Hawaiian Newspaper Translation Project: Fisheries

Historical accounts translated from Hawaiian to English
Historical accounts on the condition of Hawai‘i’s inshore resources suggests that they were much greater a century or more ago than now and some of those same accounts not only tell us that the native population was large, but was strongly dependent upon those resources as a source of food. Also apparent was a sense of a strong ethical code with respect to use of the fishery resources by the people. Users took what was needed and did not over-harvest. Traditional fisheries management was carried out through the imposition of restrictions or kapu.

Some information is available from accounts written by early western travelers and from the small number of translations that have been completed on Hawaiian writings regarding the basis for fisheries management in old Hawai‘i. Generalities gleaned from these writings suggest that fisheries management appears to have been carried out at a local level because biological processes that were the basis for management decisions often occurred on small geographical scales. The individuals responsible for these decisions were the priests and kapu were put into place by the chiefs. It is evident that the priests had considerable knowledge of spawning seasons and locations of these events for many important aquatic species important as food to the people. This information base must have taken generations of observations to gather and it was passed verbally to succeeding generations who improved on the precision of the information. Much of this information has been lost in modern times but some of it may remain in the body of Hawaiian literature (newspapers) that has yet to be translated.

With the precipitous decline in coral reef fishery resources in modern times resulting from the application of western fisheries management strategies and a breakdown in the social/cultural value of these resources, new strategies must be adapted or these resources may decline into oblivion. One program which is using traditional Hawaiian knowledge of marine resources at a local scale is showing promise as a means to effectively manage fisheries. This community-based program has been established on Moloka‘i and emphasizes what is known about spawning and other seasonal behavioral patterns to manage the local fisheries. With community buy-in, the program is working but with a better working knowledge of the biological patterns and seasonality of important species, the program would undoubtedly improve. Continuing the translation of Hawaiian newspapers will aid in this effort and with a greater understanding of nature by the general public may come a better respect for these important and precious resources. The attached translation from 1923 provides the reader with a tantalizing sample of what is to come.
The pressing issues of today are often echoed in the voices of yesterday. The following article, though written nearly a century ago in the context of 1923, addresses very current social and environmental issues that continue to face the people and islands of Hawai‘i in the 21st century. It speaks to the changes in early 1920’s society and in the island’s landscape - a territory with an expanding population, a new economy, and new norms for using resources. The author, Z.P.K. Kawaikaumaiilikamakaokaopua was a respected cultural expert from Napo‘opo‘o in the Kona district of Hawai‘i Island. He was one of many who used the newspapers to share and record native knowledge in light of the sweeping changes and great decline that the native population was facing.

During the turbulent 1800’s and early 1900’s, whole families and villages were decimated by waves of influenza, measles, diarrhea, and whooping cough that were introduced into the islands. By 1900, Hawaiians numbered perhaps 40,000, and many native scholars expressed the need to document the native knowledge and traditions that were disappearing as those that held the wisdom passed away. They used the Hawaiian language newspapers as a written repository of their insights, observations, and cultural knowledge.
The Hawaiians are a fish-eating people. Before Captain Cook came upon these islands, the only meats that the Hawaiians had were the flesh of pigs and dogs. Because of this, the fish of the ocean and the streams became a source of food for these people, perhaps more so than at present, because, today new meat sources such as the flesh of goats, sheep, cattle and deer have come here to Hawai‘i. These new kinds of meat have given people a greater variety of foods to eat and fish consumption has diminished.

Today, it seems that only half the number of Hawaiians dwell on these islands, and that in the time of our ancestors, there were twice as many, for instance, when one thinks of the number of ‘Umi’s warriors who accompanied him here to Maui to battle against Lonoapi‘ilani, to lend assistance to his younger brother, Kihaapi‘ilani, it is said that the sea was covered with ‘Umi’s canoes from Hawai‘i to Maui. In this we see that the population of these islands was great indeed, yet in spite of this tremendous population there was never a lack of fish.

Today, with a smaller population than existed in ‘Umi’s time, meat and fish are imported, as are canned meats and fish, adding to what is raised here in Hawai‘i to supply people’s needs, yet we see the decrease of the fish...
It was different not long ago, actually in our own lifetimes, for your writer recalls that when he was a child, he saw an immeasurable abundance of fish. There were many fishermen and much fish. In those days, only Hawaiians were fishermen and fish was eaten in great numbers. In that time too, there was not much meat being imported into Hawai‘i, although we had cattle, sheep and goats.

