

A Change of Name

By **Guest Author** - October 1, 2021



By Bobby Camara

*"O ka manu ai aku
laahia
Keiki ehu, kama ehu a
Kanaloa
Loa ka imina a ke
aloha"*

*"The elemental acrid
aroma [of the volcano]
Is the predictor for an
ehu child of Kanaloa*

The wait to greet this new island is long."

- Excerpt from a Pele chant translated by Pua Kanahele and Ku'ulei Kanahele

About 19 miles off the southeast coast of Moku o Keawe, and approximately 3,200 feet below sea level, an active underwater volcano is slowly making its way to the surface. Back in 1955, scientists named the volcano "Lō'ihī" (long) based solely on its physical characteristics.

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Collections of rock samples are taken during a deep-sea expedition to Kama'ehuakanaloa. - Photo: Schmidt Ocean Institute

This past July, the Hawai'i Board on Geographic Names (HBGN) voted unanimously to rename the volcano "Kama'ehuakanaloa," which Ku'ulei Kanahele of the Edith Kanaka'ole

Foundation explains, “is a powerful name that invokes the name of Pelehonuamea and her birth out of Kanaloa.”

HBGN includes representatives from the Board of Land and Natural Resources, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, the Office of Planning, the University of Hawai‘i, the Bishop Museum and the State Land Surveyor, and has kuleana for designating the official names and spellings of geographic features in Hawai‘i.

Hanalei Marzan, Bishop Museum cultural advisor and HBGN chair said, “Members of the Board are excited to revitalize the use of traditional place names such as Kama‘ehuakanaloa. This is part of our kuleana to ensure uniformity in the use and spelling of names of geographic features within our cherished pae ‘āina.”

The move to change the name of the volcano to Kama‘ehuakanaloa was initiated by cultural practitioners, like Kanahale, who noted the name “Kama‘ehu a Kanaloa” while researching and translating mele recorded in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i newspapers from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

One example is Huluhia ke Au, a mele Kanahale found in Ka Mo‘olelo Ka‘ao o Hi‘iakaikapoliopole, and printed by Poepoe in Kuokoa Home Rula on May 22, 1908. This is an excerpt from the mele that Kanahale translated:

*Keiki ehu, kama ehu a Kanaloa
Loa ka ‘imina a ke aloha
Ua mokuhia ka makamaka, ka lino
Ua ka‘a ‘ia e ka Ua lena a Lono ē
Na Lono, na ka Manō Niuhi kia‘i moku
E moku ka pō e wehe ka pawa o ke ao
E ao ho‘i*

*Ruddy progeny, glowing child of Kanaloa (an undersea volcano)
The search for salutation is far (the volcano’s growth to the ocean surface is long; when it finally surfaces it can be greeted)
The umbilical cord is severed (it has broken the surface)
Run over by the yellow rains of Lono
Lono, the great niuhi shark who guards the islands
Darkness has broken, dawn has unfurled (the volcano, surfacing, receives light)
It is light*

Another mention of Kama‘ehuakanaloa is found in Ka Nupepa Kuokoa, in a similar mele submitted by S. W. K. Kekalohe of Kipahulu Maui, on Oct. 1, 1862. The mele is attributed to Namakaeha, an ali‘i at the time of Kamehameha I.

According to Kanahale, “Kama‘ehu a Kanaloa” is a reference to any undersea volcano, a child born in Kanaloa, the ocean. There are several Pele genealogies in which different male entities are listed as her father – depending on the site of the eruption or the type of eruption – indicating where or how Pele was born. Because an undersea volcano is the birth

of Pele from the ocean, the undersea volcano is a kama 'ehu a Kanaloa, a reddish child of Kanaloa.

One may wonder why it has taken nearly 70 years to give this undersea volcano a culturally relevant and appropriate name. Part of our kuleana today is to supplement earlier research with current knowledge. Researchers in the 1950s did not have easy access to newspapers or other resources written in 'ōlelo Hawai'i.

Such is the case with the naming of Lō'ihi in 1955.

Marine geologist Dr. Kenneth O. Emery (not to be confused with Dr. Kenneth P. Emory, the noted Bishop Museum archaeologist/anthropologist) sought to confirm the presence of seamounts (underwater volcanoes) in 1955.

From June 29 to July 2, aboard the USS Patapsco, Emery conducted echo-soundings of the ocean floor south east of the Island of Hawai'i to confirm the presence of seamounts. His work was published in great detail in Pacific Science in July 1955.

He identified five seamounts. One was long, one conical, one irregular (with peaks), one was deep, and the last was shallow. Emery reached out to renowned cultural experts Mary Kawena Pukui and Martha Hoku from the Bishop Museum, and Dr. Gordon A. Macdonald, then director of the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory.

Pukui, Hoku, and Macdonald conferred five names, based solely on the physical characteristics of each, a practice that follows the naming convention of many cherished places for features that make each unique. For the long seamount, "Lō'ihi" was selected.

Today we have access to 'ike Hawai'i from primary sources to help in our naming processes.

Accounts of the journey of Pelehonuamea and her clan from Kahiki to Papahānaumokuākea, to her current home in Halema'uma'u, have been told and retold. We know that she used Pāoa, her divining rod, as she looked for suitable dwellings along our pae'āina. So it seems completely reasonable that Pele continues her explorations offshore of Kīlauea, seeking to bring new land to the surface. And that new land, still submerged, is the reddish child of Kanaloa. E ola Kama- 'ehuakanaloa!

Bobby Camara was born and raised in Honoka'a on the Island of Hawai'i, and has dwelt in Volcano for 40 years. Retired from Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, his passion has been learning and sharing about the natural and cultural resources of his 'āina aloha, with emphases on botany, ethnobotany, geography and place names, geology, archeology, and ethnography. He studied with many different kumu, and remains insatiably curious about his island home.
