

14. | Life Outside the Temple: Reconstructing Traditional Hawaiian Ritual and Religion Through Ritualized Practices

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Abstract: The construction of increasingly larger, more elaborate, and standardized temples is a common trajectory identified with the rise of complex societies. However, this focus on temple studies can have the unintended consequence of narrowing how we view ancient ritual and religion. To address this issue, I argue we should employ a practice theory approach centered on the process by which certain places, people, and objects are made to stand out from the everyday. In this chapter I present a case study from the Hawaiian Islands to demonstrate how this approach can be applied to expose ritual practices as social strategies and can contribute to the ultimate goal of understanding the place of ideology in the evolution of complex society.

Archaeological studies have shown a clear, cross-cultural association between the development of complex societies and the increase in size, elaboration, frequency, and standardization of temple architecture. Interpretations of this historical pattern have been in terms of increasing authority, especially over labor, social integration, and the legitimization of the elite's power (DeMarrais et al. 1996; Kolb 1991, 1994; Moore 1996). However, the unintended consequence of these studies has been a hyper-focus on temple sites as material referents of religious life. In this chapter, I argue archaeologists should employ a practice theory approach centered on the process by which certain places, people, and objects are made to stand out from the everyday, also known as "ritualization"

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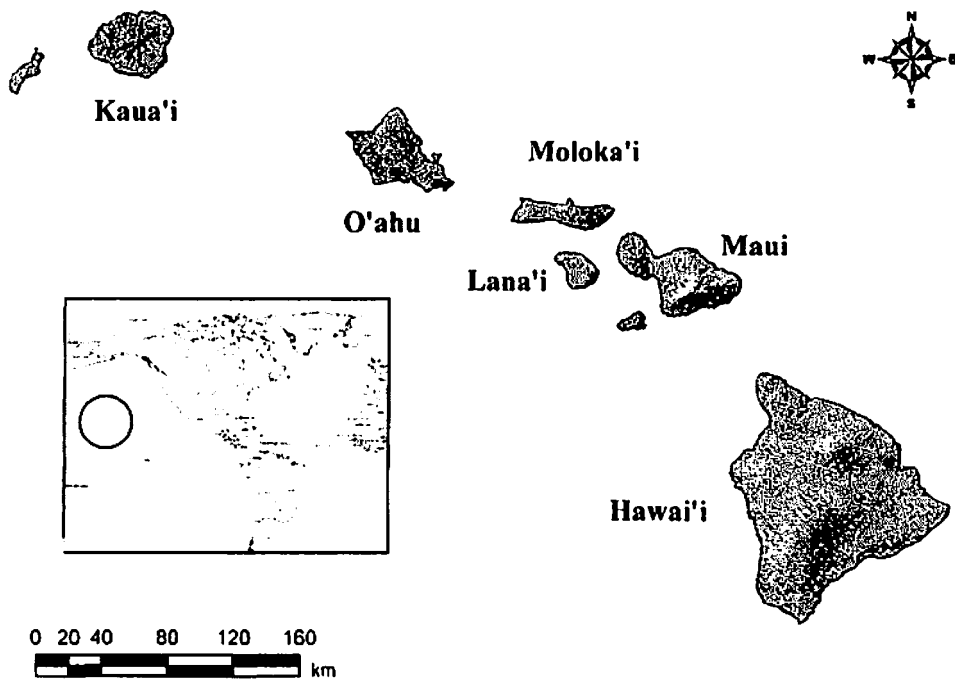


Figure 14-1. Map of the Hawaiian Islands.

embodied the god Lono and circuited islands with his entourage collecting tribute upon their arrival in community territories (*ahupua'a*)—as providing the structural backdrop for the deification of British Captain Cook. However, Valeri's (1985) work has been the target of serious critique by Charlot (1987; see also Valeri 1987) and others (Linnikin 1990) who challenge his methodology, specifically in terms of how cultural variation was represented. Further, Sahlins's reconstruction of the indigenous Hawaiian worldview has also been the center of criticism (Obeyesekere 1992; see also Sahlins 1995). Thus, using oral traditions alone, we are left with the question, how does one reconstruct aspects of society not directly recorded, under-represented, or perhaps misrepresented in ethnohistoric sources?

