



*Donné par le Baron d'Artois.*

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ÎLES SANDWICH. UN OFFICIER DU ROI EN GRAND COSTUME.

*Facing page: Jacques Arago (artist), Jean Nicolas Lerouge (engraver), "Îles Sandwich, un officier du roi en grand costume," from Louis de Freycinet, Voyage autour du monde. Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1824. National Library of Australia.*

# COLONIALISM'S CURRENCY: A Short Numismatic History of the Hawaiian Kingdom

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In October 1874, a New Zealand traveler bound for San Francisco stopped over in Honolulu, taking lodging at the idyllic Royal Hawaiian Hotel. The gentleman's pleasing stay was, however, soon disrupted when he tendered a sovereign to settle the bill for a sumptuous breakfast. To his "utter amazement," he received the following in change: "one English sixpence, two American dimes, two ditto half dimes, one quarter-dollar, a silver coin of Napoleon III, a Peruvian dollar, and a Mexican coin of some value indistinguishable." Dashing the money back in anger, he demanded "some one currency or other" that "represented something definite," but it was coolly returned by the proprietor with assurances that it was "all current coin of the realm." With nothing to do except pocket the "museum," as he took to calling his new collection of coins, the bewildered gentleman went for a stroll while considering the extraordinary monetary system that prevailed in the Hawaiian Islands. While United States coins had become the predominant currency by the 1870s, a motley mix of English, Austrian, French, Italian, Russian, Belgian, Mexican, Peruvian, and Spanish coins also had legal tender status at fixed rates set by the minister of finance. Moreover, a table published in an 1875 Hawaiian almanac shows an even greater range of coinage in circulation (fig. 1). This combination of currency turned everyday transactions into complicated affairs that could often overwhelm unfortunate visitors like our touring New Zealander.<sup>1</sup>

The diversity of coinage present was a reflection of the prominent role that the Hawaiian Islands played during the nineteenth century as the crossroads of an emerging Pacific world shaped by the integrative forces of colonialism and capitalism. What follows is a short numismatic history of the islands during this transfor-

mative century, one that begins with the introduction of Western money during the late eighteenth century and ends with annexation of Hawai'i by the United States in 1898. This period was defined by the rise and fall of the Hawaiian Kingdom and the shifting cultural, commercial, and international relationships in which it was enmeshed. A numismatic perspective offers an illuminating, if admittedly idiosyncratic, way of looking at how Hawaiian history unfolded over the course of the nineteenth century. Coins and currency played a varying role in the islands, at once undermining the traditional basis of Native Hawaiian society while also buttressing the fortunes of the Kingdom in its struggle to remain independent. The apogee of this story was the national coinage issued by King Kalākaua in 1883, which was meant to bring order to the chaotic currency situation and to reaffirm Hawaiian sovereignty. The removal of the Kalākaua coins from circulation a few years after the annexation of the islands in 1898 was thus a richly symbolic move by the United States as it consolidated control over the new colony.

The rich numismatic story of the Hawaiian Kingdom is only a small part of the larger and longer history of the archipelago, which consists of eight major volcanic islands and numerous smaller islets and atolls. The islands were initially settled by Polynesian voyagers around AD 800. This occurred as part of a broader expansion of Polynesian peoples from their ancestral homeland in the region of Tonga and Samoa, legendarily known by the name Hawaiki. It was the memory and myth of this place from which Hawai'i in turn derived

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1. The unnamed gentleman was serving as a correspondent for the *Otago Witness*, a newspaper published in Dunedin, New Zealand, while traveling to England via the newly established transpacific steamship route to San Francisco: November 14, 1874.

its name.<sup>2</sup> Links with other island groups were maintained through continued voyages even as the population of Polynesian settlers grew rapidly and spread throughout the archipelago. Around AD 1400 the tradition of long-distance voyaging came to end, inaugurating a long period of isolation during which a distinctively Hawaiian society and culture took shape. Hawai‘i developed into what archaeologists call an archaic state, one predicated upon the idea of divine kingship and a strict division between *maka‘āinana* (commoners) and the *ali‘i* or chiefly class. An elaborate *kapu* (taboo) system of laws and obligations came to govern social interactions, while a rich oral tradition based on Polynesian myths was supplemented by new Hawaiian legends and cultural forms like the *hula*. Native Hawaiians did not have money or an accepted medium of exchange as such. There was a well-developed barter system in which food and crafts were traded, and among the most valued possessions were bird feathers, which were used to make the spectacular ‘*ahu ‘ula* (cloaks) and *mahoile* (helmets) that adorned powerful *ali‘i* (see p. 22).<sup>3</sup>

