

He Ua lā he Ua

An Essay by Kīhei de Silva

Haku mele: Unknown.

Date: Before 1847. One tradition suggests that the performance history of this mele includes the greeting of Captain Cook at Kealakekua.

Sources: 1. “Hula Kolani,” Nathaniel Emerson, *Unwritten Literature*, 216-217.
2. “He Ua lā he Ua,” as taught to Māpuana de Silva by Edith McKenzie in a State Council on Hawaiian Heritage hula workshop, 1980.

Discography: 1. “Hula Kōlani,” Edith Kanaka‘ole, *Ha‘aku‘i Pele i Hawai‘i*, Hula Records, 560. This rendition ends with the kāhea, “He Inoa no Kauikeaouli.”
2. “Hula Kolani / ‘O Lono ‘Oe,” Kaumakaiwa Kanaka‘ole, *Ha‘i Kūpuna*, Hula Records CDHS-626.
3. “Hula Kolani no Lono,” Keali‘i Reichel, *Kūkahi – Live in Concert*, DVD, 2007.

Text below: Emerson, *Unwritten Literature*, “Hula Kolani,” 216-217. Orthographic editing and translation: Kīhei de Silva.

Emerson classifies “He Ua lā he Ua” as a hula kōlani: “a hula of gentle, gracious action, acted and sung [without instrumental accompaniment], while the performers kept a sitting position.¹ Our tradition defines the kōlani as a hula kuhi whose specific purpose is that of honoring a chief.² Edith McKenzie introduced the mele to us in 1980 at Kalōpā, Hawai‘i, in a three-day hula workshop sponsored by Keahi Allen and the State Council on Hawaiian Heritage. Aunty Edith cited Emerson, provided us with his text and translation, and taught us her version of the kuhi with which the words of “He Ua lā he Ua” are accompanied.³

Emerson explains the mele as belonging to “the number chosen for presentation before the king (Kauikeaouli, Kamehameha III) while on a tour of Oahu in the year 1846 or 1847.” It was performed for him in:

... the amphitheater of Maunawili, a valley separated from Waimanalo only by a rampart of hills. At one’s back are the abrupt walls of Konahuanui; at the right, and encroaching so as almost to shut in the front, stands the knife-edge of Olomana; to the left range the furzy hills of Ulamawao [Ulumawao]; while directly to the front, looking north, winds the green valley, whose waters, before reaching the ocean, spread out into the fish-ponds and duck swamps of Kailua. It would seem as if this must have been the very picture the idyllic poet had in mind. This smiling, yet rock-walled, amphitheater was the vast dance-hall of Lono--*Halau loa o Lono* (verse 4)--whose walls were deafened, stunned (*pa-á-a*, verse 6), by the tumult and uproar of the multitude that always followed in the wake of a king, a multitude whose night-long revels banished sleep: *Moe pono ole ko’u po* (verse 17).⁴

Emerson also makes note of the ambiguous nature of this mele. It was offered – in kōlani fashion – to honor the visiting ali‘i and his entourage, but it also expresses a certain amount of un-kōlani resentment over the disrupted routines, sleepless nights, and depleted food supplies that such visits must have caused.

One can not fail to perceive a vein of gentle sarcasm cropping up in this idyll, softened, however, by a spirit of honest good feeling. Witness the following: *Noe-noe* (verse 3), primarily meaning cloudy, conveys also the idea of agreeable coolness and refreshment. Again, while the multitude that follows the king is compared to the ravenous man-eating *Niuhi* (verse 19), the final remark as to the rarity of the king’s visits, *He loa o ka hiki’na* (verse 21), may be taken not only as a salve to atone for the satire, but as a sly self-gratulation that the affliction is not to be soon repeated.⁵

Emerson might even be too generous in his assessment of this sarcastic undertone as “gentle,” “softened by good feeling,” and ameliorated with “atoning salve.” The cumulative effect of the phrases *pā ‘ā‘ā nā pali* (the cliffs are deafened, dumb-struck), *pohā kō‘ele‘ele* (breaking out in storm), *he ‘eu ia no ka lā hiki* (it is the mischief of the coming day), *ka hana a ke ōla‘i nui* (the work of the terrible earthquake), *moe pono ‘ole ko‘u pō* (my nights are sleepless), and *nā niho ‘ai kalakala a ka niuhi* (the relentless tearing teeth of the man-eating shark) – when viewed in the context of a royal tour and capped by the sentiment “it will be a long time before all is noa” – seems more biting than gentle, and raises questions about the condition of Kailua and its people at the time of Kauikeaouli’s 1846 or ’47 visit.

The kingdom’s tax assessment of the ahupua‘a – prepared on December 11, 1846, by Ioela Kuaana – provides us with the following picture:

- there were only 749 people living in all of the once-thriving district,
- the center of population density was in the ‘ili of Ka‘elepulu (now Enchanted Lakes) where 100 individuals were counted,
- in Maunawili Valley, 43 people were counted in the ‘ili of Pālāwai (below what is now Maunawili Community Park) and 20 more were tallied in the ‘ili of Maunawili (now the site of the “old” Irwin/Boyd Estate),
- of the 356 garden plots that had been farmed in previous years, barely 100 were still in cultivation; the rest had been abandoned,
- 14 of these plots, mostly lo‘i kalo, were in Maunawili Valley.⁶

The king and his entourage, then, were hosted at Maunawili – and honored with “He Ua lā he Ua” – by no more than 63 actual residents of the valley who had, at their disposal, no more than 14 actively cultivated garden plots between them. In two years, the Mahele of Kauikeaouli would disrupt their already tenuous relationship with their land, and in five more years, a new wave of measles and smallpox would fall just short of decimating the entire resident population. One survivor was asked in 1895 if any of the planters from the days of Kauikeaouli were still alive. “No there is none of those old folks living,” she answered, “They are all dead excepting myself and my foster mother...” When asked

about the children of these planters, she replied: “The biggest portion of them have died off and some of them are gone here and there and all around, and at present I don’t know where they are.”⁷

“He Ua lā he Ua,” in the mouths of these planters and their children, is a thing of love, courage, and defiance. It was voiced, with ironic undertones that no one could have missed, by a decimated people who chose to honor their ali‘i with a hospitality they could not afford. So they loved him and they scolded him with words that recalled a time when the niuhi could be fed without hardship and when the rise of Makali‘i signaled a time of peace and plenty.