Archaeology

The archaeological study of Hawaiian religion began at the turn of the century when Bishop Museum ethnologist John Stokes, Hawai'i's first professional archaeologist, at the behest of the museum's director initiated surveys specifically centered on recording temples (*heiau*) in the hopes of identifying the influences of the legendary priest Pa'ao on architectural style (Stokes 1991). Many years later, the first settlement-pattern studies ushered in an excavation period in the study of temples (Green 1980; Kirch and Kelly 1975; Tuggle and Griffin 1973; see also reports by E. J. Ladd in the 1960s and 1970s listed in Kirch 1985 and Kolb 1992 on the history of temple studies). These excavations gave us our first clues as to the long-term historical development of sacred sites. The most extensive of

these investigations—including ‘Ale‘ale‘a at Honaunau on Hawai‘i and Kane‘aki in Makaha Valley on O‘ahu—revealed a common progression of medium-sized structures rebuilt into larger temples (Ladd 1969, 1973). Further, test excavations in Hālawā Valley, Moloka‘i, identified the possible site of a men’s house (*mua*), a type of ritual site well known through ethnohistory yet at the time uninvestigated archaeologically (Kirch and Kelly 1975).

Timothy Earle (1977, 1978, 1987, 1997, 2002), the principal proponent of a political economy model of Hawaiian prehistory, has in various publications depicted Hawaiian elites as covertly utilizing religion to legitimate their increasingly powerful position in society. In an effort to further understand the political economy of the Hawaiian Islands, Kolb (1991, 1994) has used survey, excavation, and oral traditions to outline a chronology for temple construction and polity evolution on Maui. The primary analytical method used in these studies is a straightforward energy-expenditure model based on the principle that larger stone structures require larger labor forces. To Kolb, this shift in practices points to an increase in the religious authority of chiefs realized initially through *corvée* labor and later through taxation. In his more recent work, Kolb (1997) has suggested political power shifted in scale over time from the polity to the community.

Ecological and evolutionary anthropology in Hawai‘i has a long history of examining ritual and religion (Graves and Ladefoged 1995; Kirch 1984, 1990, 1994; Kirch and Green 1987, 2001; Ladefoged and Graves 2000; Sahlins 1958; see also Peebles and Kus 1977). For example, recently Graves and Ladefoged have applied the method of stylistic seriation to temple architectural style to evaluate Kolb’s Maui temple chronology and to propose a novel relative chronology of temple construction in the upland North Kohala District, Hawai‘i (Graves and Cachola-Abad 1996; Mulrooney and Ladefoged 2005). In addition, Kirch and colleagues (2004) have used detailed information on soil nutrients to show a correlation between productive agricultural land and Maui temples as part of their larger biocomplexity research program.

Perhaps the most significant shift in how archaeologists investigate temples has been new research on architectural elaboration, site orientation, and site location relative to specific Native Hawaiian religious traditions. At the forefront of this work, Kirch (2004) and Ruggles (2001) have shown that elaborations in temple architecture, such as higher walls, altars, special features like notches on corners, and the overall orientation of architecture, were used by Hawaiian architects to reference the supernatural and natural worlds by emphasizing certain directions associated with specific deities, large natural features in the landscape, and locations in the sky that were important in making solar and astronomical observations. Further, Kirch and Sharp (2005) have used uranium-series dating of coral fragments interpreted as offerings to detect an unexpected surge in temple construction late in prehistory linked with the reign of an expansionist Maui chief. In addition, archaeologists have noted temples, shrines, and trails located in places that may have been part of the annual *makahiki* ritual procession around islands (Mills 2002; Somers 1985; Weisler and Kirch 1985). However, without dates for the construction of these features the history of the *makahiki* remains virtually undocumented.

