

Review: **LILIKALĀ** KAME'ELEIHIWA
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MIINOA

When I first happened upon Obeyesekere's *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook* I groaned to myself, "Not another book about Cook! The man died two hundred years ago. Why can't they just leave him dead?" For most Hawaiians Captain Cook is rather an uninteresting historical figure. The noted Hawaiian scholar Haunani-Kay Trask often dismisses Cook as "a syphilitic, tubercular racist," and when I teach that part of Hawaiian history I relate to my students that he brought venereal disease, violence, and, eventually, an unrelenting wave of foreigners, once his journals had been published in Europe.

From the Hawaiian perspective, however, the best part about Cook's visit is that we killed him, as the *mana* (spiritual power) of his death accrues to us. Such *mana* is very useful in our dealing with those admirably fierce Maori of Aotearoa who often look askance at Hawaiian reluctance to confront the colonizing foreigner. Upon such occasions we can defend our honor by declaring that at least *we* killed Cook, and having done so we rid the world of another evil *haole* (white man). Perhaps if we had followed that tradition more faithfully, the *haole* world would have avoided us longer. Considering the devastating effects of *haole* disease on our population, such avoidance would have only been to our benefit (Stannard 1989:45-49).

After all, Cook happened upon Aotearoa *before* he came to Hawai'i and the Maori had had their chance to kill him. Since they faltered in judgment, we took care of the job, and hundreds of years later we are still glorying in the act, no doubt for the same reasons that our ancestors did; Cook's behavior, like the behavior of many *haole* today, was racist, condescending, and rude. His attempted kidnaping of Kalani'opu'u, one of our highest and most sacred Ali'i Nui (high chiefs) was a criminal act, appropriately deserving of the death sentence he received.

But for the main part, his brief visit did not substantially change the political relationship among Ali'i Nui, which is the part of Hawaiian history important to Hawaiians. I have been hard put to understand why *haole* scholars (like Marshall Sahlins) persist in writing about

Cook, and since such scholars (including Valerio Valeri) invariably misinterpret Hawaiian cultural acts, we generally laugh at such works.

Obeyesekere's book is not simply about Cook, the great white explorer; it is also about the way *haoles* have idolized Cook as a God, ignoring that biblical commandment which forbids them to do so. Although not as harsh as Trask in her analysis of Cook, Obeyesekere does make a good attempt at debunking the image of slavish Natives worshiping at the feet of Cook. He says, "To put it bluntly, I doubt that the natives created their European god; the Europeans created him for them. This 'European god is a myth of conquest, imperialism, and civilization--a triad that cannot be easily separated" (p. 3). Obeyesekere can afford to be polite; Cook wasn't responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of Obeyesekere's ancestors, as Cook is in the case of Hawaiians.

It is a wonderful quirk of fate, or perhaps after Edward Said, an inevitable historical progression, to find a person of color using the white man's pseudoscience of anthropology to study white society. Anthropology has long been a *haole* term for the study of quaint Natives, as opposed to sociology, which is the "serious" study of white societies. As the object of intense anthropological observation, Natives have often wished that white people would study their own ancestors, whom they could at least know culturally, instead of us, whom they generally misunderstand and thus misrepresent (Trask 1993: 161-178).

It was refreshing, therefore, to read this thought-provoking book by Gananath Obeyesekere, a Sri Lankan by birth and an anthropologist by training, which attacks an oft-repeated and cherished European notion that Hawaiians, and by romantic extension other Pacific Natives, believed Captain Cook to be an Akua (God).

This fanciful paradigm of initial contact captured the imagination of the Western world. Perhaps Westerners, having suffered the historical memory of fierce resistance and occasional defeat at the hands of Moors and other infidels, were delighted to find at last some Natives who knew the true worth of the white man. That Cook was a commoner son of an ordinary laborer must have given hope to lower-class *haole* aspirations as well. Hence the precipitous rush of the savage white tribes of Europe to invade the friendly islands of the Pacific.

According to Western myth, even after Hawaiians killed Cook, they (the Lono priests) expressed remorse and asked when Cook would return. Obviously, the Natives were childlike and credulous, if somewhat violent, which could only be attributed to their innate animal nature. Once a superior white man killed and mutilated a goodly num-

ber of them, Natives invariably would obey; like a smart dog, Natives could be trained with the proper discipline.