When an expedition led by Captain James Cook stumbled across the islands in January 1778, it encountered a flourishing land and people made up of competing kingdoms based around the four largest islands Hawai‘i, O‘ahu, Maui, and Kaua‘i (fig. 2), each ruled by an *ali‘i akua* (god-king).<sup>4</sup> Cook was a British explorer undertaking his third voyage through the Pacific, this time with the HMS *Resolution* and *Discovery* in search of the fabled Northwest Passage. After sailing north from the Society Islands, the ships first sighted O‘ahu and then several nearby islands in quick succession. Doubts about whether or not the islands were inhabited were dispelled the next day, when several canoes came off the shores to visit the ships as they stood off of Kaua‘i. Cook was “agreeably surprised” to find that the men spoke a language similar to that of Tahiti, and they seemed happy to come alongside the *Resolution*, but refused to board. Undeterred, Cook had some “brass medals” tied to a rope and lowered to a canoe, an offering that was reciprocated with several “small mackerel.”<sup>5</sup> The medals were from a supply struck at the Soho Mint in 1772 at the behest of Sir Joseph Banks for Cook’s second voyage. Designed by Matthew Boulton, they featured a bust of King George III on the obverse, and a reverse that displayed their commemorative purpose (fig. 3). But as Cook observed in his journal, the medals were also meant “to be distributed to the Natives of, and left upon New Discovered countries as testimonies of being the first discoveries [*sic*].”<sup>6</sup> And so it was that the inaugural exchange between Native Hawaiians and Europeans was numismatic in nature.

The next morning the *Resolution* sailed along the coast of Kaua‘i in search of a suitable anchorage. A place was eventually found near the mouth of the Waimea River, and armed boats were dispatched to look for fresh water. A large crowd of Hawaiians gathered as they came into shore, and the lieutenant in charge panicked as the crowd began to grab anything they could get ahold of, and he shot and killed a man clutching a boat hook.<sup>7</sup> This murderous episode was characteristic of the early and all too often violent interactions that characterized relations between Native Hawaiians and *haole* (white/foreigner). Indeed, James Cook would himself be killed when the ships returned to the islands the following year after a fruitless search for the Northwest Passage. On this second visit, the expedition anchored in Kealahou Bay along the west coast of the island of Hawai‘i (fig. 4). Although relations were initially friendly, a succession of misunderstandings and incidents culminated in a pitched battle breaking out on the beach, in the course of which Cook, four marines, and numerous Hawaiians lost their lives. After a series of violent reprisals, the *Resolution* and *Discovery* sailed for England, and the publication of journals and reports from the expedition brought the archipelago Cook dubbed the “Sandwich Islands,” to the attention of the wider Western world.

During the late eighteenth and into the early nineteenth century, an ever-increasing number of European ships called at the islands, which proved to be a conveniently situated place for vessels on transpacific voyages to re-provision and make repairs. The first American ship to visit the islands was the *Columbia Rediviva* out of Boston in 1789. The *Columbia* was engaged in the newfound maritime fur trade, transporting otter pelts from the northwest coast of North America to China. Like Cook’s expedition before them, the Americans carried medals celebrating their voyage that were distributed in the islands (fig. 5).<sup>8</sup> The medal was designed by the Boston

2. This essay follows modern orthography and uses diacritical marks for Hawaiian words and names. The ‘*okina* marks a phonetic glottal stop, e.g. Hawai‘i. The *kahakō*, or macron, simply indicates a long vowel. Exceptions have been made when quoting from primary source material, for which the original spelling has been preserved.

3. Malo 1893: 106–110.

4. For a fascinating account of the early history of the Hawaiian Islands see Kirch 2012.

5. Cook 1784: 191–92.

6. Three types of medal were produced. Two gold medals were struck, one for Banks and the other for King George III. Another one hundred and forty-two silver medals were given to Fellows of the Royal Society and other dignitaries. Some two thousand copper or platina medals were made for distribution by Cook, and the surplus was reused on the third voyage. Westwood 1926; Smith 1985; Beaglehole 1961: 16.