The Utility of "Ritualization" in Archaeological Research

Much of the literature on ritual in archaeology is based on vague notions of how to recognize and study ancient ritual through material remains. When we do define specific components of religious ritual or make lists of material referents, these inevitably end up being clearly best suited to modern religion (Renfrew and Bahn 1991:359–360). However, in practice, it is difficult to see how these idealized categories present themselves in the material record and, more important, it is equally difficult to imagine how such a static view of ritual and religion could be used to reconstruct how different aspects of ritual life developed over time. Thus, we must begin by once again asking, how does one identify ritual in the material record?

In reaction to orthodox views of ancient religion, religious studies scholar Catherine Bell (1992, 1997) has suggested that researchers adopt a practice-based approach that looks for "ritualization" of certain people, times, places, and objects through deliberate and often repetitive behavior meant to separate them from the everyday. Thus, archaeologists must examine all past practices—both within and outside of temple sites—to develop a contextual, historical, and material-based interpretation of ritual. While applications of such an approach to date have been primarily based in Europe (Bradley 2003), Patrick McCoy (1999) has successfully used a ritualized practice approach to help interpret one of the best-studied landscapes in the Hawaiian Islands: the Mauna Kea Adze Quarry (Cleghorn 1982, 1986).

Patrick McCoy's (1999) reinterpretation of the Mauna Kea Adze Quarry centers on explaining the presence of a series of small shelters and shrines discovered on surveys at high altitude, far from the island's regular habitation zones in coastal areas and valleys. These sites on the spatial margins of daily life are interpreted as purposefully emphasizing the "liminal" quality of their mountaintop location. McCoy (1999) goes on to draw a parallel between this aspect of the sites and the liminal state of apprentice stone tool makers who were figuratively, as well as literally, transformed into experienced craftsmen during their stay there. This interpretation is consistent with lithic analysis that shows distinct apprentice and expert working areas of the quarry (Cleghorn 1982, 1986). Shifts in identity such as this are necessary for the operation of any society, but as this example shows, it can be difficult to immediately recognize these aspects of social life in the archaeological record without a great deal of contextual information from the larger region. However, what may be most important, this study gives us insight into an aspect of ritual perhaps not otherwise represented at temple sites and reveals how ritualization operated as a social strategy—a theme I will explore here through new data from the Kalaupapa Peninsula, Moloka'i Island.

The Social Landscape of Kalaupapa, Moloka'i Island

In the following case study, I take a practice theory–based approach to reconstruct the development of the Hawaiian social landscape, building on several years of field research on the Kalaupapa Peninsula, Moloka'i Island (Figure 14-2; McCoy 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; McCoy and Hartshorn 2007). I begin by

