

***Huli hele nā wahi pana*
(seeking out storied places):
The contributions of John
F.G. Stokes to the field of
Hawaiian archaeology**

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During the first decades of the twentieth century, John F.G. Stokes (1875–1960) carried out extensive archaeological research across the Hawaiian archipelago. The Australian-born archaeologist moved to Hawai‘i in 1899 to serve as general curator and librarian at the invitation of the first director of Bishop Museum, William T. Brigham. In 1903, Stokes was appointed to the position of curator of Polynesian ethnology. Under this title, he completed the first robust archaeological research endeavours throughout the Hawaiian Islands and beyond.

The vast majority of Stokes’s work was completed in the field of Hawaiian archaeology: Stokes was one of the first people to apply modern surveying techniques and photography to document Hawaiian archaeological sites throughout the archipelago (see Dye 1991; Flexner and Kirch 2016; Flexner et al. 2017; Kirch 1985, 2000), and he also carried out the first systematic archaeological excavations in Hawai‘i at the Kamōhio ‘Fishing Shrine’ in Kaho‘olawe (see Kirch 1985; Reeve 1993). While his pioneering work in Hawai‘i contributes the bulk of his legacy, he later worked on the island of Rapa as part of the Bayard Dominick Expedition in 1920. Stokes

was, however, frequently slow to publish the results of his fieldwork. His survey and systematic excavations at Kamōhio were later published by J. Gilbert McAllister (1933), his survey of *heiau* on Hawai‘i Island was edited by Thomas S. Dye and published in 1991, and Stokes’s ‘Ethnology of Rapa’ manuscript remains unpublished (Stokes n.d.; see also Ghasarian 2016).

A large collection of Stokes’s unpublished work in various stages of completion is held in the Bishop Museum Archives. The information compiled by Stokes is contained in a range of media including field notebooks, written correspondence, photographs and annotated maps, and his work is still widely cited by archaeologists working in Hawai‘i today. Here, we highlight some of Stokes’s contributions to the field of Hawaiian archaeology, and in particular Stokes’s work on Kaho‘olawe. Bishop Museum’s contribution to the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* multi-site exhibition featured artefacts uncovered during Stokes’s groundbreaking excavations there, as well as holdings from the Bishop Museum Archives that relate to the archipelago-wide survey, of which his excavations were part.

Survey of Hawaiian ceremonial sites, 1906–13

Shortly after Stokes arrived in Hawai‘i, he joined Director W.T. Brigham on a field trip to Waha‘ula Heiau in the Puna District, Hawai‘i Island. There, they recorded the large *luakini heiau* (sacrificial temple) attributed to Pa‘ao, a legendary chief from Tahiti, in detail. Stokes later built a model of the *heiau* in the museum’s iconic three-story Hawaiian Hall upon its opening in 1902, where it still stands today (Brigham 1900, 1903; see also Spriggs 2017). It was this early trip that initiated Stokes’s interest in recording *heiau*, and when he returned to Honolulu via the Kona District of Hawai‘i Island and Lahaina on the island of Maui, he made detailed recordings of *heiau* in those areas as well.

Stokes’s pioneering surveys began in earnest when Brigham secured a grant from the Carnegie Institution in 1906, ‘for the exploration of the *heiau* of which the remains in a more or less ruinous state are scattered over the group’ (Brigham 1907:3–4; see also Spriggs 2017). Over the next eight years, Stokes completed most of the fieldwork for

this Bishop Museum–based research program, which was driven by Brigham’s general interests in Polynesian origins and Hawaiian religious change. Stokes was tasked with documenting all of the known *heiau* throughout the archipelago in order to test the hypothesis that through time, these monumental temples shifted from terraced structures to walled enclosures. From 1906 to 1913, Stokes worked with countless local collaborators (‘informants’) to record hundreds of sites across the main Hawaiian Islands, always striving to accurately record names of places and sites. While he focused specifically on monumental *heiau* structures, he also recorded house foundations, smaller shrines such as *ko’a* (fishing shrines), and fishponds, among other cultural features. His aptitude for the Hawaiian language, which he developed over the decade following his arrival in Hawai‘i, became a crucial skill during this work. Some of Stokes’s drafted maps include the names of his local collaborators in the margins, and he often described the activities of his field crew in his detailed notebooks. For example, Lawrence Gay, Henry Judd, Henry Pilsbry and David Forbes accompanied Stokes and assisted with fieldwork on Kaho‘olawe.

