A881-PAC-Poly-Hi-Hi-Kohala-*kiʻi*–Vesicular lava-c 1200 CE

  

Figs. 1-3. PAC-Poly-Hi-Hi-Kohala-*kiʻi*–vesicular lava-c 1200 CE

**Case no.: 22**

**Accession Number: A881**

**Formal Label:** PAC-Poly-Hi-Hi-Kohala-*kiʻi*–vesicular lava-c 1200 CE

**Display Description:**

This ki’i, is an image of first man in Hawai’ian mythology, Kumuhonua. Ki’i are thought to have the spirit of the god residing within, which can become enlivened upon proper supplication. This image was carved from vesicular lava probably by a kahuna or Hawai‘an shaman about 500 CE when the area around central Kohala on the Big Island was being settled by immigrants from the Marquesas during the fourth or fifth centuries CE. This area was near a most ancient sacred place that had a sacrificial temple associated with it.

The creation of Kumuhonua, the first man, was made by Kāne in his own likeness by mixing his saliva with red earth obtained from the four cardinal directions of the world. However, the likeness did not have life. Kanaloa, god of the underworld, was watching when Kāne made this first man. Kanaloa then said to Kāne, “I will take your man, and he will not live forever.” And so death came upon mankind (Tregear 1891:151).

“Tradition holds that the present heiau on the "hill of the whale" overlooking Kawaihae Bay is located on the site of an earlier temple structure. Folklore centering around one of King Lonoikamakahiki's battles with his enemies on Hawai'i, at Kawaihae, as recounted by Fornander, mentions Mailekini and Haleokapuni and alludes to Pu'ukohola as a strategic point that the rebels hoped to occupy. There is a brief mention of a temple at Pu'ukohola, but no physical description. [[233](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7233)] Fornander makes two references to human sacrifices on the hill. First, he states that the rebel forces encamped at Haleokapuni, who planned to occupy Pu'ukohola and shower rocks down on the forces of Lono, "would not ascend Puukohola unless a man on the side of Lonoikamakahiki should be slain; then only would Puukohola be scaled for human sacrifices." [[234](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7234)] He also relates that "This battle of Lonoikamakahiki at Puukohola was named the Kawaluna, because of the night strategy successfully executed by him on that occasion. Kanaloapulehu, having been made prisoner, was killed and laid upon the altar (lele)." [[235](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7235)] We can only surmise that this means the altar of a temple on top of the hill. After winning his battles, Lono conducted religious services at certain temples in thanks and celebration; one of these observances was held at Pu'ukohola. [[236](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7236)]

This prominence is certainly an ideal location for a temple, one that would give such a structure great visibility and significance, factors that would not be overlooked by Hawaiian chiefs from the earliest times. In addition, Kawaihae has always figured prominently in Hawai'i Island history and was a natural location for thriving religious activity and more than the usual number of religious structures. In addition to its high political status as a periodic residence of the king and the royal family, Kawaihae must surely have been respected as the seat of great spiritual power due to the presence of three heiau on its shoreline (although probably all three were not in use at the same time). As Stokes pointed out, it is an accepted theory that trained seers, or temple designers, studied ancient temple sites and heiauconstruction details and closely followed the design of those that had brought earlier rulers great success in war and in other endeavors aimed at maintaining the welfare of the people and the power of their rulers. The variety of forms and the individual character exhibited in Hawaiian heiau, he felt, was an indication of incorporating various features that were successful in several different temples. [[237](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7237)] Certainly Lono, having won an important battle and sacrificed a rebel leader there, considered Pu'ukohola a propitious spot, as evidenced by his religious ceremony at the site after his victories over the rebels. This could indicate an earlier temple structure that Lono, as the victor, was reconsecrating and rededicating to his gods, having come into control of all of Hawai'i Island, or it might have belonged to him originally, as a chief of Kohala, and he was merely giving thanks.

Cluff et al., when documenting the features of Pu'ukohola Heiau, stated that between the first terrace and the pavement area they found a depression or ditch (Feature 9) which appeared to them to be a portion of an earlier heiau. [[238](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7238)] There has been no large-scale archeological investigation of Pu'ukohola Heiau to support or disprove the contention of an earlier structure on the site.

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| map of Pu'ukohola Heiau |
| Illustration 77. Map of Pu'ukohola Heiau site showing how structure conforms to topography of hillside. Figure 1 in Ladd, Ruins Stabilization, p. 4. |

Dorothy Barrère suggested that this writer check the original Hawaiian text of Samuel Kamakau's Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii to determine the language he used in describing the construction of Pu'ukohola Heiau. This text appears in a newspaper Ka Nupepa Kuokoa in a series of articles by Kamakau entitled "Ka Moolelo o Kamehameha I." The purpose was to find whether Kamakau used the word "kukulu" or the word "hoala" in referring to the erection of a temple at Pu'ukohola. It was found that he used the former, which connotes "new construction," rather than the latter which refers to the "reawakening" of an earlier site. [[239](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7239)] So the question remains controversial as to whether this temple was the first construction on site, raised for this particular purpose — Kamehameha's final triumph over his enemies — or whether it was a reconsecration of an earlier temple structure. Without archeological investigation, this question cannot be definitively answered.