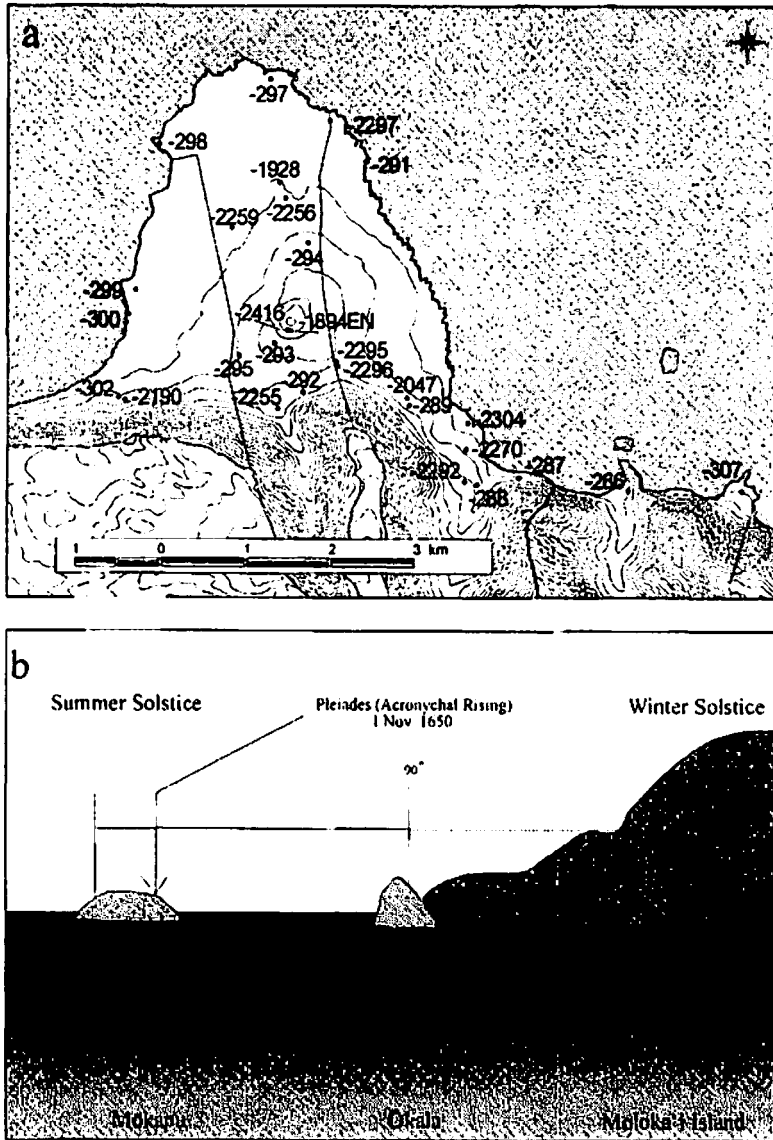


Figure 14-2. Ritual sites, Kalaupapa region, Moloka'i Island: (a) map of Kalaupapa Peninsula (100-ft contours) showing all known ritual sites. Community territory boundaries (ahupua'a) for Kalaupapa, Makanalua, Kala-wao, and Waikolu (east to west) are shown. State site numbers start with 50-60-03; (b) reconstructed eastern horizon view from site -2270 showing (left to right) Mōkapu, 'Ōkala, and the north shore of Moloka'i. Location on the horizon (67 degrees) where the acronychal rising of Pleiades, marking the annual start of the makahiki season, was visible in the year A.D. 1650 is indicated by an arrow; locations of sunrise on the summer solstice (left), equinox (center), and winter solstice (right) are shown. Sunrise during the winter solstice would not be visible on the horizon from this location.