Obeyesekere begins his work with an examination of the manner in which *haole* anthropologists interpret Native actions. Using his Sri Lankan view of the world, and his experience of the West's misinterpretation of Sri Lankan culture, he cautions his *haole* colleagues, especially Marshall Sahlins, against assuming that Natives are not capable of rational thought or sophisticated discrimination in cosmological matters. He warns that "the native can make all sorts of subtle discriminations in his field of beliefs; the outsider-anthropologist practicing a reverse form of discrimination cannot" (p. 22). Hawaiians can agree with Obeyesekere on that point because as people of color we have both been on the receiving end of such condescending attitudes.

His introductory arguments are a prelude to an entirely new analysis of Cook (hopefully the last one!) and of the Cook myth. Make no mistake, Obeyesekere is an excellent scholar, and if one is really interested in this time period, his is the most succinct and interesting of all the accounts. Instead of the usual syrupy-sweet portrayal of Cook as a brilliant navigator but often-misunderstood leader of men, Obeyesekere uses excerpts from the official journals to show Cook for the cruel savage that he actually was. Evidently Cook worshiped at the altar of private property and used the crime of "theft" as an excuse to act out his racist fantasies of white superiority. Besides personally murdering Natives, Cook also reveled in the brutal beating and mutilation of Natives.

For the crime of insolence and theft, Cook ordered that one Tongan man be given seventy-two lashes, six times the legal limit of twelve prescribed by the British admiralty, and afterwards, had a cross cut by knife on to both shoulders, penetrating to the bone (p. 31). Although particularly severe in this case, such behavior was common practice by Cook against the Tongans. He even had the audacity to hold hostage a number of high chiefs while in a rage over the theft of a goat and two turkeys. It is truly a testament to Tongan humanity that they did not rise up and murder the entire crew as they slept. I confess such thoughts ran through my mind as I read the account.

Nor were Tongans the only Natives so treated by Cook; he did the same thing in Tahiti and in the Society Islands. On Eimeo he burned whole villages and war canoes, and on Huahine he amused himself by flogging and cutting off the ears of those who offended him. Meanwhile, his men began to be inspired by such brutality, and upon landing on Ra'iatea, a savage named Williamson fiercely attacked a man who had stolen a nail, stomping on his side and breaking out several of his

teeth. To their credit, some of Cook's officers began to desert in horror of his behavior, so Cook promptly took the high chief Rio's wives and children hostage until the deserters were restored. Rio was aghast at Cook's behavior because he had feasted Cook with generous hospitality.

This is the Captain Cook who sailed into Hawai'i and according to Sahlins was supposedly worshiped as a God. Obeyesekere does an excellent job of criticizing the Sahlins interpretation of Hawaiian response to Cook. I have often been amused at Sahlins's fanciful flights of mythical realities, until of course some local anthropologist tries to teach it to my people as the truth. So it is highly gratifying to see Obeyesekere take each strand of Sahlins's argument and strip it down to the bare bones, using the actual (and not doctored) quotes from the eyewitness accounts.

Obeyesekere does a very good analysis of the actual ceremonies at Hikiau temple where Cook, or Tuute as he is called by Hawaiians, is given the name Lono and is presented to Kunuiakea, the highest-ranking Akua at the temple. He argues that the ceremony installed him as an Ali'i Nui, not as the Akua Lono; the Akua Lono is not usually presented to **Kūnuiākea**. Sahlins, on the other hand, has interpreted that ceremony to be one of **hānaipū**, where the high chief ritually feeds the Akua Lono. In actuality, the Ali'i Nui feeds the priestly representative of Lono. It is also just as plausible that Cook was being initiated into the Lono priesthood, not as a God but as a priest.