7. Cook 1784: 197–98.

8. As the medal indicated, the *Columbia* was accompanied by a tender, the *Lady Washington*, which remained on the Northwest Coast. When the *Columbia* arrived back in Boston in 1790, it became the first American vessel to circumnavigate the globe (Howay 1941).



FOREIGN COINS, IN THE MONEY TERMS OF THE UNITED STATES, ADOPTED  
AS THE CURRENT RATES IN HONOLULU, H. I.

<b>AUSTRIA</b>		<b>GERMANY</b>	
Souverain.....	\$4 50	Ten Thaler.....	\$7 50
Ducat.....	2 00	Ducat.....	2 00
Rix Dollar.....	0 75	Thaler.....	0 62½
		Florin.....	0 37½
<b>BELGIUM</b>		<b>INDIA</b>	
Twenty-five Francs.....	4 50	Rupee.....	0 37½
Five Francs.....	1 00		
<b>BOLIVIA</b>		<b>ITALY</b>	
Dollar.....	1 00	Same as France.....	
Half Dollar.....	0 30		
Quarter Dollar.....	0 12½	<b>MEXICO</b>	
		Doubloon.....	15 00
<b>BRAZIL</b>		Half Dollar.....	0 50
20,000 Reis.....	10 00	Quarter Dollar.....	0 25
2,000 Reis.....	1 00	<b>NETHERLANDS</b>	
<b>BREMEN</b>		Ten Guilders.....	3 75
Thaler, 72 grotes.....	0 62½	2½ Guilders.....	1 00
<b>CHILE</b>		<b>NEW GRANADA</b>	
10 Pesos.....	8 00	Dollar, 1857.....	0 75
Dollar.....	1 00	Common Dollar.....	0 60
Half Dollar.....	0 37½	<b>PERU</b>	
Qr. Dollar and 20c piece.	0 12½	Dollar.....	1 00
		Half Dollar.....	0 37½
<b>COLOMBIA</b>		Quarter Dollar.....	0 25
Dollar.....	0 60	<b>RUSSIA</b>	
<b>DENMARK</b>		Five Roubles.....	4 00
Ten Thaler.....	7 50	<b>SPAIN</b>	
Two Rix Daler.....	1 00	Quarter Dollar.....	0 25
		Reals.....	0 10
<b>ENGLAND</b>		<b>SOUTH AMERICA</b>	
Sovereign.....	4 90	Doubloon.....	15 00
Half Sovereign.....	2 45	Four Escudos.....	7 00
<b>FRANCE</b>		Two Escudos.....	3 50
Twenty Francs, gold.....	3 90	One Escudo.....	1 75
Ten Francs, gold.....	1 95	<b>SWEDEN</b>	
Five Francs, silver.....	1 00	Ducat.....	2 00

Fig. 1: Thos. G. Thrum, comp.,  
Hawaiian Almanac and Annual  
for 1875.