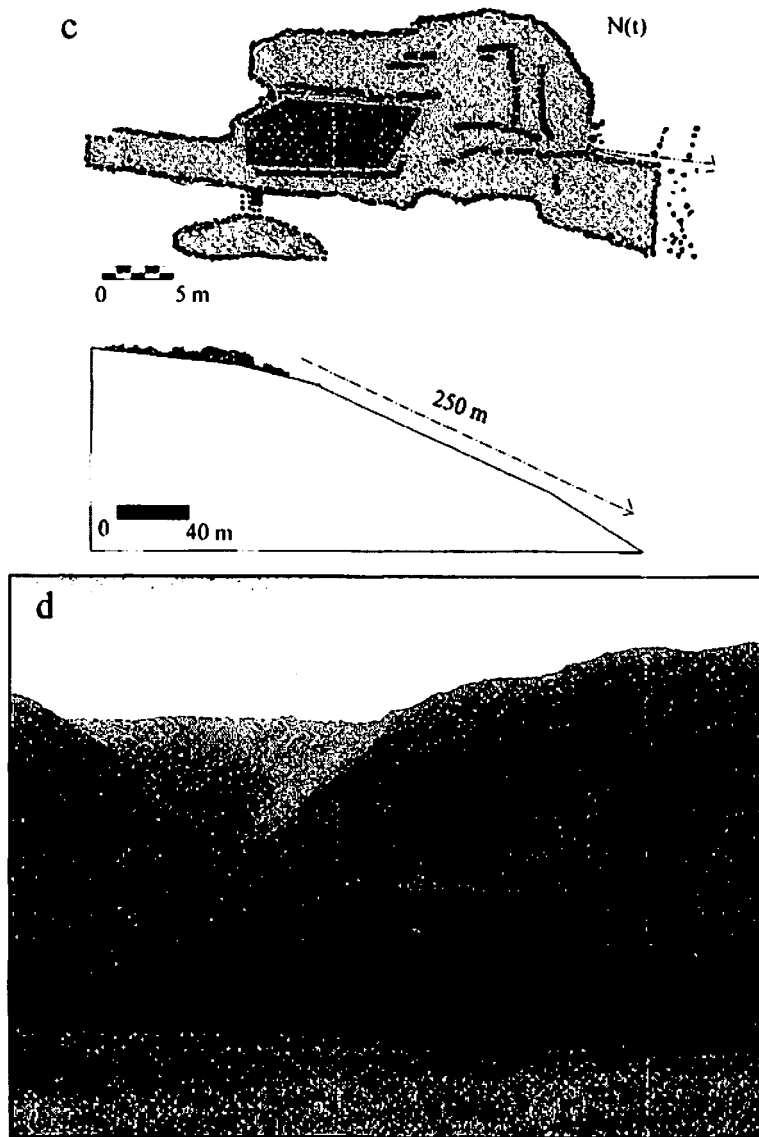


Figure 14-2—continued. (c) plan view and profile of traditional Hawaiian slide for the holua game (site -293); (d) photograph of Makapulapai (site -1928), a burial monument made up of 60 cairns, terraces, and platforms (National Park Service).

giving a brief summary of changes in daily life followed by the definition of a series of political trends evident in oral traditions that may have provided motivation for the use of ritualization to change or maintain certain values. This is followed by an overview of the ways people used the size, form, and location chosen for ritual sites to set them off from the everyday. Finally, I present a discussion of how the strategy of ritualization was dispatched across time with different goals and varied results.

Daily Life in Kalaupapa, Moloka'i Island

While colonization of the Hawaiian Islands probably began between A.D. 800 and A.D. 1000, the first signs of people permanently settled on Moloka'i Island date to between A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1200 (McCoy 2007). Current evidence suggests the valleys and colluvial environment at the foot of the north shore's cliffs in Kalaupapa were targeted for settlement by these founding populations (Figure 14-2). By A.D. 1650, permanent habitations stretched out on the dry, windy peninsula (McCoy 2005, 2006). While at first this appears to be a natural expansion of settlement, local palaeodemographic modeling suggests this occurred during a period of high but relatively stable population, thus implicating some other factor shaping this trend (McCoy 2007, 2008).

The subsistence economy in prehistoric Hawai'i centered on traditional farming and fishing. In Kalaupapa, by A.D. 1440–1550 we find the widespread transformation of the peninsula into a continuous agricultural field system made up of long, low stone walls built to act as windbreaks for growing sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) and other crops. The timing of this shift and the apparent four-fold increase in the density of walls in the following centuries together suggest that by the time of European contact these fields had become wrapped up in chiefly needs for greater and greater surplus to underwrite their political aspirations (McCoy 2005, 2006).

Until recently, archaeologists working in Hawai'i have had to rely primarily on an ethnohistoric model of access to resources and exchange that stresses the importance of control at the community territory (*ahupua'a*) level and extra-community exchanges centered on tribute. Fortunately, through the development of stone artifact sourcing we can now begin to assess where, when, and how people's access to natural resources and exchanges compares with this model. In Kalaupapa, nonlocal material has yet to be uncovered but there is strong evidence of small-scale, local adze manufacture, use, and exchange conforming to a pattern of regular, direct access to a local source without regard to social boundaries (McCoy 2006:217–236). While the failure to discover artifacts made of nonlocal stone is unsurprising given Kalaupapa's physical isolation and often politically peripheral place in Hawaiian prehistory, this study once again shows the value of contrasting ethnohistoric models with material evidence of daily life.

