

OHA STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT



Ka Ho'ihō'i 'ana o ke Kāuna Mea Makamae Pili Ali'i

*The Repatriation of four Treasures Associated with Ali'i
National Museums Northern Ireland*



Figures 1 &2. Ipu Kuha and Ipu 'Aina

IPU KUHA and IPU 'AINA

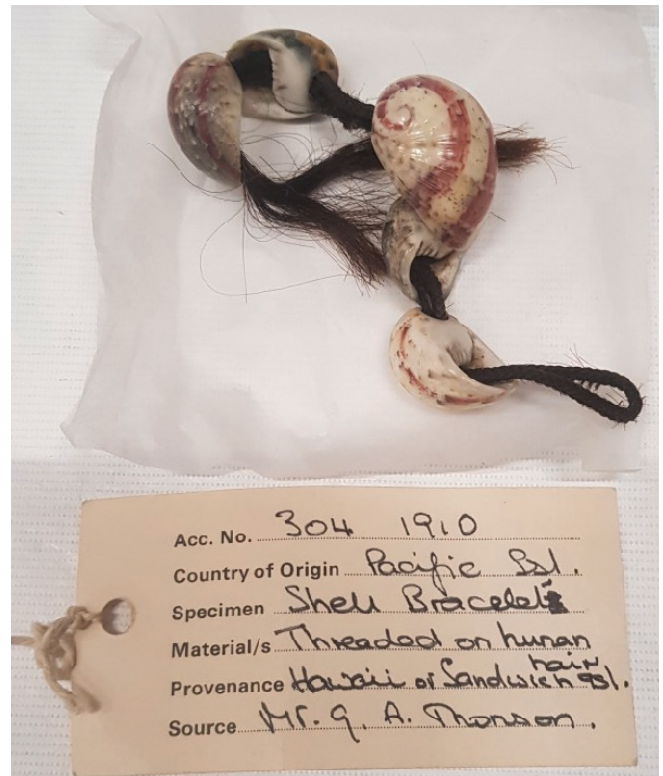
Both **ipu kuha** (spittoon) and **ipu 'aina** (scrap bowl), as the word ipu (*lagenaria siceraria*) suggests, take their names from the shape of the gourd used for a variety of containers by the common folk of Hawaiian society. Wooden ipu kuha and ipu 'aina, however, were exclusively made for ali'i (chiefs) as the symmetry and smooth surface of the item required intense labor that was achieved, remarkably, with only the use of stone tools. According to Bishop Museum Curator Sir Peter Buck (1957, p. 53), "Scrap bowls and spittoons ipu 'aina were made for chiefs, who deposited fish bones and scraps of food during meals in the former, and spittle, hair and nail parings in the latter." Because it was feared that the chief could be assassinated by use of sorcery, the attendants of the ipu 'aina carefully disposed of food scraps and bodily remains lest the material fall into the hands of a kahuna 'anā'anā (sorcerer). Both food scraps and bodily remains could be used as maunu, or bait, to cast spells to cause death to the person from whom the remains came. Another feature of many ipu 'aina, is the "curious method of ornamentation by the insertion of superb human molar teeth" (Brigham, 1906, p. 177). The use of human bones for fishhooks was well known and meant to capitalize on the mana (spiritual power) of the deceased - and in many instances to insult the dead. "This is also shown in the insertion of teeth and bones in vessels of dishonor, such as spittoons (ipu kuha), slop basins (ipu aina) and the like" (p. 177). The ipu kuha from the Ulster Museum collection contains both teeth and a bone fragment. The Belfast Art Gallery and Museum accession book lists this item (1910.74) as a bowl of wood with a diameter of 4 inches and a depth of 3-3/8 inches. A label attached to it identified it as an ipu kuha.



KŪPE'E

Kūpe'e is the Hawaiian word for bracelet and also the name of the shell (*Nerita polita*). The kūpe'e (wristlet) that Gordon Thompson acquired is rare as the shells are threaded on plaited human hair, very reminiscent of the lei niho palaoa (whale tooth necklace) that were strung on loops of braided hair, thus suggesting that the kūpe'e belonged to an ali'i (chief). Most kūpe'e in the Bishop Museum are strung with natural fiber like olonā (*Louchardia latifolia*) although other samples are strung on string, silk ribbon and even copper wire. The largest type of kūpe'e (shell) on the bracelet, with its red and white stripes, is called mahiole. Other kūpe'e (shell) types according to Titcomb, Gellows, Puku'i, and Devaney (1978), include: 'ula (red) which were red; ānuenuē (rainbow) which were red or black striped; palaoa (whale tooth ivory) which were creamy white; 'ele'ele (black, dark) which were black; kāni'o (vertical stripes) which were black with white streaks; mahiole (warrior's helmet) which were white with red stripes; and puna, a rare variety for which there is no color description. Puku'i (1986) wrote that the rarest, palaoa and puna, were reserved for the ali'i. Of the bracelets and necklaces made of kūpe'e, perhaps the most well-preserved specimen in Bishop Museum belonged to Queen Kapi'olani, which displays almost every kūpe'e color and pattern type. Those shells were gifted to Kapi'olani on her many Ho'oulu Lāhui visits with her people throughout the island chain. Other notable kūpe'e collections in the Bishop Museum also come from those of ali'i lineage:

The Queen Lili'uokalani Collection; the Kapi'olani-Kalaniana'ole Collection; the Ke'elikōlani Collection; the Lucy Kaopaulu Peabody Collection; and the Edgar and Kalani Henriques Collection.



