

SUBMITTED BY J. SUSAN CORLEY AND
M. PUAKEA NOGELMEIER

Notes & Queries

Kalanimoku's Lost Letter

THE DISCOVERY

An important, undelivered letter from Regent Kalanimoku to his king, Kamehameha II (who preferred to be called Liholiho¹), turned up unexpectedly. It was during a search for information about Missionary William Ellis' role in planning Liholiho's 1823–1824 trip to England to meet with George IV.² The London Missionary Society (LMS) for which Mr. Ellis labored became the Council for World Mission (CWM) in 1977, and all of the LMS papers and files now belong to that body.³ CWM chose the Special Collections library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London as the repository for its voluminous LMS collection. Formal, written permission from archival authorities of the CWM must be granted to the reader and to the SOAS Archivist before the reader can access the LMS files. There among the LMS' South Seas Incoming Correspondence for the years 1823 to 1825—not cataloged or annotated in any way—lies Kalanimoku's undelivered letter.

Liholiho never received Kalanimoku's June 2 letter for the king died of the measles in London on July 14, 1824. William Ellis, in Honolulu until the fall of 1824, does not appear to have forwarded the letter to London for delivery, even though Ellis would not learn

of Liholiho's death until early 1825.⁴ William Ellis died himself in 1872, and his missionary letters and papers—with Kalanimoku's letter tucked in among them—became a part of the LMS archives.

THE LETTER

The two-page text of this newly-discovered letter is written in large cursive letters, in the Hawaiian language, using the 1824 alphabet. The handwriting for the body of the letter is that of William Ellis, but the signature, in a different hand, is clear and unmistakable: *Karaimoku*. Dated at O'ahu, June 2, 1824, Kalanimoku begins by giving his king the local news. Several *ali'i* have died, including King Kaumuali'i, and Kalanimoku has given their lands to Kauikeaouli (Liholiho's younger brother and chosen successor) in accordance with Liholiho's prior instructions; Liholiho's favorite ship, *Ha'aheo* (formerly known as *Cleopatra's Barge*), has been wrecked; Kalanimoku is hard at work paying off their sandalwood debts; there is much sickness at O'ahu. Plaintively, Kalanimoku closes his letter by urging Liholiho that "*e hoi mai oe ia nei* [you should come back]." William Ellis appended a postscript, sending his own *aloha* to Liholiho in "*Beritani*."⁵

TRANSLATION CHALLENGES

Like most Hawaiian-language material from the period of emerging Hawaiian literacy, this letter poses challenges for translators and researchers. Spelling, word divisions, punctuation and capitalization are inconsistent within and between documents in the early days of written Hawaiian, and so the meaning can be difficult to ascertain. But these are simple mechanical difficulties. The greater challenges involve the interpretation of historical and cultural references that such documents contain.

The letter is written in Rev. William Ellis' clear hand. He spells the name of the king's heir, Kauikeaouli as *Kauikeoule*, but otherwise his spelling and use of capitals is quite accurate. One name, though, is particularly unclear: *Pihoo kane a ka rora* has many possible interpretations. It could be a single name, "*Pihookaneakarora*", or a shorter name, "*Pihoo*", with the qualifier "*kane a Kalola*", husband of Kalola (Karora/Kalola being a name carried by several chiefesses of the period). It

could also be interpreted as “*Pihoo*, male, child of *Kalola*” or “*Pihoo*, male, and *Kalola*”. The latter would refer to two separate deaths, but there is no record of one of the *Kalola* chiefesses dying at that time.

The language of Kalanimoku's letter comes from an era and a social network that is unevenly documented. While the overall content and tenor of the note are relatively clear, some of the specifics within it are uncertain or open to multiple, and possibly erroneous, interpretations. Like the examples below, some of these specifics can be clarified by cross-referencing the letter with the historical record and accessible documents of the day, while others provide puzzles for researchers and historians to solve.

