

Introduction

Hawaiians figure prominently in literature on the transition from fragmented chiefdoms to a unified state. The conquest and unification of the Hawaiian Islands by Kamehameha I between 1782 and 1812 came at a time of increasing European contact, prompting many to attribute his success to European weapons and ideas. Kamehameha succeeded Kalani'ōpu'u as mō'i (paramount chief) of leeward Hawai'i when he defeated the other contender, Kīwala'ō, in battle in 1782. He went on to conquer all the islands in the Hawaiian archipelago apart from Kaua'i and Ni'ihau between 1790 and 1795 (see Figure 2). By 1812, he had overcome the last challenge to his rule and Kaumuali'i of Kaua'i had also acknowledged his primacy. No one seriously threatened his rule from then until his death in 1819.

This study examines the role of coercion in the unification of the Hawaiian Islands in the era of Kamehameha I. Hawai'i was rapidly transformed from a series of divided chiefdoms into a unified kingdom at a time of increasing European contact. As such, it is a topic that involves consideration of a range of issues that are central to human history. The study of conflict and its role in wider power relations is crucial for any study of human society. The formation of centralised polities that transcended local kin-based loyalties was a significant watershed in social evolution, while the impact of European contact on non-Western societies is a major theme in world history. Three interrelated themes in Hawaiian political evolution are examined in this book: the balance between coercion and consent, between structural trends and individual leadership qualities and specific historical events, and between indigenous and European factors.

The unification of Hawai'i took place relatively late in its history and within a single generation. The period between 1778 and 1819 is rich in both European and Hawaiian documentary sources. This was a time of increasing European penetration in to the Pacific. Kamehameha's use

of European advisers and Western military technology has been cited as a major factor behind the victories that paved the way for unification. This has naturally raised the question of the degree to which European contact influenced the process of political centralisation. Was it an essential ingredient, or did it merely speed up an already existing process? The latter part of this study deals with these issues and offers particular insights into the impact of European firearms on traditional warfare in Hawai'i and elsewhere. Those asserting firearms as a significant factor in Kamehameha's wars of unification largely ignore the nature of Hawaiian warfare and do not consider warfare alongside the other forms of political control that were central to this process in Hawai'i.

The study of warfare in the non-Western world has been neglected until relatively recently. Pacific history is no exception. The few studies of warfare in Pacific history have been heavily influenced by anthropology, and tend to emphasise the cultural context behind acts of violence, rather than the actual fighting. By neglecting the narrative of events, they tend to treat warfare as a static institution rather than an evolving process. But, perhaps, the most pressing need is for an attempt to follow the lead of recent European military historiography and combine the study of tactics and weaponry with consideration of psychological and logistical factors, and the place of warfare in wider social relations. This study constructs such an approach by combining the best aspects of European and non-European military historiography. The resulting synthesis is a radical reinterpretation of Hawaiian warfare that treats it as an evolving process heavily imbued with cultural meaning, and characterised by fluid circumstances, including crucial turning points when choices were made to take elements of Hawaiian society on paths of development that proved decisive for political unification, but which were neither inevitable or predictable.

The timing of Hawaiian unification has also created a disciplinary boundary in studies on this topic that rarely transcends the juncture marked by European contact and the addition of European written observations to the body of sources available for the study of this era. This study challenges the standard historiography in arguing for a diminished role for Western weapons and ideas in unification and a greater role for indigenous institutions. It also argues against the tendency to examine history in the non-Western world in terms of generalised structural history rather than historically specific dynamics in which a number of historical trajectories were possible depending on choices made by indigenous actors. In

arguing for a more wide-ranging approach to power that encompasses political, diplomatic, social, religious and economic institutions as well as military topics, this study also spans disciplinary divides and knits Western and non-Western historiography. This approach is adopted here as a model for studies of political evolution and the role of warfare in non-European societies beyond Hawai‘i. This more comprehensive framework diminishes the role of warfare and violence and elevates the role of consent and compromise in securing long-term political power.

This study examines works from a number of disciplines, and depicts the struggle for power in Hawai‘i as a complicated and dynamic process involving long-term, slowly evolving continuities as well as short-term perturbations that could alter existing structures. It argues that long-term, indigenous processes had more influence on centralisation in Hawai‘i than is generally recognised, and that logistical and political consolidation was more important in chiefly struggles for power than battle tactics and weapons. At the same time, however, it is argued that the process of Hawaiian history suggests that more attention needs to be paid to detailing historical events in non-Western historiography to explain why and when processes occur. Having the necessary conditions for military victory and centralisation in place only ensured that there was a potential for unification; specific triggers and opportunities were also needed.

Perhaps the greatest omission in the standard discourse on the political evolution of Hawaiian society is the almost total exclusion of modern indigenous Hawaiian scholarship on this topic in favour of largely North America-based anthropologists and archaeologists. The Hawai‘inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is the world’s leading centre for scholarship on Hawai‘i. The conclusions reached by its historians present forms of political leadership and socio-economic organisation that were much more consensus-based, and in which environmental guardianship played a more prominent role in assessing leaders than is usually allowed for. This is markedly different from the standard interpretations that are critiqued in this book. While it might be argued that such interpretations merely reflect worldwide contemporary priorities and values, the fact that these values are consistently represented in Hawaiian traditions and scholarship across the ages, and also find common ground with a host of independently arrived at conclusions by other Pacific island scholars, requires that such perspectives are considered

seriously by scholars of the Pacific. Above all, this study finds indigenous Hawaiian approaches a much better fit with the historical evidence related to Hawaiian history than more conventional scholarship.

This text is taken from *Transforming Hawai'i: Balancing Coercion and Consent in Eighteenth-Century Kānaka Maoli Statecraft*, by Paul D'Arcy, published 2018 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.