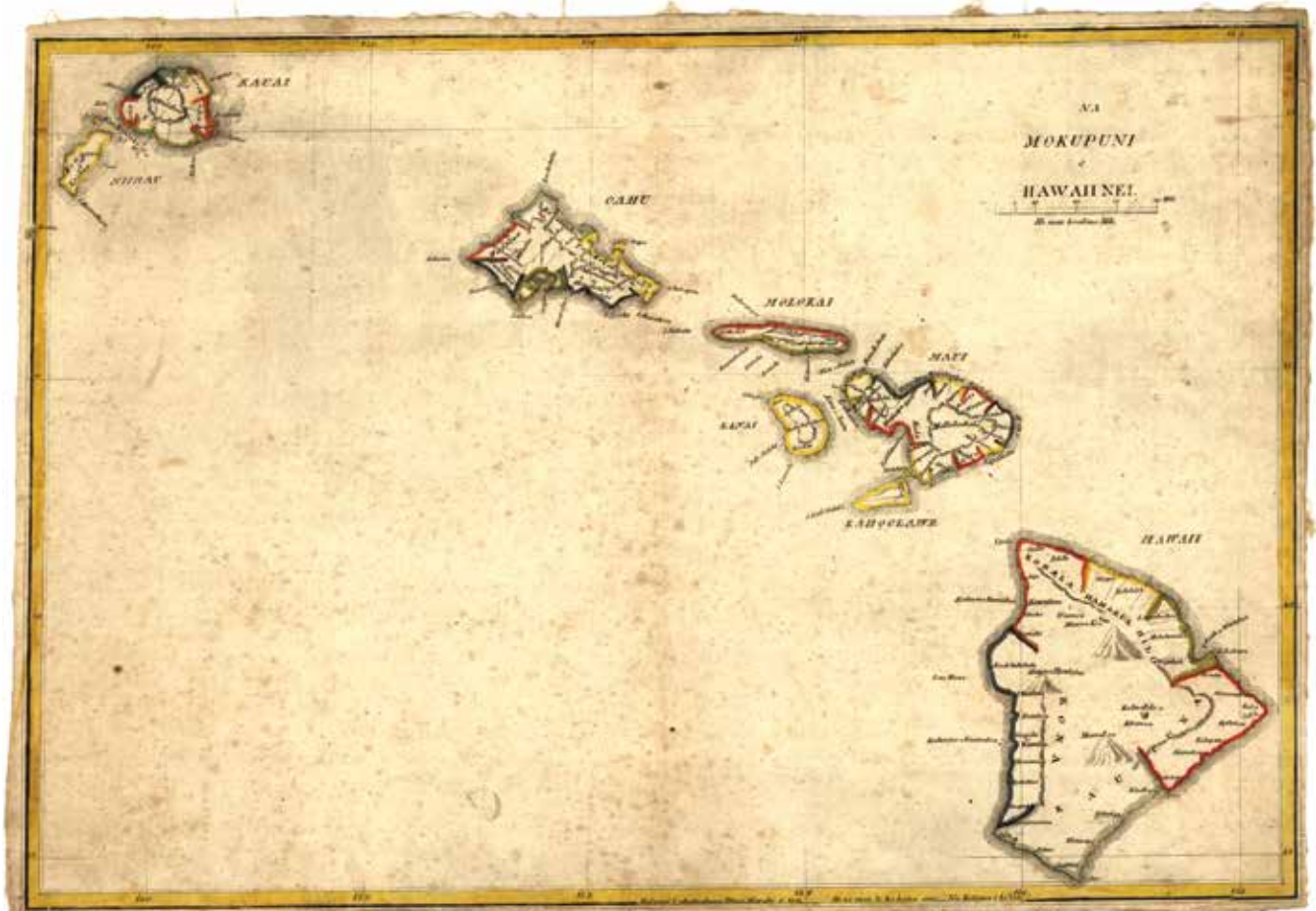


Fig. 2: Kalama, Na Mokupuni O Hawaii Nei. 1837 (Library of Congress).

merchant Joseph Barrell, who is listed with his partners on the reverse, and the dies are presumed to have been the work of Joseph Callendar.<sup>9</sup> A few months later, George Mortimer of the British brig *Mercury* procured several of these medals, suggesting that the American hope that these numismatic mementos would “fix them in the remembrance of the natives” was perhaps overly optimistic.

Mortimer’s report that some medals were received “as presents, others by purchase,” was also illustrative of the nascent cultural and material transformation of Hawaiian society as the islands were drawn into global trade networks.<sup>10</sup> The well-developed barter system that was the customary basis of the economy was initially disrupted by the introduction of new commodities, and then slowly displaced by an expanding capitalist monetary system over the course of the nineteenth century. The introduction of this new, disembedded, and abstract medium of exchange ultimately had a profound impact on Hawaiian society, but coins and currency were only gradually integrated into the thriving commercial market that quickly emerged in the islands.<sup>11</sup>

The early decades of trade in the islands were dominated by the prevailing barter system, with Hawaiians trading fresh water, pigs, fish, yams, and other staples for pieces of iron, tools, cloth, guns, and whatever other novelties on the visiting vessels caught their eye. Initially, rates of exchange varied wildly given the incommensurable scales of valuation on each side. And while early visitors were able to secure what they perceived to be a bounty for a few nails, the market shifted as knowledge of *haole* needs and goods grew among the Hawaiian populace, and soon complaints about high prices and hard bargains abounded.<sup>12</sup> Relations also continued to be overlaid with both threats of and actual violence. In 1790, an offense by Captain Simon Metcalfe aboard the fur trader *Eleanora* against a Hawaiian chief was compounded by the theft of small boat that resulted in the death of a sailor. In reprisal, Metcalfe sailed to the village of Olowalu on Maui and put out a call to trade. When canoes gathered alongside the ship, a full broadside of cannon was fired into the thick of the crowd,

killing over one hundred people. A few weeks later the *Fair American*, a smaller tender to the *Eleanora* captained by Metcalfe’s son, arrived in the islands, and its crew was in turn killed in revenge for what has been remembered as the “Olowalu massacre.”<sup>13</sup> While this sort of extreme violence was uncommon and commercial relations continued to expand, it does underscore how fraught interactions between foreigners and Hawaiians were in these early years.