Political Motivations and Social Memory

Thus far I have outlined the settlement history and economy of Kalaupapa without reference to ritual or religious belief. However, we would be mistaken to think these were not important in structuring past behaviors. Indeed, ritualization, like any social strategy dispatched to maintain or change people's values, implies a corresponding idealized set of power relations. To access this aspect of Hawaiian society, we have a rich body of oral traditions linked to chiefly genealogies that can be placed on an absolute time scale by using a conservative estimate of 20 years per reign (Cachola-Abad 2000; Cordy 2000; Hommon

1976, 1986; Kolb 1991, 1994). Naturally, when using this evidence we should take care not to underestimate the power of elites to influence oral traditions through supporting specialists to act as court historians. It is also important not to cast commoners in a passive role by assigning a disproportional share of the credit for history to the elite. With these concerns in mind, I have chosen to use Moloka'i oral traditions to create a social history of memory centered on the island's political history (McCoy 2006:253–264).

On Moloka'i, the earliest known chiefly dynasty is marked by the initial consolidation of the island under a single ruler (A.D. 1360–1460), followed by subsequent fragmentation of this hierarchy (A.D. 1460–1720) with the rise of independent district-level polities that, after an intense civil war (A.D. 1720–1740), came under the rule of the second dynasty (A.D. 1740–1780). Finally, the island is occupied by the more powerful polities of O'ahu, Maui, and eventually Hawai'i Island (A.D. 1780–1795). As I have discussed elsewhere, the period of political fragmentation and district-level polity building sometime between A.D. 1460 and A.D. 1720 is marked by the earliest reference to the capture of the island's regent by a neighboring island chief, an unusual 10-generation-long gap in the local chiefly lineage, and allusions to the indirect influence of neighboring polities (McCoy 2006; Summers 1971). The subsequent civil war, reunification, and occupation of the island seem to have occurred in the years just before and after first contact with Europeans.

Ritualization in Action: How Sites Were Made Special

It is impossible to talk about the process of ritualization of specific places without explicitly identifying variables that set some locations outside and above everyday life. To do this I have examined structures directly named in local oral traditions as locations of ritual and those identified by archaeologists as being outside the architectural norm (Kirch 2002; McCoy 2002, 2003, 2004; Somers 1985; Stokes 1909; Summers 1971; see also Cachola-Abad 1996). Below, I describe these sites in terms of their physical size and the likely size of ritual gatherings at the site, their location across the landscape, and how the elaboration of architecture was used to reference features in the natural world (Figure 14-2). It is unrealistic to expect these elements to give us a complete picture of how the builders of these sites intended to shape the “model experience” rituals provide (Valeri 1985). However, this type of analysis does open up for discussion the practice of ritualization in a way that the rituals themselves would have masked or naturalized.

Ritual sites in Kalaupapa can be grouped into three size categories, with the largest size class containing only one member: a group of burials that cover a low hill in the center of the peninsula called Makapulapai (state site no. 50-60-03-1928; Figure 14-2). At approximately 3,600 m², the site's 60 cairns, terraces, and platforms cover over five times the area of the next-largest ritual structure. Nonetheless, the site lacks the type of communal performance area found at temple sites, suggesting it is best interpreted as a burial monument—a rare site type in

Hawai'i. The next size category, structures with surface areas between 650 m² and 250 m², includes nine structures, most of which have been radiocarbon dated (Table 14-1; McCoy 2007). These structures do have communal performance areas, and the largest fall within the expected surface area of temples built by pooled labor (Kolb 1994). One structure has a well-preserved example of a slide for the traditional *holua* game (50-60-03-293; Figure 14-2). Games like *holua* were an integral part of the *makahiki* ritual complex; however, the presence of a *holua* slide on its own is not enough to infer the *makahiki* was practiced here. Finally, the smallest class of ritual structures, ca. 50 m² or less, includes a diverse range of sites that may have significantly structured the social landscape but would probably have been locations of small-scale ceremonial offerings.

The greatest density of ritual sites in the study area is found in an east–west–oriented band where the peninsula meets the island's north shore (Figure 14-2). At some of these sites, Hawaiian architects used the cliffs to elevate sites above surrounding settlements (sites -289, -292, -293, -302, -2190). However, within this band of sites we find many where relative elevation does not appear to have been the primary element influencing location choice (sites -295, -299, -300, -2047, -2255, -2270, -2295, -2296, -2304). Several of these sites appear to be temples placed immediately east of their western community boundary (sites -295, -299, -300, -2295)—the location where a *makahiki* procession would have entered and been presented tribute. On the Kalaupapa Peninsula north of the dense band of sites, we find small shrines (sites -291, -297, -298, -2297), medium-sized temples associated with the Kauhakō Crater and its lava tube (sites -294, -2416), and the massive burial monument at Makapulapai (site -1928).