I was most amused by Obeyesekere's rebuttal of Sahlins's argument that the confrontation between Cook and **Kalani'ōpu'u** was a **Kāli'i** ceremony in reverse, wherein he remarks that "one of the serious problems that Sahlins faces in his mythic interpretation of Cook's death is that there is nothing in Hawaiian culture that recognizes a **'Kāli'i** in reverse' " (p. 182). The Kāli'i is a ritual of transition between the two great religious cycles of Makahiki and 'Aha, or of the reign of the Akua Lono, which lasted for four months, and that of **Kū**, who presided for eight months. Using the **Kāli'i** ritual as a model, **Kalani'ōpu'u** would be the king ritually killed and Cook would be the God Lono who supposedly vanquishes him, but since Cook was killed and not the king, Sahlins is indeed stretching the analogy, as is his wont.

Personally, I have always thought that the **Kāli'i** ritual has been misinterpreted by foreign scholars. **Kāli'i** means to "touch the chief" and, as described by Malo (1951:150), clearly is a ritual whereupon the Akua Lono, having completed the Makahiki circuit and collection of gifts, now accepts and blesses the Ali'i Nui, or king if you like. That is why the king is never pierced by the shower of spears, merely tapped by a spear wrapped in the white tapa symbolic of Lono; he is protected by Lono.

That Sahlins was following in a long line of *haole* scholars in idolizing Cook is no longer difficult to understand, thanks to Obeyesekere. Sahlins, like other *haole* before him, gains *haole mana* by doing so. He is thus identified with Cook, the great white humanitarian so beloved by Hawaiians as to be worshiped as a God. Perhaps Sahlins too, with his skillful and magical manipulation of Hawaiian ritual, hoped to achieve a similarly divine status. Certainly he is revered by many of his colleagues, if not by Hawaiians, and has gained great renown for his recitation of the cherished Cook myth.

So what actually happened? Was Cook really worshiped by Hawaiians as a God when all previous Polynesians had failed to do so? Did Hawaiians think all *haole* were Gods and thus buried Watman at Hikiau *heiau*? Which Hawaiian actually killed Cook? And why did they kill Cook, after having deified him? Didn't they know they were not supposed to kill a God?

When Cook stumbled upon our shores, Hawaiians were astounded, just as was every other Native in the Pacific when first laying eyes upon the *haole*. There is an excellent film by Dennis O'Rourke called *First Contact*, which describes the Native reaction to *haole* intrusion into the New Guinea Highlands in the 1930s. The people postulated that the *haole* were Gods, or perhaps ancestors returning from the dead, as their skin was so pale.

That is not unlike the confusion expressed by Hawaiians at first contact. In a universe ordered by cosmogonic genealogy, Hawaiians needed to make some sense of the event according to their own categories, and they had varied reactions. Some thought the event wonderful and others were terrified. Some postulated that the strange white-skinned people were one of the forty thousand Akua. The word *Akua* refers to various kinds of divinities. Akua are sometimes one of the great unseen Gods, or they can be ancestral guardians with varied physical manifestations (e.g., fish, plants, animals), or they can be ghosts.

Some of the Akua proposed were Lonoikamakahiki, Kukalepa'o ni'oni'o, Lonopele, Niuolahiki, Ku'ilioloa or **Kānehekili** (Kamakau 1961:93-95). One priest recommended a test to judge whether these *haole* were Akua--tempt them with women and if they could be seduced, they were mere men. Cook's crew proved quickly enough that they were men, and by Native accounts, so did Cook when he slept with the Kaua'i chiefess Lelemahoalani.

After initial contact in January 1778, Cook sailed off to northwest America, returning to Hawai'i island in November of the same year, which is roughly the beginning of the Makahiki. In the intervening ten months, Hawaiians had no doubt discussed his visit and expostulated as

to who exactly he was. Some Hawaiians recognized that their venereal sores originated with Cook's men and appealed to them for medical treatment; if not Gods, they might be medical priests.

In his search for a sheltered harbor, Cook made a clockwise circuit of Hawai'i island, unwittingly following Lono's ritual path of the Makahiki festival. When he weighed anchor in Kealahou Bay, traditional home of Lono, thousands of Hawaiians greeted him with exuberance and unstinting hospitality. I sincerely doubt that every Hawaiian there identified Cook as the God Lono, but it is very likely that the Lono priests decided to do so.

