

Lanikai Rock

Ka Pōhaku Kū Ho'okahi 'o Kamakaiwa?

“Among the many boulders of Kailua’s ahupua‘a, the best known and most celebrated is “Lanikai Rock.” Visible to the earliest Hawaiian seafarers, this promontory called Alāla stood like a motionless sentinel, inviting travelers of every kind to recognize its sacred prominence, for its name meant “Awakening”. From this vantage point one could (and still can) see in one panoramic sweep the outline of the entire ahupua‘a, all the way to the base of Konahuanui, descending down to the waters of Mōkapu.”

– Kailua Historical Society, announcing a December 10, 2013, panel discussion in which “local long time residents provid[e] insight on coping with change in Kailua & Lanikai.”ⁱ



It’s no secret anymore, not with the advent of the Papakilo database,ⁱⁱ that kanikau (Hawaiian language chants of mourning) of the 19th and early 20th centuries are often the repositories of place names and their locations that have otherwise been lost to us. But place-name hunting in Papakilo can take time and luck, especially when you can’t word-search a place name that you don’t yet know.

I was irritated by the Kailua Historical Society’s use of the name “Lanikai Rock” in its panel-discussion flyer of December 2013, as I often am by the proliferation of settler sobriquets for our storied places, but I went to that discussion without the benefit of data-base ammo and thus had nothing to contribute in the way of correcting the misnomer. I listened, with interest, to Cosette

Harms's memories of "Pu'uhonua," the hilltop house built above Alāla pointⁱⁱⁱ in 1931 by her grandparents Arthur and Anne Powlison. She spoke of her family's understanding that the rock formation behind the house was a place of refuge, a pu'uhonua, in the time of Kamehameha, hence the Hawaiian name the Powlisons gave, back then, to their now-iconic residence. She and other members of the panel^{iv} reviewed the story of Kūali'i's umbilical-cutting ceremony in the 17th century at the heiau that included this rock formation; and we wondered together – panelists and audience alike – what had become of the remainder of the heiau and what the name of the remaining outcrop might be. Hawaiians named just about everything, surely this pōhaku ki'ai (guardian rock) had its own inoa.

A possible name, an old one, finally cropped up in 2019 when I was doing research for a Merrie Monarch Festival essay that explained Hālau Mōhala'Ilima's performance of "Ka Lae 'o Alāla," a mele composed by my daughter Kapalai'ula de Silva for what had become "Lanikai Point." My *alala/alaala* word search in the Papakilo newspaper collection led to the ninth paukū (section, verse) of the kanikau "Ua Hala o Halaloikamakaokaopua" composed in 1894 by a "Mrs. Kapela" for Halalo Pihoihoi age 21, son of Kalama and Ka'auamo of Kāne'ohē.

Kanikau la he aloha nou no e Halalo
Kuu kane mai ka la ulili o ka Ohao
Mai ke kai hone mai o Alaapapa
Aloha ia wahi a kua e pili ai
I pili ia e kua ka ua me ka makani
O ke anu hoi me ke koekoe
Koekoe ka po ua hala oe
Kuu kane mai ka lae o Alaala
Mai ka pohaku ku hookahi o Kamakaiwa
Mai ka ihona la o Pahonu
Aloha ka wahi a kua e hele ai
Auwe kuu kane, kuu kane hoi e
Mrs. KAPELA

An outpouring of grief and love for you, Halalo
My kāne^v of the sparkling sun of Ka'ōhao
Of the whispering sea of 'Āla'apapa^{vi}
Beloved is this place we two hold dear
Where we held each other in the rain and wind
In the cold and damp
The night is cold, damp, because you have gone
My kāne of Alāla point
Of Kamaka'iwa, the rock that stands alone
Of the descent to Pāhonu
Beloved is this place that we two traveled

