

# Conclusion

Timing mattered. The initial formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom was affected as much by specific events and individuals as by structural features. Archaeologists and anthropologists correctly emphasise economic modes of production, coercive capacity and ideological hegemony as the key structures of political power in the pre-unification period. By emphasising general structures of power over the enactment of power, however, they are unable to explain why unification occurred, when and as it did, without recourse to European influences. Western influences did alter the configuration of the kingdom, but were not necessarily essential for its foundation. Marshall Sahlins moves towards combining general structures and specific enactments with his structure of the conjuncture, but emphasises ideological schemes and neglects coercion in his assessment of Hawaiian chiefly power in Kamehameha's time. Hawaiian chiefs were testing and extending the limits of their secular power from the 1770s. A number of futures are possible within any combination of longer term structural parameters. Would Kamehameha still have become the first unifier of the islands if he emulated Kahekili's less conciliatory policies? Would he have been able to seize the islands if Kahekili had died five years earlier or five years later? The historiography of Hawai'i in Kamehameha's time demonstrates the potential of interdisciplinary approaches, particularly the value of constructing detailed narratives to supplement analysis of underlying environmental features and cultural structures, and to test more general theories.

The experience of Hawaiian society between 1782 and 1812 is an example of the exercise of power in a time of transition. The formation of a centralised polity that transcends local kin-based loyalties is invariably a watershed in social evolution. The potential for unification was in place before Western influences became a permanent feature of the political landscape. Kamehameha's administrative reforms after unification combined existing Hawaiian practice with European ideas, personnel

and technology. The written word and Western vessels facilitated inter-island communication, while residents such as John Young and Isaac Davis proved to be loyal lieutenants when entrusted with senior administrative posts and regulation of commercial interactions with visiting trade vessels. Kamehameha also drew upon centuries of political practice and accumulated knowledge about the construction and maintenance of chiefly coalitions and the administration of moku, which lay at the heart of power within a decentralised polity. Coercion also played a role. Kamehameha forged the Hawaiian Kingdom in battle in the early 1790s. His military gains may have been diminished, however, if they had not been followed by the astute political compromises that took place in the decade following the battle of Nuʻuanu.

Kamehameha lived in a society that underwent major transformations over the previous few hundred years. Spurred on by increasing population pressure and status rivalry between aliʻi, the relationship between humans and the environment and rulers and subjects had been altered dramatically. Cultivation in favoured locations was intensified, while settlement expanded into more marginal agricultural zones. Both processes required a degree of coordination beyond family and local community organisation. In drought-prone leeward areas, the threat of famine exerted a powerful influence on communities to concede greater powers to their rulers. Hawaiʻi traditions record the rising influence of leeward chiefs relative to those of older windward communities with larger populations. The defining of fixed landholdings, which was inherent in the demarcation of ahupuaʻa boundaries, created new functions for rulers as administrators, and as defenders of frontier boundaries. Even without these pressures, competition between chiefs for status provided a powerful incentive for waging war. Leaders developed sizeable retinues and used their sacred status to further their administrative and military activities. Feeding retinues and making offerings to the gods required a share of agricultural production beyond subsistence needs.

These factors gave rise to the structures of power that were witnessed by Captain James Cook in the 1770s. By 1778, polities encompassed many ahupuaʻa, and some consisted of a number of islands. The political coherence of these polities rested on the diffusion of power. Makaʻāinana obedience to the moʻī and his aliʻi was based to a large extent on the latter group's sacred status. Produce and labour were given with the expectation that the ruler would protect his subjects from external enemies and attract divine favour to ensure prosperity within the realm. The existence

of secular sanctions for transgressions of chiefly and divine kapu suggests that ideology alone did not ensure maka'āinana obedience. The relative coherence of chiefly retinues provided leaders with a coercive advantage over the fragmented maka'āinana communities that made up the overwhelming majority of the population. The system also held together because chiefly demands did not intrude too deeply into the worlds of local maka'āinana communities.