One disastrous consequence of the new era of exchange inaugurated by Cook’s arrival was an influx of infectious diseases like smallpox, tuberculosis, and syphilis, which decimated the Hawaiian population.<sup>14</sup> Against this background of demographic catastrophe, a variety of intersecting political and cultural developments were also transforming the islands. After over a decade of conquest and maneuvering, Kamehameha (fig. 6), a powerful *ali‘i nui* (ruling chief) from Hawai‘i, consolidated control over the entire island group in 1810, establishing himself as the absolute monarch of a unified Hawaiian Kingdom. The abrogation of the traditional *kapu* system in 1819, and the rising influence of American missionaries who arrived soon after, also presaged a new direction for Hawaiian culture. All of these changes occurred amid the growing commercialization of Hawaiian society, which was driven by the lucrative trade in sandalwood and the establishment of businesses that serviced the American whalers who began to flock to the Pacific in the 1820s.<sup>15</sup>

The fine harbor at Honolulu made it the port of choice for visiting ships, and natives and foreigners alike congregated there as it became the commercial center of the islands. The sex trade flourished, and the Hawaiian historian Samuel Kamakau reported that “sailors used to pay for women with a piece of cloth, a small mirror, or a pair of shears, beads, a small piece of steel, a plug of tobacco, or a small coin.”<sup>16</sup> Unquestionably then, some coins were being exchanged during this time, but they were not necessarily circulating. Archibald Campbell, a Scottish sailor who lived in Honolulu in 1809–10, said of Hawaiians that: “Almost all their dealings are

9. A total of three hundred medals were produced in silver, copper, and pewter, the majority of which sailed with the *Columbia*. Bentley 1989.

10. Mortimer 1791: 254.

11. For the classic anthropological account of this turbulent period see Sahlins 1985; for a useful review of the ample anthropological literature concerning the introduction of modern money into traditional societies see Maurer 2006.

12. Morgan 1948: 59–61; Kuykendall 1938: 82–84.

13. Only one of the five crew members, Isaac Davis, was spared, and he went on to become an important adviser to Kamehameha. The elder Metcalfe left the islands without realizing that his murderous doings had indirectly led to the death of his own son (Kuykendall 1938: 24–25).

14. Debates about the pre-contact population of the Hawai‘i are particularly contentious, but most scholars posit a figure between 250,000 and 500,000. The first reasonably accurate census of the islands was undertaken by American missionaries in 1831–32, and counted 131,000 people, suggesting a catastrophic decline in the half century that followed Cook’s arrival (Kirch and Rallu, 2007).

15. For a compelling look at the history of the larger “Pacific World” during this period see Iglar 2013.

16. Kamakau 1992: 280.



Fig. 3: Great Britain, 1772. Bronze medal by Matthew Boulton (ANS 1940.100.295, bequest of Robert J. Eidlitz) 42 mm.



Fig. 4: John Webber (artist), William Byrne (engraver), "A view of Karakakooa [Kealahakua] in Owwhyhee," from James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*. London: G. Nicol, 1784 (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History).



Fig. 5: United States, 1787. Pewter medal by Joseph Callendar (ANS 1932.29.24) 42 mm.



Fig. 6: Louis Choris, "Tammeamea, roi des iles Sandwich," from *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde*. Paris : Imprimerie Firmin Didot, 1822.



conducted by barter; they know the value of dollars, and are willing to take them in exchange; but they seldom appear again in circulation, being always carefully hoarded up.”<sup>17</sup> A decade later the French explorer Louis de Freycinet reported a profusion of “piastres,” Spanish dollars or pieces of eight, which was the currency of choice in the burgeoning world of transpacific trade. The result, Freycinet continued, was that “although in reality the greater part of the sales are made by barter, the prices of the articles traded are ordinarily stated in silver money.”<sup>18</sup>