Personal names were often used with more familiarity in court circles than has been documented. In this letter, the name Ke'eumoku is mentioned twice in the list of chiefly deaths, once with the clarification of “*ku ai i ka pu*” [lit.-who traded guns or shot by a gun] and second directly afterwards, followed by the word *horii* [no recorded meaning, possibly a part of his name], and the information that he was taken to Kailua. Chief Hoapili also wrote to Liholiho while the king was in England, and he, too, mentions that “the two Keeaumokus” have died.⁶ Hoapili adds no clues which could solve the mystery of who the first Ke'eumoku was, whether he was shot, or whether he was trading guns. The second Ke'eumoku is apparently Kahekili Ke'eumoku, brother of Ka'ahumanu, for whom a Christian burial at sea was held in Honolulu while his body was secretly returned to Kailua, Hawai'i, for interment.⁷ The qualifying term *horii* also remains a riddle.

Among the eight or nine “deaths” listed, one is that of “*Haaheo*”, which is actually a reference to Liholiho's pleasure ship, once known as *Cleopatra's Barge*. Teasing out the specifics of such historical references is often beyond the scope of a translator's efforts.

Another concern for translators is to find appropriate interpretations for words and phrases that were idiomatic to the time. Multiple possibilities must be considered for words like *olelo* [statement, message, report, advice, etc.], *tauo'ha* [command, bequest, directive, will, etc.], *make* [dead, defeated, overwhelmed, beset, etc.], and many others. What may seem to be simple word preference can be historically directed: 'E'eka, who is listed among the *make* [dead?] in Kalanimoku's letter of June 2, is mentioned in Hoapili's letter of September 13 as being *ma'i* [ill]. Whether she was merely ill or already dead when

Oahu June 2^d 1824

Aroha ino oi e Pihoriko,

Eia tau wahi olilo ia oe, Ua pau
makou o anei i ka make i ka mai.
Ua make Heaumoku ku ai i ka pu.
Ua make Heaumoku horii ua hoihoi
ia i Kairua. Ua make o Pihookame
a ka rora. Ua make o Kirivehe.
Ua make o Eka. Ua make o
Taumuarii; po aiva aenei ka ma-
ke ana. Na Pakaka oia i make
ai ua hoihoiia ma Lahaina a
ua waihoia i roko o ka hale me
Keopuolani, pela ia i tauoha
ai iaie. Tauoha mai oia iaie
i te Aina ia Tanai, i Kanaka
i ka waiwai, a i ka aina ona a
pau roa, e malama wau a
hiti mai oe. Ua make Kavero
Ua make o Kaheo buhia i ka
makani, tau i uka, mahaka
ihora. Ua horo ka Kakauiwahie
i Kahiki me William Sana,

uku mai oia iau i ka Sala.
Aore i pau ke aie a kakou, ke
hana nei nowau, ma muri pa-
ha pau. Ma muri paha e
pau roa makou o a nei i ka
make i ka mai, e hoi mai oe
ia nei.

Ola haavi au i ka aina o ka
poe i make aenei ia Kauikes
ule, pela oe i tauoha mai iau

11. Aroha ia Hamahamau
Aroha ino oe, i ora oe
i ke Akua a i kana
Heiki. Karamoku

Aroha ino oe e Rihorihoro
i ka noho ana i Beritani
e ake au i hoi vave mai oe

M. Ellis

Kalanimoku wrote his letter is a point to be verified, and it would affect the final interpretation of the letter.

The greeting *Aloha ino*, used by both Kalanimoku and Rev. Ellis, also poses difficulties for translation. Common today as a condolence or an expression of sorrow or grief [lit. alas, woe, what a pity, etc.], the salutation does not appear to carry that connotation in Kalanimoku's letter, and yet the choice of that greeting from among the many others current at the time shows an inclusion of the intensity that the word *'ino* reflects. While the same greeting appears in a number of other letters of the time, it is often replaced by other salutations, like *aloha wale* and *aloha nui*. All of the various greetings have been glossed in translations as "greetings", "fond greetings", or "fond regards". The use of *Aloha ino* as an opening for such serious correspondence might well be considered to express something more weighty, like "intense concern" or "profound regard". It certainly incorporates a seriousness of tone that challenges the translator to be both interpreter and wordsmith.