Mō'i lacked the necessary coercive advantage to dominate their vassal ali'i. Most mō'i inherited powerful, well-established ali'i families as vassals from their predecessors. The selection of mō'i often owed much to concerns for the preservation or balancing of existing power blocs within the ali'i, rather than the relative strength of the candidates. Personal power bases had to be built up by mō'i through time. The support of powerful vassal ali'i remained a necessity for the maintenance of any moku's coherence. Entrenched power, logistical problems and the importance of individual prowess in battle for the enhancement of mana all worked against the formation of a full-time, centralised army that was drilled to fight in unison and loyal to a central ruler.

The two moku that were most associated with attempts at military reform in this period included the leeward districts of Maui and Hawai'i within their domains. The dangers of drought may have allowed mō'i to justify increased chiefly powers in terms of demands made on their subject's labour and on agricultural production to create a more militarily efficient, magazine economy. This process may have been behind the relatively late and rapid rise of leeward areas to political prominence, detected by Patrick Kirch, and the challenge they posed to older, windward centres of power. Relations between moku in Kamehameha's time, however, raise doubts about this theory. The centre of power for the Maui line was on the windward coast at Wailuku. Hawai'i's windward chiefs were as aggressive as their leeward counterparts throughout the late 1700s. Ecologically based theories of the evolution of Hawaiian power understate the importance of individual ability among mō'i and specific historical configurations. Was Maui the most powerful moku in the 1780s because of its ecological base or the tactical ability and aggressiveness of its ruler Kahekili, combined with the temporary weakness of their rivals while new, young mō'i sought to consolidate power?

Kamehameha's success in unifying the Hawaiian chain cannot be understood merely in terms of these generalised structural characteristics. The economic structures described by Kirch, Earle and others were in place long before unification. They provided a foundation for unification, but do not explain why unification occurred when and as it did. Within these sociopolitical and environmental parameters, the decisions and actions of leading figures decisively shaped the course of events. Prior to becoming mō'ī of the leeward coast of his home island, Kamehameha was a rather impetuous young man who was more of a warrior than a leader. He developed into a mō'ī whose success was based as much on consent as coercion. Kamehameha's rise owed a great deal to the support of the four Kona uncles. His respect for this clique, and their continued coherence, ensured the security of Kamehameha's rule against possible threats from within the moku. The induction of Ka'iana into this ruling group in 1789 and the occasional dissent of Kame'eiamoku never seriously challenged this unity. Shielded behind Hawai'i's rugged interior, the moku's Kona heartland prospered in the absence of external intruders or serious natural disaster.

Whether through choice or circumstance, the early years of Kamehameha's rule involved little territorial expansion. Kamehameha's career as mō'ī can be seen in contrast with that of his main rival, Kahekili. While superior to Kamehameha as a tactician, Kahekili's military expansionism and harsh treatment of rivals weakened his moku's coherence. His bloody conquest of O'ahu ensured a legacy of animosity among many of the island's inhabitants. His expansion on to O'ahu also diverted resources away from east Maui, which was only loosely integrated into Kahekili's moku after over a decade of Hawai'ian control. Kahekili's extermination rather than integration of much of the O'ahu ali'i meant his resources were merely stretched, rather than expanded, over a multi-island polity.

In the wake of Kalanikūpule's defeat on Maui in 1790, Kahekili and Ka'eokulani of Kaua'i allied to protect their realms from the rising star of Kamehameha. Kamehameha's naval victory against this coalition in 1791 put his many rivals into a defensive frame of mind. Kahekili and Ka'eokulani maintained a standing army on Maui for the next few years in anticipation of an invasion by Kamehameha. Kamehameha was left free to move against his enemies on Hawai'i. Once Keōua was removed, Kamehameha was able to consolidate his hold on Hawai'i without fear

of attack. Meanwhile, the strain of maintaining a coalition formed to counter a possible invasion began to tell on the political coherence and economic capabilities of Kahekili and Ka'eokulani's domains.

