the earlier nineteenth century, which saw a considerable growth of government and landlord bureaucracy (see, for example, comments of Hitchcock in *Answers to Questions Proposed by R. C. Wyllie* (Honolulu: 1848), p. 38. An incident related by John Ii in *Fragments of Hawaiian History* (Bishop Museum Press, 1959), pp. 76-77, suggests it was not easy in the traditional system for one chief to command the dependants of another.
- ⁶ This is the Kanihonui case, which occurred in 1809, *ibid.*, pp. 50-51. Richards describes it in greater detail below (p. 28).
- ⁷ This segmentary scheme constitutes the official view of Hawaiian territorial organization and was rigorously applied during the Mahele. Testimonies taken from ordinary cultivators during the Mahele, however, indicate considerable regional variation in land terminology, especially in reference to the smaller segments, as well as uncertainty and contradiction in the use of such terms as *'ili 'aina* and *mo'o 'aina* (see *Native and Foreign Testimony, Board of Commissioners to Quiet Land Titles*, AH).
- ⁸ One foresees in this comment the resistance that would be offered by the chiefs just a few years later (1846) to the Great Mahele. But then, for reasons that will become clear later on in Richards' text, the middle chiefs had most to lose from the Mahele, notably the claim on the people's labor that chiefly "ownership" had given them. The entire *konohiki* class was in fact liquidated as a political force by the Mahele. Thus the old chief's remark quoted by Richards can be matched by one of a *kuleana* holder some years later, giving testimony in a Wailuku, Maui, water-rights case: "The common people are konohikis now. Everybody now that has a kuleana of his own is a konohiki" (Olelo, witness in *Sherman Peck et al vs. Edward Bailey*, Supreme Court in Equity 305 [1866-1867]).
- ⁹ This statement of Richards has sometimes been cited (e.g., Ralph Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom 1778-1854* (Honolulu: UH Press, 1947), p. 270) as if in description of traditional Hawaiian economy. But what it would imply, in a primarily subsistence system, is that the chiefs (and their retainers) constituted two-thirds of the population, and every family of farmers supported twice its numbers in non-productive consumers. Such a small proportion of return to the producers as Richards suggests could only refer to the post-European economy of exchange, with local labor and trade of native produce virtually monopolized by the chiefs. Then the decline in the producer's share is only limited by the chiefs' appetite for consumption. From the sandalwood trade on, the Hawaiian chiefs were not noted for their abstinence, nor frequently for their compassion.
- ¹⁰ An extensive reading of "native" and foreign testimonies before the Land Commission (1848-1854) will not support the contention that people commonly held land in different *ahupua'a*. What sometimes occurs is that siblings and first cousins from locally important families are dispersed among several *ahupua'a* of a district (such as Ewa). On the other hand, the ordinary *maka'ainana* did often have claims in different *'ili 'aina* of the same *ahupua'a*, a distribution which—under nineteenth century conditions of proliferation and segmentation in the landlord system—might place them under two or more chiefs at once.
- ¹¹ Although the Constitution of 1840 stipulated that there should be only one *konohiki*-holder over each *maka'ainana*, nothing of the sort was achieved until the Mahele. As Richards' own later statements on the diversion of taxes from the central government imply, there was typically a large pyramid of 'landlords' over any given plot, the lesser holding of the greater, and everyone on top of the cultivator. In 1845, Emerson described the system thus, from the vantage of his mission station in Waialua: "Every land has been regarded as having some owner and many lands have

six or eight owners at the same time. For instance, Waialua, containing perhaps one or two thousand acres in all, has seven lords, one above the other, and all of them over the people, and claim services from them occasionally, if they happen to want it" (*Answers to Questions Proposed by R. C. Wyllie*, p. 45). Hitchcock similarly wrote of Molokai during the same period in reference to the law tabuing one tree to the *konohiki*: "The first question is, who is the *konohiki* of a land? The law evidently supposes but one, at most, to an *ahupuaa*; but these headmen have enlarged the number to suit their convenience, and so it happens that instead of one's trees being *tabu*, the *tabus* equal the number of those made *konohikis*. The other question is, what does the law mean by *laau* or tree? . . . There are lands on this island—and I presume this island is as free from such abuses as any one in the group—where almost every useful leaf, root or tree have been *hoomalu'd* [reserved] for the *konohikis*" (*ibid.*, p. 38).

¹² Under the constraints of the traditional economy, Hawaiian chieftainship was *peripatetic*. Given the considerable amount of taro or sweet potato required in the traditional diet, it would be economically impossible to localize the chiefly retinue, for no one place could support them nor could enough food be carried from a distance to maintain both the carriers and those for whom it was destined. (Cf. W. D. Alexander's translation of F. J. F. Meyen's account of the Hawaiian Islands during his visit in 1831.) Consequently, the greater the chief, the more mobile he was, constantly on circuit through his domain. One of the manifestations of this in a later time is the difficulty experienced by historians in deciding which, among Honolulu, Lahaina and Kailua, was the capital of the early monarchy.