Stokes not only collaborated closely with local ‘informants’ and field assistants, but also with other scholars like T.G. Thrum and W.T. Brigham while working on this multi-year project. Stokes’s staff collection in the Bishop Museum Archives includes correspondence between Stokes and Thrum (Figure 17.1), demonstrating how these two men worked together to seek out *heiau* across the archipelago. Although Stokes was slow to publish his results, which are today almost exclusively contained in unpublished materials in the Museum Archives, Thrum published extensively along the way (see, for example, Thrum 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1915, 1916; see Spriggs 2017 for a detailed synopsis of Stokes and Thrum’s relationship). In the end, Thrum compiled the most comprehensive list of *heiau* in the Hawaiian Islands (this list was published posthumously under Thrum’s sole authorship in 1938). Stokes’s extensive contributions remained unpublished, due at least in part to a series of unfortunate events that included the loss of one of Stokes’s greatest supporters after Brigham left the museum in 1917 (see Spriggs 2017). A copy of Stokes’s unpublished monograph, ‘Heiau of Moloka‘i’, completed in 1919 and held in the Museum Archives, offers one testament to Stokes’s collaborative efforts and indeed his desire to publish his results: the work contains annotations by Brigham in preparation for its inclusion in his larger book on Hawaiian religion, which itself was never published after Brigham’s departure from the museum.

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HONOLULU, T. H. September 4th 1906.
 (ADDRESS P. O. BOX 500)

Sept 27/06

Dear Mr Stokes.

Your favor of 2nd inst is just at hand and I am glad to learn of the progress of your interesting work, and would like, if convenient to you and not derogatory to the main work in hand and report thereon, to receive a corrected list of the heiaus of each district as you complete it. Of Halekumukalani you may not learn more. It is one of those mentioned by S. M. Kamakau in his papers. Of Mahiakau, Keawemua and Umihale, these were given me by D. Hoolapa, a resident of the place, now here, who refers me for confirmation of Kahaluu items to the Deputy Sheriff, J. K. Nahale, in the district. I can see why present day natives would interpret the latter heiau to be Umi's house lot, but my memo says it was situated near the shore and was partly washed off by the sea: was built before Kamehameha's time by one of Maui's kings. Keawemua was said to have been a puuhonua of olden time. Mahiakau is said to be makai of the govt. road, foundations of which are to be seen plainly. Was built in the time of Kalaniopuu. It is too bad that you find the heiau's in such poor condition.

My last trip to Waialua and Waianae finishes me up for the present. I found only ~~good~~ one good one in the latter place, one new one for Waialua and the missing names of two or three we had on our list.

Trusting this will be of help to you, believe me to remain.

Yours Truly,
 T. G. Thurm

Figure 17.1. Letter from Thomas G. Thurm to J.F.G. Stokes providing information on various *heiau* sites in the Kona district of Hawai'i Island, dated 4 September 1906.

Source: Bishop Museum Archives (SM 215208).

In completing fieldwork for his most extensive project documenting *heiau* across the Hawaiian Islands, Stokes completed surveys of *heiau* on O'ahu and Hawai'i Island in 1906–07 and expanded his work to the island of Moloka'i in 1909–10, before continuing to record sites back on O'ahu and in Kaua'i in 1911, and then on Niihau in 1912. His final survey was undertaken on the smallest main Hawaiian island of Kaho'olawe in 1913. Here he faced a new challenge, as many site names had been



Figure 17.3. Annotated photo of the Kamōhio site; Kahoʻolawe, Hawaiʻi.

Source: Bishop Museum Archives (SP 59486).

The site that Stokes and his field crew investigated during their second trip to Kahoʻolawe was later described as the ‘Kamohio Fishing Shrine’ in McAllister’s 1933 Bishop Museum Bulletin entitled *Archaeology of Kahoʻolawe* (McAllister 1933:13). Here, Stokes carried out the first systematic archaeological excavations in the Hawaiian Islands (see also Kirch 1985). Stokes and his field crew carefully excavated and recorded multiple terraced features at the site. The work represents a major milestone for the field of Hawaiian archaeology, as the first stratigraphically excavated site in the archipelago.



Figure 17.4. Digital scan of a bone fishhook collected by John F.G. Stokes during excavations of the Kamōhio site; Kamōhio Bay, Kahoʻolawe.

Source: Bishop Museum Ethnology Collection (object no. C.03356), Bishop Museum Archives (© 2019) (Q 210599).