     b) Extent of Use

Another question that is extremely difficult to address due to the dearth of documentation is that of the heiau's extent and duration of use. Dorothy Barrère believes that this structure was erected for the sole purpose of insuring Kamehameha's victory over his enemies and that it was probably not used as regularly as other luakini temples after that time. It may instead have been used only on certain highly important occasions related to Kamehameha's wars of conquest. [[240](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7240)] She and others have pointed out that after the elaborate ceremonies connected with the building and consecration of a luakini for success in a particular enterprise, such as a significant battle, had been completed, it was not unusual for the structure to be abandoned, although its site might be used and reconsecrated many times thereafter. It was traditional for a ruler to maintain at least one functioning luakini near his place of residence. During Kamehameha's final years on Hawai'i Island (1812-19), he visited six of them ceremoniously each year: Hikiau in Kona, Punalu'u in Kau, Wahaula in Puna, Kanoa in Hilo, Honuaula of Waipio in Hamakua, and Mo'okini in Kohala. These visits involved reconsecrations of these temples to the major gods to maintain mana. In addition, the ruler observed the monthly worship periods in these structures. [[241](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7241)]

Historian Russell Apple, on the other hand, believes that Pu'ukohola continued to be used for human sacrifices until the kapu abolition in 1819. He thinks that the flammable structures on the temple platform were burned at that time or left to rot. Some of the statues were probably hidden. [[242](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7242)]

Captain Vancouver reached Kawaihae Bay in February 1794 during a kapu period that was to continue for the next week. The king, who had traveled with him from Kealakekua, had to go ashore to attend to religious duties. [[243](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7243)] During this time the king and all the provincial chiefs remained in retirement. It seems highly probable that these religious activities took place in or around Pu'ukohola Heiau. On that same trip, Menzies added that the heiau had been built about two years earlier and was still so "strictly tabooed" that his guides would not dare let him view the interior. It was apparently still being used for religious activities, and Menzies specifically mentioned several houses within the enclosure for the priests who were performing the rites associated with the kapu ceremonies in effect during the time of his visit. Of course, Kamehameha had not yet unified the islands, and so he might still have been attempting to gain powerful mana from veneration at this particular temple. But it also appears it was being used in connection with some of the traditional Hawaiian kapu rites. [[244](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7244)]

By the time de Freycinet visited Kawaihae in 1819, after Kamehameha's death, Pu'ukohola Heiau was open to his inspection. Jacques Arago, who accompanied de Freycinet, stated in his narrative published in 1823:

I think I have already told you that human sacrifices were still in practice as late as ten years ago [1809]. It was Tammeamah I. who caused the abolition of this barbarous custom. . .[[245](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7245)]

He follows this statement with a discussion of the Hawaiian religious system, and in talking about the priesthood mentions:

The private houses of the priests are never tabooed; and in that of Toyai [Kawaihae], belonging to the high priest, I never have seen any luxury beyond those enjoyed by the common people. The apartments of his wives are close at hand. . . . As to the small temples inclosed within the morais, they are tabooed for every body; and he who should attempt to violate their sanctity would be punished in the most exemplary manner... [[246](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7246)]

It is a little difficult to interpret whether Arago is speaking in general terms or of specific "small temples" within Pu'ukohola and/or Mailekini heiau. If the latter, this would suggest that the temples at Kawaihae were still viewed as sacred structures and off-limits to the common people. Certainly his mention of the residence of the high priest there, either in Pelekane or on the Pu'ukohola temple platform, suggests on-going religious activity and significance to the area. This activity might not have involved human sacrifices for the last few years, but have been connected with periodic agricultural and other subsistence-related ceremonies performed by the king and his ruling chiefs. [[247](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7247)] As Barrère et al. have stated, the ruling chief, and later the king, was responsible for maintaining the goodwill of the most powerful gods for the benefit of his subjects and the welfare of his kingdom. He accomplished this by observing four monthly worship periods in the state (luakini) heiau. [[248](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7248)]

Although many visitors in the years after the temple's abandonment lamented the number of human sacrifices that had taken place at Pu'ukohola, the only testimony that contains much credibility is that of John Young, who told the Reverend Lorenzo Lyons that he had seen there "many a human victim sacrificed." [[249](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7249)] Frank Vincent, Jr., mentioned in his 1870s-period travelogue that human sacrifices took place at Pu'ukohola at least into the early 1800s, but the source of his information or its veracity is unknown. [[250](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7250)]

The New England missionaries visited Pu'ukohola soon after the death of Kamehameha, the Reverend Hiram Bingham stating that the temple contained the ruins of several houses that had been burnt as well as the ashes of the idols and remains of past offerings. As mentioned in an earlier section, the queen regent Ka'ahumanu told the Reverend Artemas Bishop in 1826 that all the buildings in the enclosure were destroyed in one day, presumably soon after the end of the kapu system.