Alas my kāne, my departed kāne.
[by] Mrs. KAPELA^{vii}

Where many kanikau move quickly from place to place, leaving out a lot of in-betweens, the geography of this paukū is remarkably tight: Mrs. Kapela remembers being with her kāne at Ka‘ōhao in the sweet embrace of ‘Āla‘apapa reef and Alāla point. Once at Alāla, her focus narrows even further: she is drawn to Kamakaiwa, “ka pōhaku kū ho‘okahi,” and from there to Pāhonu^{viii} on the shore below. These are places that she and Halalo held dear, and she makes her grief known (‘āla‘apapa: “to tell publicly”) with names whose meanings speak of her realization (alāla: “awakening”) that their bond (ka‘ōhao: “the tying”) is now broken, and that the handsome one above (kamakaiwa: perhaps “the ‘iwa presence”) will never again join with his female counterpart (pāhonu: turtle enclosure) below.

I think it highly likely, then, that the Kamakaiwa of Kapela’s lament is an old name for Lanikai Rock. Kamakaiwa is, in every respect, a pōhaku kū ho‘okahi: it stands alone, rises separately, and is unmistakably erect. The only real uncertainty I have is that of orthography and meaning: is it *ka-makaiwa* (the mother-of-pearl eyes) or *ka-maka-iwa* (the ‘iwa eye \ face \ loved one)? The first name is suggestive of heiau images, as in the makaiwa of the god Lono. The second name resonates with Ka‘iwa, the frigate bird ridge to which Alāla point ultimately connects. Both make sense. Both are far better than our current namu haole (English mumbling). Perhaps with more time and luck – and the expansion of the current Papakilo database^{ix} – other writings will crop up to illuminate and rectify.

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[Click here](#) to read the related essay “Ka Lae ‘o Alāla.”

NOTES

ⁱ <https://historichawaii.org/2013/12/24/kailua-historical-society-event-to-feature-panel-of-local-long-time-residents-providing-insight-on-coping-with-change-in-kailua-lanikai/> and <https://kailuahistoricalociety.org/tag/rock/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.papakilodatabase.com/main/main.php>

ⁱⁱⁱ Alāla: The name is not glossed in the Pukui and Elbert *Dictionary*, but it does appear in Pukui’s *Place Names*: “High point between Kai-lua beach and Lani-kai, O‘ahu. A tall stone at the point is used by fishermen as a landmark to locate a fishing station at sea. Lit., awakening” (Pukui, Elbert, and Mo‘okini, *Place Names of Hawai‘i*, Honolulu: UH Press, 1976; 9).

^{iv} Deborah Dunn and my daughter Kahikina de Silva.

v The specific relationship between Halalo and Mrs. Kapela cannot be determined from the information given in this kanikau. Since *kāne* can mean “male, husband, man, brother-in-law, male sweetheart...” I’ve chosen not to translate the word into English.

vi The name appears in Hawaiian language newspapers and 19th century maps as both ‘Āla‘apapa and ‘A‘alapapa. The first could mean “to tell publicly”; the second, “reef fragrance.” I haven’t been able to determine which is the older, or which, if either, is a misprint of the other.

vii *Hawaii Holomua*, March 10, 1894, my translation and emphasis. Each paukū of this 13-paukū lament was composed by a different author, each author an obvious intimate of the deceased.

viii We are more familiar today with Pāhōnu, Waimānalo, but there is reason to think that there was another “turtle enclosure” at the base of Alāla point that the Mahoe family associated with turtle-catching (*Kailua*, 237). The name is also paired with Wailea in 1865 article that can be read as a description of Ka‘ōhao from end to end: “me ke alohilohi o ke one o Wailea me Pahonu,” – with the sparkling sands of Wailea and Pāhōnu (Kalauli, “Aole i Loa,” *Kuokoa*, July 6, 1865).

ix About half of the entire collection (50-60,000 of 125,000 pages) had been digitized as of two years ago. “Hawaiian newspapers re-digitized to preserve knowledge,” Associated Press, March 7, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/newspapers-hawaii-language-10861eb69e192f94a4ab5236f6a11adb>