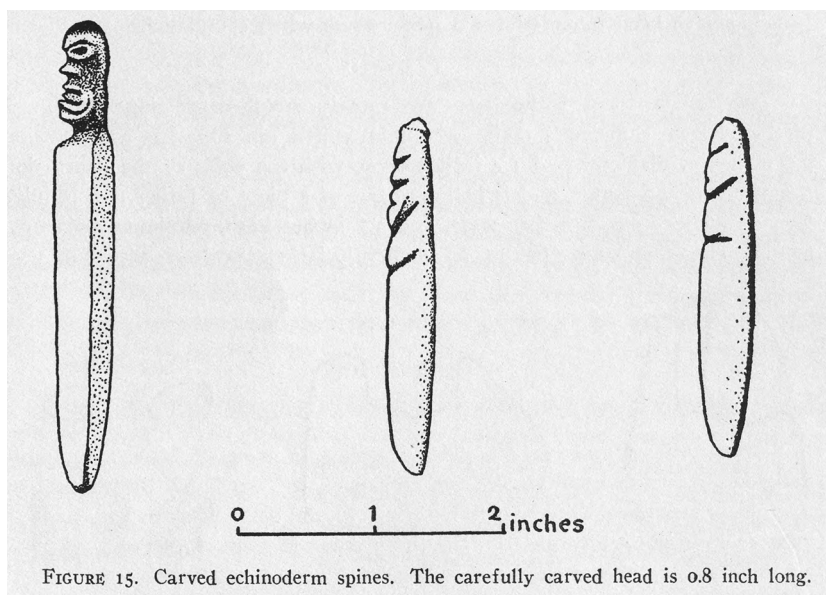


FIGURE 15. Carved echinoderm spines. The carefully carved head is 0.8 inch long.

Figure 17.5. Carved echinoderm spines from the Kamōhio site. Originally published as Figure 15 in *Archaeology of Kahoolawe* by J. Gilbert McAllister (Bishop Museum Bulletin 115).

Source: Bishop Museum Archives (SP 215210).

The excavations at Kamōhio yielded an extensive collection of artefacts that speak to the ceremonial use of the site: a wooden *ki'i*, stone images and various offerings that included coral, fish and shellfish (and among these a single offering containing around 1,800 *pipipi* shells), as well as dozens of offerings wrapped in *kapa* bundles (these included stones, floral material, food items and bones). In addition, hundreds of fishhooks (Figure 17.4), most of which were broken or unfinished, as well as fishhook blanks and tools (such as coral files) attest to the site's function as a place for fishhook manufacturing. However, the most unique artefacts uncovered during the excavations are the intricately carved urchin spines (Figure 17.5).

Based on the extensive collection of artefacts uncovered at the site, Stokes made the following conclusion:

the shelter was the abode or workshop of many successive Kahuna Kamakau or fish-hook-makers. Every craft had its guardian deity to which of course obligations were made. As time progressed the reputation of the establishment's products spread to the other

islands, until fishermen from the islands of Maui and Hawaii resorted to the spot, making offerings to the fish gods or bartering for hooks. (Quoted in McAllister 1933:17)

Stokes never published the results of his archaeological research on Kaho‘olawe. However, two decades later, McAllister drew heavily from the foundational work of Stokes to write his own Bishop Museum Bulletin, *Archaeology of Kahoolawe*. In the bulletin, McAllister synthesised Stokes’s work, and added information from his own weeklong field trip to Kaho‘olawe in 1931, as well as information drawn from the very limited short reports about the island that were available at the time. McAllister assigned new site numbers to the sites initially documented by Stokes and described Stokes’s work in some detail, based on his field notebooks from the staff collection in the archives. Importantly, McAllister also inventoried and described some of the extensive artefact collections from Stokes’s excavation of the stratified deposits at Kamōhio as well as the more general collections he made from throughout the island. However, as Kirch notes (1985:12–13), ‘the stratigraphic associations so carefully noted by Stokes were ignored’ by McAllister when he wrote up this work.

Reflecting on Kaho‘olawe

There is a copy of McAllister’s bulletin in the Bishop Museum Archives that was gifted to Stokes by the museum in January 1934. Robert J. Hommon (an archaeologist working in Hawai‘i who carried out numerous surveys on Kaho‘olawe for the US Navy from 1976 to 1980; see Hommon 1980) later donated this copy to Bishop Museum, which contains numerous annotations in the margins in Stokes’s handwriting. Although Stokes was fired from the museum in 1929, we know that he continued to work on some of his pending projects, including the Rapa manuscript and Honaunau report; the results of the latter were later published by E.H. Bryan Jr and K.P. Emory in 1986 (Stokes 1986a, 1986b; also see Krauss 1988:223, as cited in Spriggs 2017).

