

SOURCE:

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Chapter 3 Historic Context

Introduction

To the extent that it is relevant to archaeological and historical investigations at PMRF, the cultural and historical setting is reviewed as six topics: (1) traditional cultural geography; (2) traditional land use; (3) early historic land use; (4) commercial agriculture era; (5) early twentieth century prior to World War II, and (6) World War II and Cold War to 1990s.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS THE ORIGINAL “EARLY HISTORIC LAND USE” SUBSECTION:

Early Historic Land Use

The Mānā Plain held little interest to early western explorers, the first of whom arrived with Captain Cook in 1778. The area was reported to be a hot and dry place with large sections of marshlands (see Portlock 1789:170-171). Dixon (1789:25) noted the small settlement of Kekaha (which he called “A Tappa”). He described it as being situated inland of a row of “cocoa-nut” trees, among which was a good deal of swampy ground cultivated in taro and sugarcane. In 1804, Lisiansky wrote that the Mānā Plain rose gradually inland from the western shore, and “from its numberless habitations, which appear better built than those of the island of Owyhee, presents everywhere a most beautiful landscape” (Lisiansky 1814:114). In 1840, Commander Charles Wilkes, during his command of the United States Exploring Expedition from 1838 to 1842, stated that the area was fit for little except pasturage of goats, being destitute of trees to a distance of 8 or 10 miles inland. He noted that the sea offshore was considered the best for fishing and salt production, that coconut trees grew in the lowlands, and that the land at the base of the cliffs had excellent soil but lacked water (Wilkes 1845:4:45, 65).

Hawaiians lived on the Mānā Plain in much the same way as their ancestors until midcentury when the 1848 Mahele set the stage for a shift to large-scale plantation agriculture (Flores and Kaohi 1992:114). They continued their traditional reliance on trading with their neighbors; obtaining freshwater from springs, intermittent streams, and percolating water near the ocean; acquiring marine resources from

the channel and rich offshore reefs; raising fish and taro in ponds and swamps; hunting ducks and birds; gathering wild plants from the plain and uplands; harvesting forest resources; producing traditional canoes, tools, and *kapa* (barkcloth); and growing taro, sweet potatoes, bananas, and other food crops in small plots (Flores and Kaohi 1992; Handy and Handy 1991; Maly and Wulzen 1997; Tomonari-Tuggle and Yoklavich 2005). The people of Mānā also grew sugarcane on a small scale (Condé and Best 1973:141; Sweeney 1994:8); ratoons of sugarcane planted on the lowlands in 1850 were still growing in 1884 (Flores and Kaohi 1992:130-131). Some Hawaiians also grew tobacco for private use (Sweeney 1994:11).

Handy and Handy (1991:275) say that while Hawaiians grew some taro in the swampy areas of Mānā and Wai'ele, they largely depended on sweet potatoes. "To what extent these could be watered by hand or irrigated is not known, but there must have been long periods of dearth, during which the uplands offered much less [rainfall] in this area than on the eastern and northern sides of the island." The back beach area from Barking Sands to Kekaha became a pastoral area for grazing cattle and goats (Drolet and Powell 1998:19).

At midcentury, the harvesting of sandalwood and other timber had pushed the forest edge upslope, and overgrazing by imported cattle and goats had denuded the lower forests (Maly and Wulzen 1997:23; Sweeney 1994:8). The area was fairly populated, with a row of grass houses that extended all the way along the foothills from Waimea to Mānā (Flores and Kaohi 1992:128; Kaua'i Historical Society 1991:100; Sweeney 1994:10).