Pu'ukohola Heiau probably was used for religious rituals beyond the year and purpose of its initial construction, even though the dedicatory sacrifice of Kamehameha's chief rival psychologically, if not in reality, ensured his supremacy in the eyes of most of the inhabitants of the islands. In other words, the temple had to a great degree fulfilled its purpose immediately. Kamehameha's position was not totally secure for another twenty years, however, and during that time he may have felt the need for continuing ceremonies to gain mana from Ku-ka'ili-moku. Whether or not there were further human sacrifices is conjectural. Given Kamehameha's growing awareness of European mores, there were probably no more than were necessary to keep his subjects respectful of the traditional rights and authority of the ali'i and especially of the unassailable power of the paramount chief. It is also possible that Kamehameha conducted consultations with his subordinate chiefs within the sacred enclosure of Pu'ukohola while in residence in Pelekane. Affairs of state had to continue, and the temple location would have provided privacy for deliberations and encouraged spiritual influences from the mana of the gods.

In his description of Pu'ukohola Heiau in his Hawaiian Annual for 1908, Thomas Thrum stated his belief that Ellis's description was probably very accurate as to the structure's original appearance because it was only thirty years old (this would make its completion date 1793) and had been abandoned for only four years (implying it was used up until 1819). [[251](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7251)] The historical accounts of early visitors seem to indicate without question that religious activity continued in the area up to the time of the abolition of the kapu. From the account of Ka'ahumanu and the missionaries, it seems certain that the structures on the heiau were destroyed soon after Liholiho's edict. After that time, visitors and natives were allowed into the temple grounds, indicating a distinct change from its previous very sacred character. Probably some native people, especially the older occupants of the area, continued to venerate the structure, and limited private ceremonies or leaving of offerings undoubtedly continued in secret. John Mulholland mentions that a Catholic priest once erected a church on top of Pu'ukohola Heiau, but that most of the local people refused to attend it. It had to be rebuilt elsewhere. [[252](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/historyn.htm#7252)]” After <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/kona/history7o.htm>.

33. Fornander, *Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-Lore,* 4:324.

234. *Ibid.,* p. 326.

235. *Ibid.*

236. *Ibid.,* p. 330.

237. Folder 2 of 2, Gr. 1, Box 9.48, Hawaiian Heiau MS (pre-1919), Sc Stokes, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, p. 6.

238. Kikuchi and Cluff, "Archaeological Survey of Puu Kohola Heiau and Mailekini Heiau," p. 48.

239. S. M. Kamakau, "Ka Moolelo o Kamehameha I," Helu 23, in *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa* (April 13, 1867).

240. Dorothy Barrère, interview by Linda Greene December 5, 1989, at Kona Historical Society, Captain Cook, Hawai'i.

241. Barrère et al., *Hawaiian Aboriginal Culture,* Vol. 1, pp. 26-27. The choice of Mookini over Pu'ukohola as the functioning *luakini is* an interesting one, perhaps because it was a very old one in addition to being near Kamehameha's birthplace, or perhaps because Puukohola had been used just to insure his conquest of the islands and then basically abandoned?

242. Russell Apple interview by Linda Greene and Diane Rhodes December 5,1989, in Volcano, Hawai'i. Also see Apple, 'History of Historic Structures, Kawaihae, p. 23.

243. Vancouver, *Voyage of Discovery,* 3:62.

244. Menzies, *Hawaii Nei,* pp. 56-57.

245. Arago, *Narrative,* p. 112.

246. *Ibid.,* p. 114.

247. Ladd, *Ruins Stabilization,* p. 1 .

248. *Hawaii Aboriginal Culture,* Vol. I, p. 25. Although Mo'okini Heiau might have been the official state temple, the fact that Kawaihae was a royal residence, an important contact point for foreign ships, and residence of the governor of the island, John Young, combined with its past history, would seem to argue a continuing royal presence and thus continuing religious activity.

249. Doyle, *Makua Laiana,* p. 40. Young, however, may simply be referring to the sacrifices during construction and those of Keoua and his followers. It is difficult to conclude from this statement how many other victims may have been sacrificed there in succeeding years.

250. Vincent, *Through and Through the Tropics,* p. 94.

251. Thrum, "Tales from the Temples. Part II,' p. 65. Realistically, however, the configuration of the *heiau* and location of structures on it might have changed markedly during those thirty years, with the temple's original appearance being very different from the one Ellis described.

252. Mulholland, *Hawaii's Religions, p.* 20. No year or other supporting data is provided. Could this be the A-frame structure Solomon Akau mentioned seeing on the Pu'ukohola platform in the 1920s, which was removed several months later? Akau interview by Fujimori, January 12, 1979, pp. 2-3.

**LC Classification:**

**Date or Time Horizon:**

**Geographical Area:**

**Map:**



**GPS coordinates:**

**Cultural Affiliation:**

**Medium:** vesicular lava

**Dimensions:**

**Weight:**

**Condition: original**

**Provenance:** Kohala 1966

**Discussion:**

**References:**

Tregear, E. R. 1891. *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* (Wellington, Lambton Quay: Lyon and Blair,