Nānā a‘e Au a‘o Ahiki / Ki‘eki‘e i Luna ke Kū ‘o Ahiki

An Essay by Kīhei de Silva

Haku mele: Unknown.

Sources:
1. “Nana ae au a o Ahiki,” from Samuel Keko‘owai’s mo‘olelo *Makalei ka Laau Pii Ona a ka I‘a…*, in *Nupepa Kuokoa*, January 13, 1922.
2. “Kiekie iluna ke ku o Ahiki,” from Samuel Keko‘owai’s mo‘olelo, *Makalei ka Laau Pii Ona a ka I‘a…*, in *Nupepa Kuokoa*, February 10, 1922.
3. “Ki‘eki‘e i luna ke kū o Ahiki,” from the collection of Aunty Sally Wood Naluai as shared with us in 1986.
4. “Kiekie i luna ke ku a A[h]iki,” in “He Moolelo Kaao no Hiiaka-i-ka-poli-o-Pele,” *Ka Hoku o Hawaii*, December 15, 1925.

Our text: *Nupepa Kuokoa*, 1-13-1922 (“Nānā”) and Sally Wood Naluai (“Ki‘eki‘e”);[1] translation and orthography by Kīhei de Silva.

These are companion chants; they complement each other. Both were published in early installments of Samuel Keko‘owai’s legend of the Mākālei, and both speak of the unparalleled beauty and prosperity of Kailua, Ko‘olaupoko, O‘ahu. The world encompassed by both chants is framed by a mountain peak above and a fishpond below. The two, Ahiki and Kawainui, are male and female, and their intimate, life-producing relationship is expressed in the gentle caress of the Malanai breeze as it moves through the reeds of Mokulana, a “floating island” on the fringes of the fish-swollen pond. Both chants, moreover, are calling chants. One sends its sweet whistle across the Kailua plain, calling the fish to swarm and the heart to attend. The other invites a lover/guest to enter and enjoy: “Imagine the two of us immersed in this beauty; it would be a shame if you didn’t join in.” Both, finally, are calls to return. They remind us of a harmony from which the worlds of story, author, and audience have fallen. They ask us to raise again the Mākālei branch of a rejuvenated lāhui.

“Nānā a‘e Au a‘o Ahiki,” appears in the January 3, 1922, edition of *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*. It is offered by Keko‘owai as a poetic summary of his lengthy discussion of the four powers of the Mākālei branch when wielded by its keeper, Haumea. It has the power to cause pregnancy: “he hoohapai keiki.” It has the power to ease the travails of pregnancy: “he hoohanau keiki.” It has the power to restore the body to a youthful state: “ka hoololi ana i ka helehelena…[he] hooui kino.” And it has the power to attract multitudes of open-mouthed fish: “ka pipili pikokoi o ka i‘a ma kona wahi e ku ai.” These are the things that can happen when the branch is held to the body, and the Mākālei’s power is evident, Keko‘owai concludes, in “kekahi mau lalani hooui kino o keia mele” – in several rejuvenatory lines of the following mele, “Nānā a‘e Au a‘o Ahiki.”

Keko‘owai does not assign a speaker or specific, story-line context to this mele, but he presents “Nānā a‘e Au” in the same January installment of his mo‘olelo that tells how

Kahinihini‘ula uses the branch to lead the fish swarms of Kawainui to their hiding place in the upper Maunawili Valley pool of Hālauwai. The mele would fit easily into the boy’s mouth as he gazes at Ahiki and Mokulana from the mākāha at the pond’s lower reach. He is, at this moment, a youthful manifestation of his great-great-grandmother Haumea as he sends his pied-piper’s call out over the water and sets in motion the transformational process by which order, vigor, and pono are restored to Kailua.

“Ki‘eki‘e i Luna ke Kū ‘o Ahiki” appears in the February 10, 1922, issue of *Kuokoa* in the fifth of almost 100 installments of the Mākālei legend. Unlike “Nānā a‘e Au,” this mele enjoys a more specific “Mākālei” voice and story-line context. Keko‘owai explains that it was skillfully composed by the people of Kailua in joyful tribute to the name and good works of their overseer chief, Ahiki. Indeed, the magnitude of Ahiki’s generosity and kind leadership was such that “me he mea la, aole lakou he poe okoa, aka, he ohana koko ponoi no keia konohiki a ka lokomaikai nui wale” – it was as if they were not a separate people, but of the same family and blood as this extraordinarily good-hearted konohiki. So great, in fact, was their esteem for Ahiki that they gave his name to one of the Olomana peaks, and “ua paa ia inoa ahiki loa mai ia kaua e ka mea heluhelu i keia la” – and this name has held fast all the long way to us, O reader, in this our own day.

This, then, is the back-story for the Ahiki of “Ki‘eki‘e i Luna.” He is both man and mountain, agent of pono and symbol of pono. In the course of Keko‘owai’s legend, Ahiki the man will be charged with setting his world to rights, with restoring the balance signified by the union of his mountain peak namesake and the pond below. The mo‘olelo unfolds slowly in this direction: quest, discovery, marriage, hānai – all orchestrated by the irrepressible Haumea. Here, at the story’s outset, we are afforded a glimpse, in mele form, of that distant time when the world will again be well. That world calls to us here, early on, and we would be wrong to ignore the invitation.