¹³ The cutting on "shares" does not refer to the common people but in all probability to chiefs, as the former were excluded from direct participation in the sandalwood trade virtually to its end. Their contribution was as bound and unpaid labor: bound, on pain of losing their house and land (Cf. G. F. Mathison, *Narrative of a visit . . . 1821 and 1822* (London: Chas. Knight, 1825), 412-413; 451); unpaid, as the obligation to work for the chiefs was in the nature of a rent. The tax law of December 1826—for the liquidation of the chiefs' debts to American merchants—did allow every man to keep the half of the one picul (133-1/3 lbs.) he was to cut (see R. C. Wyllie, Report of the Minister of Foreign Relations, 1855, pp. 2-4; AH). But "this is the first time the common people have been allowed to sell it" (Charlton to Canning, 10/15/1827, FO & EX, AH). The succeeding paragraphs in Richards' letter document as well the exclusion of ordinary Hawaiians from craft and entrepreneurial positions in the developing market economy.

¹⁴ Kamakau records that people who prepared gourds for utensils named their finished products for their ancestors "so that a chief would not snatch them away" (Newspaper *Ke Au Okoa* December 9, 1869).

¹⁵ Although the tactic seems devious and far-fetched, Jarves cites a comparable instance in Kauai in the early 1840's. The governess there, in preparation for a visit from the King, selected a site for the new houses which, according to custom, were to be built for him and his suite. She chose a site near her own lands, one she knew would be undesirable for the King's purpose, and had his men build there. As she had anticipated, the King did not occupy the houses, and when he left the island the governess appropriated them, "and thus acquired two good houses at no expense to herself" (James Jarves, *Scenes and Scenery in the Sandwich Islands . . .* (Boston: Munroe, 1844), p. 115).

¹⁶ One sees in this diversion of revenue one of the reasons for the Great Mahele not generally discussed. In stipulating but one landlord over each land section (*ahupua'a* or *'ili'aina*), and giving *kuleanas* to such cultivators as made their claim, the Mahele at one stroke eliminated the large class of intermediate 'landlords' and their claim on the people's labor. The former then disappear, as did their levy on the economy, yielding to the dominance of commercial (mainly American) interests. At the same time, the people, such as were left, were freed by the abrogation of labor-taxes to enter more readily into the market sector, often as wage-laborers. It should be noted

that at this time (later 1840's), the money economy came into full swing, even in rural areas, and there was some shortage of willing labor (Richard Greer, "Honolulu in 1847," *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, vol. 4, (1970), pp. 59-88 (p. 70).

Although the Mahele is usually understood as the preparation of a land-grab by foreigners, it seems to respond more fundamentally to this general transformation of the economy and redefinition of the economic classes. For the monarchy it meant a severing of dependence on the landlord system, adapted from traditional custom, but costly in proportion to the proliferation of konohikis and their agents. As for the people, the security of tenure and freedom from labor obligations afforded by the Mahele, rather than tightening their relation to the land gave them greater opportunity to leave it—and, of course, to lose it.

¹⁷ Richards' estimate on executions may be underestimated. In Kauai on one day of 1834, four persons were hanged for two murders, each committed by a pair of culprits (Journal of Mercy Partridge Whitney, entries of April 12 and May 6, 1834, HMCS*).

¹⁸ This victim was Haalou (whose wife Sarai Hiwauli later married John Ii). The incident is related by Kamakau (*op. cit.*, p. 255), Hiram Bingham (*A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sandwich Islands* (New York: Sherman Converse, 1847, p. 180), and Marin (Ross Gast and Agnes Conrad, *Don Francisco de Paula Marin* (Honolulu: UH Press for The Hawaiian Historical Society, 1973, p. 270). It did occur in 1822.

¹⁹ This was Kanemakakini (Kamakau, *op. cit.*, p. 267).

²⁰ This irregularity of production and rest is a common feature of Polynesian systems of production for use. As the objectives of production are finite and specific (unlike an abstract "wealth"), work tends to cut off when there is no present need of it (compare C. S. Stewart, *Journal of a Residence in the Sandwich Islands in the years 1823, 1824, and 1825* (London: Fisher, Son, & Jackson, 1828), p. 111). Even under the market system this traditional Hawaiian work ethic asserted itself, and of course the oppression of chiefs and the barriers placed on the people's direct participation in the commercial economy during the earlier nineteenth century did little to encourage otherwise.

* Cited with permission of the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society.