Historian Seth Archer traces the cultural impact of disease and health problems in the Hawaiian Islands from the arrival of Europeans to 1855. Colonialism in Hawai‘i began with epidemiological incursions, and Archer argues that health remained the national crisis of the islands for more than a century. Introduced diseases resulted in reduced life spans, rising infertility and infant mortality, and persistent poor health for generations of Islanders, leaving a deep imprint on Hawaiian culture and national consciousness. Scholars have noted the role of epidemics in the depopulation of Hawai‘i and broader Oceania, yet few have considered the interplay between colonialism, health, and culture—including Native religion, medicine, and gender. This study emphasizes Islanders’ own ideas about, and responses to, health challenges on the local level. Ultimately, Hawai‘i provides a case study for health and culture change among Indigenous populations across the Americas and the Pacific.

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Colonialism, Indigenous Health, and Culture in Hawai‘i, 1778–1855

SETH ARCHER
Utah State University
For Amber,
up life’s hill
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Note on Language and Terminology

In Hawai‘i, as in other colonized spaces, language is contested. There is good reason for this. As the Hawaiian proverb says, “In language there is life, in language there is death.”¹ Scholarship written for a broad audience must weigh culturally appropriate language against the demands of clarity and understanding. A cursory glance at recent scholarship reveals the elusiveness of a standardized Hawaiian orthography. Some consider further standardization as a colonial imposition; hence, the small island next to Maui appears variously in written form as Lāna‘i, Lana‘i, and Lanai. This presents obvious difficulties for readers. As a student of the language myself, I adhere to the best practices established by my mentors, striving always for internal consistency. This means including diacritical marks – the ‘okina (‘) and kahako ˉ (¯) – except where the original source does not, and correcting spellings that would otherwise cause confusion with brackets. Hawaiian words appear in italics the first time they are used and in regular script thereafter, except where italics appear in the quoted text.

Translation poses its own challenges. Consider the word poˉʻino, a contraction of pō (time of, state of) and ʻino (wicked, immoral, spoiled, contaminated). As applied to women in menses, pōʻino in nineteenth-century texts has generated translations ranging from “unlucky” to “dangerous.”² A lot hangs on these differences. Readers

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¹ “I ka ʻōlelo no ke ʻo, i ka ʻōlelo no ka make.” Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui offered an alternative: “Life is in speech, death is in speech” (ʻŌlelo Noʻeau, 129).
² Malo, Hawaiian Antiquities, 29 (“unlucky”); Malo, Mo ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi, trans. Langlas and Lyon, 218 (“dangerous”). See also Pukui and Elbert, Hawaiian Dictionary, s.v. pō, ʻino,
Note on Language and Terminology

will not always agree with my translations or with the translations I have chosen, though more often than not the translation that appears is the only one thus far attempted.

The people at the heart of this book are referred to as Hawaiians, as Islanders, or by the town, district, or island from which they hailed (for example, “Kaua‘i Islander,” “Kula resident”). Choice of identifier is typically determined by context. Despite the recommendation of some scholars, I avoid Native Hawaiian, kānaka maoli (“true/genuine people”), and kānaka ʻōiwi (“Indigenous/Native people”). Cultural and politically significant today, these terms are mostly anachronistic for the period under study and sometimes muddle important distinctions between people of different or mixed ancestry. When relevant to the discussion, persons of mixed descent are identified in the text as “part Hawaiian” or by the Hawaiian term hapa haole (“part foreign”).

Regardless of where they were born, people lacking Hawaiian ancestry are never identified in this book as Hawaiian. Before 1820 visitors arrived from the British Isles, France, Spain, New Spain (Mexico), the United States, Canada, Russia, Ukraine, the German and Baltic states, Canton, and the South Pacific. In the latter chapters of this book, foreigners in some numbers began to settle on the islands. Sometimes a shorthand for these diverse newcomers is necessary. To Hawaiians they were all – with the possible exception of Tahitians – haole (foreign). That term took on racial connotations later in the nineteenth century. “Western” is a wholly imperfect description for these people, their ideas, and their institutions, but it will have to suffice in certain places where “foreign(er)” fails to convey the type of introduction or intrusion.

Nineteenth-century Hawaiians spelled their names in various ways; name changes were not uncommon. In general I employ the name most commonly used by scholars and by contemporary Hawaiians to refer to their ancestors. For example, the royal governor of O‘ahu appears in the text as Boki rather than Kama‘āle‘ule‘ule, his given name, or Poki, which may be a closer pronunciation. An exception is where sources indicate that the individual preferred an alternative to the name commonly used today; for example, Davida rather than David Malo. Monarchs are most often ʻōiwi. For an alternative translation of the prefix po-, see Andrews, Dictionary, s.v. po, poino. For discussion, see Blaisdell, “‘Hawaiian’ versus ‘Kanaka Maoli’ as Metaphors”; Wood, Displacing Natives, chap. 1, esp. 12–13; Silva, Aloha Betrayed, 12–13; Young, “Interdisciplinary Study of the Term ‘Hawaiian’”; Kauanui, Hawaiian Blood; Brown, Facing the Spears of Change, ix–xiii.
identified by their given name (Kauikeaouli) and sometimes by their title (Kamehameha III). When a person identified by foreigners does not appear elsewhere in the records, I employ the imposed name, however inaccurate, rather than guess at the actual one.

Hawaiian society was divided into two major classes in this period. The overwhelming majority of Islanders were commoners, or makaʻainana (“children of the land”), while the aliʻi (chiefly) class comprised about 1 percent of the population. Both terms are gender-neutral. I follow the convention of using “commoner(s)” for the former and “chief(s)” for the latter, though I frequently make a point of identifying female chiefs as “chiefesses,” since chief is gendered in English. A list of important persons appears in Appendix D.

While Hawaiʻi in this period was known to much of the world as the Sandwich Islands – and to the Chinese as the Sandalwood Mountains – I use Hawaiʻi or the Hawaiian Islands when discussing the archipelago and its people, regardless of era. I refer to the largest island in the chain as either the Big Island or Hawaiʻi Island.

* Thanks to Gregory Rosenthal for this reference.