While these observations relate to this one letter by Kalanimoku, the same kinds of considerations could be productively applied to the other letters of the time in order to reconsider their historically accepted translations. In spite of the uncertainties about how the language affects some of the detail within this letter, however, the overall nature of the letter as a report to one's respected leader is clear.

THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

It is the nature of this letter that makes it historically significant beyond simple curiosity. Liholiho had well-known personal challenges in performing his role as sovereign, and there is general historical agreement that his departure enabled Regents Kalanimoku and Ka'ahumanu to govern the kingdom with steadier hands.⁸ Given that, it is tempting to conclude that his *ali'i* would have secretly cheered Kamehameha II's departure and feared his return. This newly-discovered letter, however, amplifies similar sentiments from three other primary source letters to refute such a conclusion.

Ka'ahumanu wrote the first of these other three letters on January 1, 1824, shortly after Liholiho's November 27, 1823 departure. She sends her *aloha*, anticipates his return, and assures her king that

"under the influence of your brother [meaning Kalanimoku], all is well in your lands here."⁹ Kalanimoku wrote another, earlier letter to Liholiho dated March 12, 1824 in which he asks Liholiho "if you are in England," saying "you must write to us so that we may see and hear of your arrival there and thereby make us glad." Kalanimoku closes his March 12 letter with the plea: "You have seen England, come home."¹⁰ Chief Hoapili wrote the third letter on September 13, 1824, unaware that Liholiho had died in London two months' previously. Hoapili echoes Kalanimoku when he urges his king to come home: "You have seen your Lord of the land, come home."¹¹ In a letter to his regents during his stay in England (his only letter home), Liholiho himself asserts his kingly supremacy and anticipates his return to his kingdom.¹² Taken together, these letters demonstrate that his most important *ali'i* steadfastly regarded the absent Liholiho as their king and hoped for his speedy return. Furthermore, the letters demonstrate that their regard for him and longing for his return continued undiminished despite their king's absence of several months.

Kalanimoku's June 2, 1824 letter amplifies the sentiments expressed in the chiefs' other three letters, and this new discovery should provide the final proof historians need to discard any temptation to conclude that his principal *ali'i* secretly wanted Liholiho "out of the way."

NOTES

¹ This article uses the names "Kalanimoku" and "Liholiho," rather than "Karaimoku" and "Rihoriho" as they appear in the letter. After 1824, the conventional Hawaiian alphabet substituted the letter "l" for the letter "r."

² William Ellis notes 30 November 1823, CWM/LMS/South Seas/Incoming Correspondence 1823–1825/Box 4 Folder 3, School of Oriental and African Studies, Univ. of London (hereafter SOAS). Ellis' notes state that Liholiho sought from George IV a promise of British protection for his kingdom; William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches—Hawaii* (Rutland, Vt. And Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company 1969), 450.

³ Introduction to "Guide to the Council for World Mission Collection," SOAS Library Publication.

⁴ Ellis left Honolulu September 18, 1824 and probably learned of Liholiho's death after he arrived at Boston March 25, 1825. Rhys Richards, *Honolulu Centre of Trans-Pacific Trade, Shipping Arrivals and Departures 1820 to 1840* (Canberra: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau and HHS, 2000), 61; *MH* 21/9 (1825): 289.

⁵ Karaimoku [Kalanimoku] to Rihoriho [Kamehameha II], 2 June 1824, Hawai-

ian language, CWM/LMS/South Seas/Incoming Correspondence 1823–1825/Box 4 Folder 6 Packet A, SOAS.