This is going to be an important question for several generations, understanding how there was so much fish in the days of our ancestors while there is so little in our time, so that much meat and fish must be imported to supply people with food. This question is being pondered by the Hawaiians and perhaps it will trouble them for some time to come. Because this is a fish-eating people, the high price of fish is making it difficult for the Hawaiians. It appears that it will get worse as the years go by.

Most Hawaiians today may be unfamiliar with these things we desire
mau mea e makemake 'ia nei e ike mai kākou, i nā kumu ho'i i emi mai ai ka i'a o ko kākou mau kai. 'O nā kai nō kēia a ko kākou mau kūpuna i hele ai e lawai'a i ko lākou mau lā, a i ho'olawa mai me ka lawa pono i nā mea i makemake 'ia no kā lākou 'ai, a i lohe 'ole 'ia ho'i ko lākou nele 'ana a me ka pilikia o ka loa'a 'ana.

Eia nā moʻolelo i kākau 'ia e Kamakau a me Malo, nā kānaka Hawai'i i loa'a ka ho'ona'auao 'ia 'ana i nā kula mua o kākou, a i Lahainaluna ho'i, ke kula kiʻekiʻe o ia mau lā i hala aku. Ke hōʻike mai nei kēia mau kānaka kākau moʻolelo i ke kumu i nui ai ka i'a o ia mau lā i hala wale aku.

Ka mua, ua hoʻokapu 'ia nā i'a o ke kai i ko lākou manawa kokoke e hānau. A ma muli o ka like 'ole o nā manawa e hānau ai nā i'a o kēia mau kai, 'a'ole i lilo kēia mau hoʻokapu 'ana i mea e nele loa ai nā kānaka i ka i'a. He manawa 'oko'a nō ko ka 'ama'ama, a ua ike kākou eia nā lā hānau mai Novemaba mai a hiki i ka pau 'ana o Maraki. I ke au o nā kūpuna o kākou, he 'eono mahina kapu o kēia i'a, 'a'ole e hiki e kī'i 'ia e 'ai, koe wale nō nā loko, a no kēia kumu nō pāha i hana 'ia ai nā loko. 'A'ole wale nō no ke kapu, akā, no ka hoʻomomona 'ana kekahai, a ke kū mai nei nā loko i'a nenui ma nā wahi like 'ole e hōʻike mai ana i nā hanauna o kēia mau lā i ka ikaika a me ka mana'o hana o ko kākou mau kūpuna.

Ua lōʻihi ka mālama 'ia 'ana o kēia mea he kapu ma luna o nā i'a like 'ole o ko to know: why the fish in our seas are decreasing. These are the very same seas in which our ancestors fished in their day, and which provided enough of what was wanted for their sustenance and it was never heard that they lacked for fish or had difficulty in catching them.

We should consider the histories written by Kamakau and Malo, Hawaiians who were educated in our first schools and at Lahainaluna, the college of that bygone era. These two historians tell us the reason why there was so much fish in the olden days.

First— A kapu was placed on the fish just prior to the spawning season. Because the spawning seasons varied among the fishes of these seas, the kapu did not deprive the people of fish. ‘Ama‘ama had a different season and we know that its spawning time extended from November to the end of March. In the time of our ancestors, this fish was kapu for six months, and could not be caught to eat except in fishponds, which is perhaps why fishponds were built. They were not only for relief from the kapu but also to fatten the fish. There are large fishponds everywhere demonstrating to the present generations the strength and determination of our ancestors.

These kapu imposed on the various fishes were observed for a long time in our seas. It
Kākou nei mau kai. A na kēia mau kapu i pāpā mai i nā kānāwai o ke kūʻē i ʻana i nā iʻa kapu, a ua hānau mai ia mau iʻa, a ua hoʻopulapula ʻia ka nui o nā iʻa ma loko o kēia mau kai. He ʻoiaʻiʻo, ʻaʻole he mau kānāwai lōʻihi e wehewehe ana i ka manaʻo o kēia mau kānāwai, hoʻokahi nō, ʻo ke kapu na ke akua, a ua kapu ihola. ʻAʻole nō hoʻi nā kānaka i maʻa i ka hele aku e kūʻē i kēia mau kānāwai ma ka haʻihaʻi i ʻana, akā ua lawa nō i ko lākou ʻike ʻana, ua kapu no kēia akua, a ua hiki ʻole ke kiʻi ʻia kēlā mau iʻa.

Ma kekahīʻano, ua kaukahi nā kānāwai i hana ʻia, ʻaʻole he mau luna kānāwai nāna e hoʻoholo mai kou hewa, akā, na ka loaʻa ʻana o ka iʻa ma kou lima e hōʻike mai ana ua kiʻi ʻoe i ka iʻa kapu. A inā ua loaʻa ʻoe, hoʻokahi nō hoʻopāʻi, ʻo ka make. He make naʻe na kēlā akua.