The Akua Lono was a God of peace and fertility who made an annual visit and circuit of a given island to bless the people and the land, gathering offerings of food, mats, tapa, and feathers in his wake. During Lono's time, war, ocean traveling, and hard labor were *kapu*, or forbidden, and celebration was the order of the day. But as Lono's ritual was less rigorous and severe than that of **Kū**, the Lono priests enjoyed less *mana* (Malo 1951:141).

Note that during the Makahiki season of 1778, the **Mō'i** (paramount chief or king) of Hawai'i island, Kalani'opu'u, had led his warriors in an attack on the chiefs of Maui, although war was expressly forbidden by the Lono priests at this time. Hence, it was entirely serendipitous for the Lono priests that Cook should sail into Kealahou at this moment. His presence demanded the return of Kalani'opu'u to their jurisdiction.

To the extent that the Lono priests could convince Cook to act out the part of their God, they could then persuade the general populace that the physical manifestation of the Akua had arrived. It was not usual to find one of the great unseen Akua such as Lono manifesting himself in living, breathing human form. The Lono priests could gain great *mana* from such an event. When Cook conveniently arrived with all of the requisite similarities-- white sails resembling the Makahiki symbol, traveling in the prescribed clockwise direction, landing at the focus of the Lono priesthood, and worshiping at his temple (Hikiau was used for both the worship of **Kū** and of Lono, as was commonly done at *luakini*) --of course the Lono priests would have hailed him as some kind of manifestation of Lono. They would have been foolish not to have done so, as it was to their political advantage.

Never mind that Cook didn't know the name Lono, couldn't speak Hawaiian, and refused to eat the ritual offerings; he was white (one of Lono's symbolic colors), he had powerful weapons, he would make a good ally, and that was enough. Had the Lono priests not done so, the **Kū** priests might have claimed Cook as their own, whereupon he would have had to eat the eye of a man (Malo 1951:174), and that might have

proved difficult. His name Tuute, or **Kūke** in modern Hawaiian orthography, would classify him as a relation of the war God Ku.

Did Kalani'opu'u, the other Ali'i Nui, and the Ku priests believe that Cook was an Akua? I have to agree with Obeyesekere that they treated Cook as an Ali'i Nui, not as an Akua. Some ranks of Ali'i Nui were designated Akua, or Gods who walked upon the earth, by virtue of an incestuous mating between their parents. Clearly Cook could not fit into that category. Moreover, it would have been highly detrimental to the *mana* of the Ku priesthood for the real God Lono to put in a physical appearance. Peaceful pursuits might have taken precedence over war, and chiefs could only gain great *mana* in battle. On the other hand, Cook as an Ali'i Nui with powerful weapons would prove a fierce adversary to Kalani'opu'u. It was better to let the Lono priesthood claim him as one of their own, either priest or chief or for the masses as an Akua.

If Cook, and by extension, his men, were part of the Lono faction, it would be entirely fitting that Watman, one of Cook's crew, be buried at Hikiau, where the Lono priests could watch over his remains and keep rivals from stealing his bones (for their *mana*). The *haole* belonged to the Lono priests for a time.

As to which Hawaiian actually killed Cook, no one will ever know, although surely it was a chief; only other chiefs were allowed in close proximity to Kalani'opu'u. The Hawaiian account has it that many participated, each trying to claim the *mana* of the death of this foreign Ali'i Nui as their own. Now that *mana* has accrued to all Hawaiians as a people. That Hawaiian chiefs did kill him is evidence that they at least did not believe him to be an Akua. Obeyesekere correctly interprets the disposal of his body as the normal chiefly custom. These were not, however, honors given to the Akua Lono of the Makahiki.

Are there no flaws in Obeyesekere's book? Is his analysis perfect? I cannot answer these questions in the affirmative. He is not a Hawaiian and does not know our culture, nor does he speak our language; thus he makes mistakes common to a foreign scholar. I applaud his critical analysis of his field of anthropology, of colonialist myths, and of Sahlins's work, but before he ventures further into the writing of Hawaiian history, he should at least become fluent in my language. Nonetheless, he has certainly satisfied the purpose of his inquiry; Cook is no longer a God. Maybe now he will rest in peace.

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