The open rupture of this coalition followed soon after Kahekili's death in 1794. Kalanikūpule's victory over Ka'eokulani at 'Aiea later that year was not enough to salvage the erosion of the Maui line's power base over the preceding three years. During this time, the dynasty's old heartland of west Maui had been presided over by Ka'eokulani rather than Kalanikūpule, and bled dry by unprecedented logistical demands. Kalanikūpule's victory did not even secure all of O'ahu for him. Ali'i from Wai'anae and Waialua fought for Ka'eokulani at 'Aiea, in a continuation of their districts' traditional resistance to rule from mō'i based in the Kona–Ko'olaupoko area. Kaua'i remained independent and in no mood to ally with the slayer of its deceased mō'i, Ka'eokulani. Kalanikūpule's loss of his European arsenal in early January of 1795 was enough to persuade Kamehameha to attack. Kalanikūpule was denied the chance to consolidate his position. He probably went into battle against Kamehameha at Nu'uanu with his core of support reduced to the chiefly retinues based on O'ahu's Kona and Ko'olaupoko districts.

Contemporary military historiography's emphasis on the importance of logistical and organisational factors calls for a re-evaluation of the significance of European weaponry and mercenaries in Kamehameha's wars of unification. Cannon may have secured an advantage for Kamehameha at sea, which served to protect the heartland of his moku and to threaten that of his enemies. Traditional accounts of land warfare in this era, however, suggest victories were gained by the steady accumulation of advantage over a number of days or weeks. Individual battles were significant as part of a wider process. The two most noted instances of the use of cannon on land, at 'Īao and Nu'uanu, occurred only at the end of such processes. Nowhere in the traditions is there any clear indication of the widespread or decisive use of firearms. The available muskets were generally of poor quality, and an indiscriminate hail of lead threatened the individual martial prowess on which so much Hawaiian chiefly status rested.

Each passing year after the ending of hostilities in 1796 may have enhanced the reputation of firearms. Past myths rather than contemporary performance might well have ensured the future of firearms as tools of coercion. The prolonged peace from 1796 to 1819 probably had more

impact on Hawaiian society than the mounting European presence. European influence remained largely confined to a few ports of call and trade in European goods was mainly the preserve of ali'i. The vast majority of the population continued to live a traditional, rural life. Traditional obligations arising from Kamehameha's sacred status still formed the basis of his dealings with his maka'āinana subjects. The continued coherence of the ruling clique of Kamehameha and the four Kona uncles enabled Kamehameha to hold onto his much-expanded realm in the crucial years immediately following 1796.

To preserve their coherence, the ruling group agreed to fragment their landed power base and create an independent administrative structure to counter their own power. As long as they remained coherent, the ruling clique could preserve their near monopoly on coercion by keeping the islands demobilised. The administrative bureaucracy could detect attempts to rearm and retrain well before potential rebels could mount an effective challenge. Demobilisation was aided by military losses in the Kaua'i channel disaster of 1796 and the 1804 epidemic on O'ahu. General military training declined with each year of continued peace, as did the ability of those outside the ruling clique to mount an effective military challenge. Denied access to administrative and coercive power the lesser ali'i increasingly focused their energies on the competitive accumulation of European goods. Even in this sphere, the ruling group's grip on other avenues of power allowed them to control and regulate European trade.

Kamehameha's kingdom is perhaps best described as a centralised monarchy in the form of an oligarchy. Like mō'i prior to 1796, Kamehameha's rule rested on the support of a group of powerful ali'i families within his moku. After 1796, however, the ruling clique became smaller, and the balance of power within it was reinforced and institutionalised by the creation of designated offices and a bureaucracy. This, in turn, allowed the demilitarisation of the islands to be preserved, with the retention of only a small standing army. The pursuit of power remained distant from the day-to-day life of the vast majority of the population. Whether or not the embryonic kingdom's government could keep the outside world equally distant remained to be seen.

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