Although there is no manuscript written by Stokes on file for his Kaho‘olawe fieldwork, it is clear that he had reflected upon the excavations at Kamōhio based on the annotations he made in this copy of McAllister’s bulletin, now held in the Bishop Museum Archives. In the header on page 13 where McAllister describes the site, Stokes had crossed out the

words ‘Fishing Shrine’ from the original text, ‘Kamohio Fishing Shrine’. Next to the crossed-out words, Stokes wrote ‘Fish hook factory’, and below it, he wrote:

The industry was carried out secretly. The fish-gods would of course be present. A secondary purpose may have been a fishing shrine, although its situation is too remote for general use.

On the page facing the table of contents, Stokes wrote the following:

Unfortunate arrangement – Kamohio fish-hook factory should have been described with greater detail and accuracy, and separate from the rest of Kahoolawe. It had no necessary connection with the island, beyond its situation, and was isolated in the land side by the cliffs and precipices. Its normal approach was from the sea.

These annotations suggest that Stokes had shifted (or perhaps by then fully formulated) his interpretations of the Kamōhio site’s primary function during the years after he completed his fieldwork. His reclassification from what he describes in his field notebooks as a ‘fish heiau’ to a ‘fish-hook factory’ are intriguing, as it shifts the focus of this *wahi pana* (storied place) from its ceremonial significance to the domestic activities carried out there. Based on the material culture recovered from Stokes’s excavations and his written conclusions, it is clear that both domestic *and* ceremonial activities took place at the site. However, by shifting the focus to the domestic realm, Stokes demonstrates a deeper understanding of how domestic architecture in Hawai‘i often incorporates a sacred or ritual component, manifested in this case by the placement of shrines within larger structures (Weisler and Kirch 1985; also see Ladefoged 1998).

Stokes’s suggestion that this particular site be treated as separate from the rest of Kaho‘olawe is also noteworthy. The island of Kaho‘olawe features prominently in *mo‘olelo* (oral traditions) about Ku‘ūla, an *akua* (deity) associated with fishing. Additionally, one of the island’s ancient names is Kanaloa, after the *akua* of the sea or a namesake who voyaged to Hawai‘i from the south and made landfall at Lae o Kealaikahiki on the west end of Kaho‘olawe (Reeve 1993:v). These associations, and indeed the material remains of coastal settlements and *ko‘a* that Stokes himself documented, would be in line with his interpretation of the Kamōhio site as a place where fishhooks were manufactured and ritual activities related to fishing took place. Returning to his assertion that the site ‘had no necessary connection with the island’, there is documentation that may

suggest a connection elsewhere. In his extensive report to the Kaho‘olawe Island Conveyance Commission, Reeve notes the following in regard to a potential name associated with the site:

on an early sketch map of Kaho‘olawe, drawn around 1889 [possibly by Joseph Emerson, see Reeve 1993:66], can be found, down along the island’s southern shore, a place identified as the ‘Cave of Kunaka’. The location [...] suggests that it may lie somewhere along the western edge of Kamohio bay. (1993:154)

Kunaka is recorded as an *ali‘i* who resided in Waipi‘o Valley on Hawai‘i Island sometime around the fourteenth century (Reeve 1993:154). However, whether or not this legendary chief has any relationship with this place has yet to be determined, and may be an avenue for future research.

Conclusion

Examining Stokes’s wide body of work, it is clear that he was indeed ahead of his time in the field of Hawaiian and Pacific archaeology, both in terms of the methods he employed and the interpretations he formulated. Flexner and Kirch (2016:19–20) cite three ways in which the research Stokes carried out is notable for the history of the discipline: (1) the use of local knowledge, whether gained from historical sources authored by Native Hawaiians or from Native Hawaiian collaborators; (2) the drafting of accurate structure maps to test a hypothesis about change through time; and (3) the use of the then-new method of photography to further document sites. These same approaches are still applied by archaeologists working in the region today, and in many ways, this foundational work was crucial in paving the way for archaeology to emerge as an empirically based discipline throughout the past century.

Through the Ho‘omaka Hou Research Initiative and other recent projects, Bishop Museum has been working to improve the accessibility of its vast holdings while also reactivating legacy collections through collections-based research endeavours (Mulrooney et al. 2016). In 2016, with the generous support of the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities, the museum launched a publicly accessible database that includes all of Stokes’s maps and photographs from his survey of Moloka‘i. Available at data.bishopmuseum.org/Stokes, the database includes 76 maps and 152 photographs. Patrick Kirch and Clive Ruggles are currently working with these materials, along with Stokes’s unpublished manuscript ‘Heiau of

Moloka‘i, to conduct new research on the *heiau* of Moloka‘i. This and other ongoing projects are a testament to the importance of Stokes’s enduring legacy in the field of Hawaiian and Pacific archaeology.

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Objects highlighted in this chapter were on display at the Bishop Museum from March 2020 to March 2021.

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