In 1895 an old woman of Palalupe, Maunawili testified before the Ko‘olaupoko Commission of Private Ways and Water Rights in an effort to stop William G. Irwin from diverting the water of five upper-Maunawili springs to the sugarcane fields of Waimānalo. The woman identifies herself as Hika‘alani. She was a girl when “Mr. Bingham and the first missionaries came here,” and she remembers when Maunawili was covered in lo‘i kalo. Bananas and cane were planted on the banks of each patch, and bulrushes and ‘uki grew on the fringes of a well-watered Kawainui.[2] She remembers Palawai (the lowland on the Olomana side of what is now Maunawili Community Park) as “the place where kalo was planted most and that was the kalo that supplied the chiefs when they called for hookupus…There were several chiefs but those that I knew were Kalola, Kahahele, Kaahumanu, Lililiu, Kauikeaouli…”[3]

She then tries to make the point that the lo‘i kalo of the few remaining native farmers of 1895 would soon suffer from the water shortage that Irwin’s ditch had already begun to cause. But under the often demeaning cross-examination of Irwin’s attorney, W.A. Kinney, she comes apart, loses her train of thought, and retreats into stubborn confusion. At one point in the proceedings, she concedes that, “I am weak and old and feeble, and I forget some things.” And when asked if anyone can corroborate her increasingly fuzzy

testimony, she says: “No, there is none of these old folks living. They are all dead excepting myself and my foster mother, the person who took care of me, she is so old she can’t walk, she has to crawl…There is no one living who is related to [these old folks], all dead.”[4]

Not quite all. Not yet. Not by a long shot. Samuel Kaiākea Kekoʻowai is right around the corner, whistling, and a fish swarm is waiting in the wings.

Nānā aʻe au aʻo Ahiki

Nānā aʻe au aʻo Ahiki,
Kuʻu lei hiehie ʻo Mokulana,
I ka holu a ka lau o ke kalukalu,
I ka hōʻoniʻoni a ka Malanai,
Eia mai au ʻo Mākālei,
Ka lāʻau piʻi ona a ka iʻa,
Ke kani kuʻu piʻo hone i ke kula,
Kaʻi ʻāuna lā i ke ano ahiahi.

I look out at Ahiki
Mokulana is my attractive lei
In the swaying of the kalukalu grass
As it is stirred by the Malanai breeze
Here I am, the Mākālei
The fish-attracting branch
My sweet whistle carries across the plain
Leading the fish swarm at evening time.

Kiʻekiʻe i luna ke kū ʻo Ahiki

Kiʻekiʻe i luna ke kū ʻo Ahiki
Holo ana ke aka i Kawainui
Nānā aʻe ʻoe i ke alo pali
He maikaʻi nō mai luna a lalo
A lalo ē
I laila māua me ka Malanai
E wehe aku i ka lau o ke ʻuki
ʻĀwili me ka neki o Mokulana
Me ka iʻa hoʻopā ʻili kānaka[5]
I laila ē
A he waiwai nō ka hale, e kuʻu aloha
Nou nō ka hewa i ke kipa ʻole ʻana mai
ʻAʻole anei ē?

High above is the peak, Ahiki
Its shadow sails below on Kawainui
Won't you look at the face of the pali
So beautiful from top to bottom
To the bottom, indeed.
The two of us could be there in the Malanai
Parting the leaves of ʻuki
Entwined with the bulrushes of Mokulana
With fish that find us irresistible
There, indeed.
This house has great value, my beloved
And it would be a shame if you didn't visit
Isn't this so?

Notes:

1. Aunty Sally's version is the least problematic of the three in terms of orthography, diction, and phrasing. She told us that Lōkālia Montgomery had shared it with her as a "mele hoʻokipa…A chant welcoming a guest one is very glad to see, a very welcome guest, indeed."

2. "Testimony of Hikaalani before the Commissioner of Private Ways and Water Rights for the District of Koolaupoko, Island of Oahu," *Wong Leong et al. vs. W.G. Irwin*, June 10, 1895, 47-48. Hiikaʻalani testified in Hawaiian; we only have the commission's English translation of her words.

3. Ibid, 49, 51.

4. Ibid, 54-55.

5. The awa (whitefish) of Kawainui (as well as the "ʻoʻopu kuʻia o Kawainui" mentioned in the lengthy name chant for Kūaliʻi, the Kailua-born chief of Oʻahu) were once so plentiful and tame that they swam right into the hands of the pondkeepers. The phrase "ka iʻa hoʻopā ʻili kanaka" is also reminiscent of people whose "skins" had fish-attracting, Mākālei-like qualities. Tame fish and sweet skin references can be found in Sterling and Summers, *Sites of Oahu*, 230.

This essay was first published in Hālau Mōhala ʻIlima's 2008 Merrie Monarch Fact Sheet.
It is offered here in revised and updated form.