Finally, temple architects referenced directions in much the same way as elsewhere in the Hawaiian Islands with an east (95–115 degrees), a northeast (54–67 degrees), and a north (345–45 degrees) group (Kirch 2002; McCoy 2006; see also Kirch 2004). Within the northeast orientation group we find one site with a platform at 67 degrees from true north, putting it in line with the location on the horizon where the star cluster Makali'i (Pleiades) would have risen at sunset directly over the offshore islet of Mōkapu (Figure 14-2). Known in Western traditions as the acronychal rising of Pleiades, this specific stellar phenomenon is cited in ethnohistoric sources as marking the annual start of the *makahiki* season (see Kirch and Green 2001 for a discussion of pan-Polynesian ritual, calendar, and astronomy). In addition, one can make two important solar observations from this location—sunrise on the summer solstice would appear over the northern side of Mōkapu and sunrises on the equinox would appear over the southern edge of 'Ōkala. Thus, together these observations on landmarks in the eastern sky would have allowed for the regular coordination of the lunar calendar with the seasonal and festival calendars.

Discussion: The Strategy of Ritualization and Social Evolution

The final, and perhaps most difficult, aspect of applying a ritualized practice approach is pulling together the motivations and actions evident in the ethnohistoric and archaeological records into a synthesis of how ritualization was

Table 14-1. Summary of Dated Ritual Sites, Kalaupapa, Moloka'i Island, Hawai'i

Site No. (50-60-03-)	Site Type	Area (m ²)	Orientation	Community Territory
Establishing Phase (A.D. 1440-1650)				
292	Temple	629	NE	Makanalua
2416	Temple	170	SE	Makanalua
2296	Priest's complex	481	E	Kalawao
288	Shrine	56	—	Kalawao
Landscape Phase (A.D. 1650-1720)				
294	Temple	630	NE	Makanalua
2255	Temple	300	NE	Makanalua
2297	Shrine	50	—	Kalawao/ Makanalua
2047	Petroglyph	—	—	Kalawao
1894-EN	Priest's house	62	—	Kalawao
Monumental Architecture Phase (A.D. 1720-1795)				
1928	Burial complex	3,600	—	Makanalua
2270	Temple	612	NE	Kalawao
2295	Temple	594	NE	Kalawao
293	Holua slide	56 ^a	S	Makanalua
2259	Men's house	—	—	Makanalua

Source: McCoy 2006, 2007.

^aArea calculation only accounts for the site's platform, not the ca. 250-m sledding track.

employed in the past. In the case of Kalaupapa I have used radiocarbon dates and oral traditions to break the history of ritualization into three phases beginning with the earliest archaeologically visible signs of marking out certain places as having value above the everyday (A.D. 1440-1650), followed by the extension of this to include the entire landscape (A.D. 1650-1720), and ending with a period when monumentality becomes an important part of the suite of strategies used to shape values (A.D. 1720-1795). Below I describe the historical context and possible consequences of the use of these strategies for people's everyday lives.

Establishing Phase (A.D. 1440-1650)

One major difficulty in the study of ritual is that archaeologists are rarely able to pinpoint the stage when people first constructed ritual sites in a given area. However, the short chronology of occupation of the Hawaiian Islands gives us the opportunity to do just that and in Kalaupapa we find a diverse range

of sites built during what is called here an “Establishing Phase” (A.D. 1440–1650; Table 14-1, Figure 14-2). Using a classic political economy labor model, the presence of three size classes suggests a multitiered chiefly hierarchy. However, this is also a period of economic change with the construction of the Kalaupapa Field System, as well as a period of political upheaval in the uppermost office of island chief. The use of place-centered ritualization in the Kalaupapa region thus appears to be linked to an attempt to revise the political economy in a way that puts local chiefs in a more powerful position and appears to have been successful at least to the degree to which local chiefs manage to increase their power base in the years before A.D. 1650.