On a more academic line of thought: the irony of word and context in “He Ua lā he Ua” invites us to make a distinction between an honorific composition and an honorific mode of performance. The language of “He Ua” is too double-edged to qualify as the former, but the mele was offered to Kamehameha III as a dignified hula noho. This suggests that the term “kōlani” is defined – to some extent, at least – by delivery not content. “He Ua” is classified as kōlani because it was presented in a specific and decorous manner, not because its words are exclusively those of praise, admiration, and respect – they aren’t. This also suggests that the mele can be performed in modes other than the kōlani with which it was delivered in Maunawili in 1846 or ’47. The kōlani was perhaps one of several vessels in which the words could be appropriately delivered.

We have decided to chant (not dance) “He Ua lā he Ua” at the very end of our hula performance. We dance “‘O ‘Oe nō Paha Ia e ka Lau o ke Aloha” for the absent mo‘o guardian of the former fishpond into which about half of the water of Maunawili still drains.⁸ And we chant “He Ua lā” in the same spirit of love and defiance with which it was voiced in the time of Kauikeaouli. The mele, in our mouths, is a call for the rejuvenation our homeland in the life-giving rain of Lono. It pays homage, even if slightly ironic, to the memory of Kamehameha III and his well-meant but ill-conceived attempts to restore his people to prosperity. It asks for the release of our homeland from the teeth of contemporary land sharks. And it offers up a prayer for patience in our long wait for the return of the benevolent Hauwahine: she who pre-dates all sharks and on whom the pono of Kailua – man to man, man to land, and man to akua – was founded.

It says that, against all odds, we are still here.

He Ua Lā he Ua

He ua lā, he ua,
He ua pi‘i mai;
Noenoe hālau,
Hālau loa o Lono.
Ō lono ‘oe;⁹
Pā ‘ā‘ā nā pali
I ka hana a ‘Ikuā

Pohā kō‘ele‘ele.
A Welehu ka malama,
Noho i Makali‘i;¹⁰
Li‘ili‘i ka hana.
Aia a e‘eu,
He ‘eu ia no ka lā hiki.
Hiki mai ka lani,
Nāueue ka honua,
Ka hana a ke ōla‘i nui:
Moe pono ‘ole ko‘u pō
Nā niho ‘ai kalakala,
Ka hana a ka niuhi
‘Ā mau i ke kai loa.
He loa o ka hikina.
A ua noa, a ua noa.

A rain, a rain
A rain travels inland
Covering the hālau in mist
The long hālau of Lono
Listen!
The cliffs are stunned
By the clamor of ‘Ikuā
A month that breaks out in storm
And then the month Welehu
Takes up residence in Makali‘i
Little work can be done
Unless one is bestirred
It is a prank of the coming day
The royal one approaches
The earth trembles
The work of the terrible earthquake
My nights are sleepless
Because of teeth that tear into food
The work of the man-eating shark
Ever-burning in the vast ocean
Long is the coming
Until all is free, is free.

Notes:

1. Nathaniel Emerson, *Unwritten Literature*, 216.
2. cf. Pukui, *Hawaiian Dictionary*, “kōlani,” 149.

3. Unfortunately, we don't know the genesis of this choreography.
4. Emerson, 217.
5. Ibid.
6. Tax Assessments Prepared by Ioela Kuaana, Tax Assessor of the Ahupuaa of Kailua, on December 11, 1946. Published by Carol Silva, "Kailua in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in Kailua Historical Society *Kailua*, Kailua: 2009, 9-10.
7. Testimony of Hikaalani (wahine) before the Commissioner of Private Ways and Water Rights for the District of Koolaupoko, Island of Oahu, 1895. *Record of Proceedings: Wong Leong et al. v. W.G. Irwin*, 1895: 47-55. Kaneohe Ranch Co.
8. The other half is diverted to Waimānalo by means of a flume and tunnel system through Aniani ridge.
9. This line has also been transcribed and glossed as "'O Lono 'oe – You are Lono" and gives rise to the belief that the mele might have been composed in honor of the god Lono.
10. Emerson offers the following explanation for the sequence of months that begins in line 7 with 'Ikuā and closes in line 10 with Makali'i: "These were months in the Hawaiian year corresponding to a part of September, October and November, and a part of December. The Hawaiian year began when the Pleiades (*Makali'i*) rose at sunset (about November 20), and was divided into twelve lunar months of twenty-nine or thirty days each. The names of the months differed somewhat in the different parts of the group. The month *Ikuwá* is said to have been so named from its being the season of thunderstorms. ... *Maka-li'i* (verse 10) was not only the name of a month and the name applied to the Pleiades, but was also a name given the cool, the rainy, season. The name more commonly given this season was *Hooilo*. The Makahiki period, continuing four months, occurred at this time of the year. This was a season when the people rested from unnecessary labor and devoted themselves to festivals, games, and special religious observances. Allusion is made to this avoidance of toil in the words *Li'ili'i ka hana* (verse 11)." *Unwritten Literature*, 218.

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