LEI NIHO PALAOA



Lei niho palaoa, or whale-tooth necklaces, such as the one collected in the 19th century by Gordon Thompson, were symbols of nobility and power in Hawaiian society. The hook-shaped ivory pendant that is suspended upon cords of the braided hair of esteemed ancestors, was thought to represent the tongue, and by association, the mouth and the power of the spoken word as evidenced in the proverb: "I ka alelo ke ola, i ka alelo ka make. In the tongue is life, in the tongue is death." The "niho palaoa" refers to the tooth of the sperm whale, a highly prized resource obtained when a sperm whale beached itself or was found dead onshore. Kualoa, O'ahu, was once coveted by Kahekili of Maui for access to this highly prized resource, presumably for fashioning the lei niho palaoa. The earliest written account of the pendant by westerners was by James King, the second lieutenant of the *Resolution* which James Cook captained until he was killed at Kealahou, Hawai'i. King described the lei niho palaoa in a journal entry of 1779 as "an ornament in the form of a handle of a cup, about two inches long and half an inch broad, made of wood, stone, or ivory, finely polished, which hung about the neck by fine threads of twisted hair, doubled sometime an hundred fold" (pp. 134-135). The distinct hook or tongue shape of the niho palaoa was prevalent in the 19th century when walrus ivory was often substituted for sperm whale ivory, according to Cammann (1954).



While the shape is clearly pre-European, the style on O‘ahu was uncarved and, thus, called ‘ōpu‘u (bud). Peleiholani, paramount chief of O‘ahu, gifted his son, Kalani‘ōpu‘u, with such a lei. Hence, the ‘ōpu‘u in his name refers to the O‘ahu style of lei niho palaoa. The other unique material used in fashioning the lei were the cords of human hair braided in eight-ply weave. As an example of the tremendous amount of work required to braid the fine filaments of hair, is a classic lei specimen in the W. O. Oldman collection of London that described a lei niho palaoa composed of “580 closely-braided square cords of human hair on each side of the ornament in the form of a hook carved from a whale tooth, very finely shaped and finished. Braided tapering cords at ends for fastening around the neck” (Oldman, 1940, p. 72). The fastening cords were usually of olonā (*Louchrdia latifolia*), an endemic plant that produced fibers recognized to be “the strongest and most durable fiber in the world” (MacVaughey, 1918, p. 236).

LEI NIHO PALAOA



Pe‘ahi (fan) that were fashioned in this unique, curved rainbow shape were reserved for the ali‘i. The Belfast Art Gallery and Museum accession book lists this item (1910.346) as a fan whose upper portion is “plaited cane,” probably ‘ie‘ie (*Freycinetia arborea*), the rattan-like roots used for basketry and wickerwork like mahiole (helmets) or ki‘i akua hulu (feathered god-image).

The ledger describes the bottom portion as being composed of “intermixed hair & wool.” The width is 20-3/8 inches and the length is 9-3/4 inches. Other museum notes state that “a pattern of human hair and red and purple wool is woven into the handle portion. These fans were used by Hawaiian chiefs and held by special attendants.” The innovative practice of incorporating western fabric and fiber into the fan can also found in similar fans in the Peabody and British Museums. A fan of feathers in the Belfast Museum itemized as 1910:345, the returning pe‘ahi (pictured above) states that it belonged to Princess Bokee [sic Boki Kamā‘ule‘ule], probably Kuini Liliha, the wife of Boki and governor of O‘ahu from 1829 to 1831. She died in 1839. The Thompson family of Ireland were in the Pacific during Liliha’s time in Honolulu and may have acquired the fan at that time. It could also be possible that the repatriated pe‘ahi was part of Liliha’s estate.

ABOUT THE DONOR: GORDON AUGUSTUS THOMPSON



FIGURE 3. Presented by Mr Gordon Augustus Thomson, 1884. City of Melbourne art and heritage collection.

Gordon Augustus Thompson was born in 1799 in Belfast, Antrim, Ireland, to a wealthy family with ties to the estates of Castleton and Lowood in Scotland. Gordon, the youngest son, was named for the governor of St. Vincent, Colonel Robert Gordon, to whom he became the sole heir of his uncle’s Spring Estate in the West Indies. His travels took him to many parts of the world and were captured in the book, *In the Wake of Captain Cook: The Travels of Gordon Augustus Thompson (1799-1886)*, by Winifred Glover. Being one of Cook’s stops, Hawai‘i was certainly one of Thompson’s destinations and the source of his Hawaiian artifact collection. He and his family may have visited Hawai‘i at around the same time that their round-the-world tour took them to Melbourne, Australia, in 1836. Thompson’s mansion in Belfast housed the many curiosities and relics he collected from his travels. He donated his collection to the museum in his native Belfast in the 1850s before he retired to Melbourne, Australia, where he died at his home, Bedeque House, in 1886 at the age of 86. He published a memoir in *The Argus* called “Early Australian Reminiscences,” a poignant story of his early days in the city of Melbourne and the state of Victoria. In 1884, he donated a portrait of himself to the city of Melbourne.



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