Malia paha i kēia au naʻauao, ua hiki i nā kānāwai o kēia lā ke ʻakaʻaka mai no kēia mau hana hūpō a nā kānāwai o ke au kahiko, akā, ma waho aʻe o ke kapu no kēia akua a na kēlā akua, ua nui ko lākou naʻauao, ʻoiāi ua loaʻa he manawa e hānau ai nā iʻa i ko lākou manawa. A na kēia mau kapu i hoʻonui aʻe a hoʻolawa mai i nā iʻa o ko lākou mau lā maka pōloli iʻa.

I kēia mau lā o nā kānāwai a ka poʻe naʻauao, ke ʻike nei kākou, ʻaʻole he malu o nā kānāwai i hana ʻia, a ke lilo nei ka lawaiʻa ʻana a me ka hopu ʻana i nā iʻa o ko kākou was these kapu that prohibited the people from catching the restricted fish and these same fish spawned and multiplied in these seas. There certainly were no lengthy laws with explanations to tell what they were all about, there was but one – the kapu came from the gods and it was inviolable. The people were not accustomed to go and oppose those who proclaimed the law, but it was enough because they knew that the kapu for this particular god, and that those fishes were not to be caught.

In a sense, the law stood alone, for there were no judges to determine one’s guilt, but being found with the fish in your hand showed that you had caught a fish that was under kapu. If you were caught so, there was but one punishment, death. Death, however, came from that god. Perhaps in these enlightened days people can laugh at these ignorant actions of the people of old, but outside of the kapu of the various gods, they were very wise, for they found out that there is a spawning season for each of the fishes, each in their time. It was these kapu that increased the fish supply to satisfy them when they hungered for fish.

In these days of laws made by the “learned,” we are seeing that these laws being passed provide no protection. Fishing and collecting
nei mau kai i mea ho'opilikia mai i nā kānaka 'ai i'a, no ke kumu i ka 'u'uku 'ana mai o nā i'a, ua pi'i a'e ko lākou mau kumu kū'ai.

I kēlā mau makahiki aku nei, me ka hana nui i hana 'ia ai, a holo ai kekahī kānāwai e ho'okapu ana i ka hopu 'ia 'ana o nā 'ama'ama, a ua nui ke kūʻē 'ia o kēia kānāwai e kekahī po'e kānaka Hawai'i, no ke kumu, e ho'opilikia mai ana. 'O ka 'oia'i'o na'e o kēia kānāwai, e ho'ihoi mai ana i kekahī o nā kapu i hana 'ia nō e ko kākou mau kūpuna i nā lā i hala aku. A i ke kū 'ana o kēlā kānāwai he 'elima makahiki, 'a'ole nō i maluhia ke kānāwai, a ki' i 'ole 'ia ho'i nā 'ama'ama, akā, ua hopu 'ia nō e nā kānaka e hele ana i ke kīlō 'upena. A i ka pau 'ana o kēlā mau makahiki he 'elima, 'a'ole i ho'olō'ihi hou 'ia aku kēlā kānāwai, no ka mea, ua maka'u nā kānaka e hele ana i loko o ka 'Aha 'Ōlelo ke hana hou i kānāwai o kēia 'ano.

In the olden days, the konohiki were not elected; the fisheries were given over by the chiefs to those they trusted, and they were called konohiki. It was these persons who imposed the kapu in their times. The 'ōpelu and aku were made kapu for Lono and fearing even the mention of this god, people were unable to catch these fish. These days there is no set time of restriction for these fish. They can be caught whenever they are found. Today, we can go to the market and see the aku being cut up, filled with eggs. These
eggs are the fish of next year and when they grow larger, they become aku. But there seems to be no understanding of this and the aku are killed whenever they are found, yet when one that is filled with eggs dies, you are killing hundreds of aku of the future.

Today, we in the current generations are seeing the crisis and the lack of fish. They are becoming so expensive that they are unobtainable at a decent price. But in the days of our ancestors, they had enough fish, even though there were more people then than there are now. This may be shocking to people of today but this is the actual truth; they were well supplied because they set a kapu during the spawning time of all fishes. The fish that lived near shore such as the manini, the kole, the uhu, the kūmū, the palani, the kala and many others living in our seas had no kapu imposed on them, but when the spawning season came for these fishes, they went into holes to live until the tiny fish were grown. When they emerged, they did not fail to multiply for they had borne their young. But the ʻamaʻama, squid, aku, ʻōpelu and other such fish bear their young in unenclosed and unprotected places. For this reason they were made kapu from when the spawning season was near until the months when it ended.
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