Landscape Phase (A.D. 1650–1720)

As shown in the example of the Mauna Kea Adze Quarry—a place that is physically and socially liminal to everyday life and the locus of the ritual shift of apprentice craftsfolk into experts—ritualization is a strategy that not only works to transform people and places but also shapes larger social landscapes (McCoy 1999). In Kalaupapa, the expansion of settlement onto the peninsula is accompanied by the extension of ritualized places across the entire physical landscape in what is called the “Landscape Phase” (A.D. 1650–1720). In short, there appears to be an attempt to integrate formerly physically liminal places within the existing constructed social landscape. These moves would have further naturalized the constructed social landscape as well as given this newly occupied place a lower social value by constructing few, smaller structures while continuing to add highly visible large temples within the southern zone. Looking to possible political motivations for this move we find that it is during this period that the Ko’olau polity centered on the island’s north shore—including the study area—briefly rose to power and began attempting to annex the remaining half of the island through warfare. Thus, as chiefs sought to extend their power externally it is perhaps not surprising that we find attempts to shape the value of the internal landscape at this stage.

Monumental Architecture Phase (A.D. 1720–1795)

If there is one unifying element in the use of ritualization in complex societies, it is in the construction of monumental-scale architecture. In late prehistoric Kalaupapa we find a shift in the scale of site construction marked mainly by the construction of the large burial complex at Makapulapai. Elsewhere I have argued that this monument commemorates a battle at Kalaupapa in which local forces were defeated by an army led by Kualii’i, an O’ahu chief who reigned ca. A.D. 1720–1740. At Makapulapai, at the apex of the hill, we find a single petroglyph of a human figure holding an adze, Kualii’i’s weapon of choice in the legendary battle (McCoy 2006:290). Thus, the site may have served as a symbol of the power of the island’s new lords to shape the social landscape.

Perhaps even more revealing of the influence of outsiders, we find evidence of the institution of the *makahiki* ritual complex immediately after the subjugation of Kalaupapa. The construction of a temple for astronomical observations (site -2270), the construction of a slide for the *holua* game (-293), and the construction

of a temple east of the boundary between two communities (-2295) all date to this period (McCoy 2006, 2007). However, while we might assume the linking of the study area to a larger tribute and wealth-creation system coordinated through the annual *makahiki* procession would mark the end of commoner rights to local resources, what we find is that in fact access to raw material for stone tools and exchange continues without regard to community territory boundaries. Once again, this shows the importance of examining where the archaeological record of daily life agrees and contradicts the expected, as well as material evidence of a possible link between the spread of the *makahiki* ritual complex and expansionist territorial warfare.

Conclusion: Toward a Ritualized Practice Approach

Ancient ritual and religion are among the most difficult and rewarding topics addressed through anthropological archaeology. In this chapter I have argued that practice theory, specifically the concept of ritualization, has enormous utility for revealing how people in the past used the social strategy of distinguishing certain places, people, and objects as having value above and outside the everyday to shape social evolution. For Hawaiian archaeology this approach offers several immediate advantages. First, taking a practice approach helps shift the focus from ethnohistory alone to using material evidence to reconstruct how architects used site form, location, and the natural landscape to distinguish certain locations as outside the everyday. Second, this approach helps define an appropriate relationship between ethnohistory and archaeology in which one is used to reveal political motivation and the other to document the actions taken to try and shape people's values. In the study presented here, this approach revealed an apparent link between territorial expansion, monumental site construction, and the institution of the *makahiki* ritual complex. Third, a practice approach helps determine which aspects of daily life were influenced by different social strategies. In Kalaupapa, settlement patterns and agricultural development appear to have been influenced by new values and power relations set out through ritual; however, we find that raw material for stone tools remained accessible throughout prehistory regardless of the social ideal. In the future, this approach may indeed bring us closer to understanding why in the course of human history unrelated peoples converged on certain ritual practices in the development of complex, hierarchical societies.

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