- ⁶ Hoapili to Rihoriho [Kamehameha II], 13 September 1824, archival translation from Hawaiian into English, F. O. & Ex. 402-2-16, AH.
- ⁷ Samuel M. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* (Honolulu: The Kamehameha Schools Press, 1961), 254.
- ⁸ Beginning with the Rev. Sheldon Dibble, *History of the General View of the Sandwich Islands' Mission* (New York: Taylor & Dodd, 1839), 88–89. Dibble gives the credit solely to Ka'ahumanu, but later historians acknowledge Kalanimoku's role, for example, Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sandwich Island; or the Civil Religious, and Political History of Those Islands* (Canandaigua, NY: H. D. Goodwin, 1855), 202–203, 205; Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom, Volume 1 1778–1854, Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: The Univ. Press of Hawaii, 1978), 117.
- ⁹ William Richards, *Memoir of Keopuolani, Late Queen of the Sandwich Islands* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1825), 54–55.
- ¹⁰ Karaimoku [Kalanimoku] to Rihoriho [Kamehameha II], 12 March 1824, archival translation from Hawaiian into English, F.O. & Ex. 402-2-14, AH.
- ¹¹ Hoapili to Rihoriho [Kamehameha II], 13 September 1824, AH.
- ¹² Iolani [Kamehameha II] to Paalua [Kalanimoku], Ka'akumu [Ka'ahumanu], and my younger brother, Kamahoemuwa [n.d. July] 1824, translated from Hawaiian into English by Kamehameha IV, F. O. & Ex. 402-2-14, AH.

Kalanimoku's Lost Letter

Oahu, June 2nd 1824

Profound regards to you, Rihoriho,¹

Here is my message to you. We here have been swept off by death from illness. Keeaumoku, shot by a gun,² has died. Keeaumoku *horii*³ died, and was taken back to Kailua. Pihookaneakarora⁴ has died. Kiriwehe⁵ is dead. Eeka is dead. Taumuarii⁶ has died, the death occurring nine days ago. He died at Pakaka, and was taken back to Lahaina and placed in the tomb with Keopuolani,⁷ for that is what he had commanded me. He left me the island, Kauai, the people, the assets, and all of his lands, that I should take care of them until you return. Kaverō⁸ has died. *Haaheo*⁹ is a ruin, having been blown by the wind onto the shore and broken up. The *Makauwahie* (ship) sailed to Kahiki with William Dana; he paid me in cash. Our debts are not completely cleared; I am acting on it, and perhaps they will be done with later. Later, those of us here may all be dead from sickness; you should come back.

I have given the land of those who recently died to Kauikeoule,¹⁰ as you commanded.

Loving regards to Kamehamalu

Kalanimoku's June 2, 1824, letter translated from Hawaiian into English by Dr. Puakea Nogelmeier, associate professor of Hawaiian language, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and Hawaiian language translator.

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Intense regards to you, may God and his Son save you

Karaimoku¹¹

Deep regards to you, Rihoriho, staying there in Britain; I yearn for
your quick return

Wm. Ellis

NOTES

- ¹ Liholiho in modern spelling. All names in this translation are as presented in the original in translation, but spelled in modern orthography in the footnotes.
- ² Or *who traded guns*.
- ³ Kahekili Ke'eaumoku. No meaning available for *horii*, which may be a part of the name, or a familiarizing qualifier to distinguish him from the previously-mentioned Ke'eaumoku.
- ⁴ Possibly Piho'o, husband of Kalola; Piho'o, male, child of Kalola; or Pihoo, male *and* Kalola. Several chiefesses of the period carried the name Kalola.
- ⁵ Kiliwehi, chiefess and wife of Kamehamehakau'oko'a.
- ⁶ Kaumuali'i, ruling chief of Kaua'i and husband of Ka'ahumanu.
- ⁷ The king's mother, who had died previously.
- ⁸ Kawelo, probably Kawelookalani, one of Liholiho's administrative chiefs.
- ⁹ Liholiho's yacht, not a person.
- ¹⁰ Kauikeaouli, the king's younger brother and heir.
- ¹¹ Kalanimoku, one of the regents in Liholiho's absence.