In this ad hoc manner, currency was slowly introduced and adopted in the islands, but familiarity with money was undoubtedly concentrated around the ports. Levi Chamberlin, the Honolulu-based business agent of the American missionaries, in 1825 requested that the organization send “cash” because “money was beginning to be an important article, and can be used in many instances to more advantage than articles of trade.” In contrast, missionary Sereno Edwards Bishop, who grew up in the village of Kaʻawaloa on Hawaiʻi in the 1830s, reported that “money in those days was hardly a medium of exchange among the natives, most of whom were not familiar with the appearance of coin.” He went on to observe that what coin was in circulation was “entirely Spanish, in dollars, quarters, and reals,” continuing that he “never saw a British or American coin of any sort” in his boyhood.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the persistence of a traditional subsistence economy outside of the major ports was evinced by the fact that Hawaiians were able to pay their taxes in produce until 1850, when a new law required payment in coin.<sup>20</sup>

As the economy in the islands diversified and grew more sophisticated in the 1830s, the lack of a viable currency became an increasingly pertinent issue, particularly for those *haole* who sought to employ local labor in their assorted enterprises. An insufficient supply of coin led a frustrated William Hooper, the manager of an early sugar plantation at Kōloa on Kauaʻi owned by Ladd & Company, to issue his own scrip in 1836. The earliest version of this was made by overprinting French theater tickets, but as this proved inadequate a quantity of paper money was ordered from the Boston Bank Note Company. The three (*ekolu*) and five dollar (*elima kala*) notes resembled contemporary American bank notes, and featured a vignette of a whaling scene with an inscription in the Hawaiian language advising that it was redeemable at the company store in Kōloa.<sup>21</sup> Other business owners soon followed this lead, and by 1843 the mission school at Lahainaluna on Maui, which instructed students in engraving and possessed a working press, was printing currency for both itself (fig. 7) and on contract to individuals. A forgery scandal involving two students brought a halt to this venture, but the

mission-issued money demonstrates how great the want was for a functional currency and shows the shape of the Hawaiian monetary system.<sup>22</sup> The dollar became “dala” or “kala” and the cent became “keneta” in the Hawaiian language, and the denominations were based on the dominant Spanish currency:

<i>hookahi dala</i>	one dollar
<i>hapalua</i>	half dollar
<i>hapaha</i>	quarter dollar
<i>hapawalu</i>	one eighth dollar
<i>hapaumi</i>	one sixteenth dollar
<i>ekolu keneta</i>	three cents

The 12 ½ cent *hapawalu* (fig. 8) was equivalent to the Spanish real (fig. 9), and the standard rate of pay for a day’s work. The scarcity of coin was such that a 12 ½ cent piece was more often than not simply a quarter that had been cut into two “bits,” and the need for coin to pay laborers proved to be a persistent problem for employers. One irony of the general shortage of coinage was that merchants at Honolulu and Lahaina who serviced the whaling industry were importing large amounts of coin, but rather than circulating in the islands, it was being sold at a premium to needy captains for bills of exchange.<sup>23</sup>

By the mid-1840s, something close to a currency crisis was brewing in the islands. The government, which was reorganized as a constitutional monarchy with a strong legislature in 1840, was preoccupied with debates over land tenure. This resulted in the *Mahele* (division) in 1848 that reapportioned lands among Native Hawaiians, but also allowed for private ownership by *haole*.<sup>24</sup> The “cultural power” of Western political economy was reordering Native Hawaiian life in the islands and allowing *haole* missionaries, merchants, and politicians to play an increasing influential role in the affairs of the Hawaiian Kingdom.<sup>25</sup> Despite frequently voiced complaints, it was not until the 1846 legislative session that the currency situation was addressed. At that time a law was passed that posited a “currency of the Hawaiian Islands” valued on the American model of 100 cents to the dollar, but retaining the by now well-established Spanish denominations (dollar, 1/2 dollar, 1/4 dollar, 1/8 dollar, 1/16 dollar). The legislation made no provision for the design or minting of the money beyond the cent, a copper coin impressed with the head of Kamehameha III. A provision necessarily allowed “gold and silver coins wearing the legalized impress of any sovereign state” to continue to circulate “at their current or merchantable value, for the time being,” the implication being that the Hawaiian government would soon be minting the silver coins, but ultimately only the copper cents were ever manufactured.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 7: Laihanaluna Seminary, Maui, 1843. Hapalua (half dollar) scrip. 56 × 39mm (images enlarged). (Hawaiian Mission Children's Society Library & Archives).

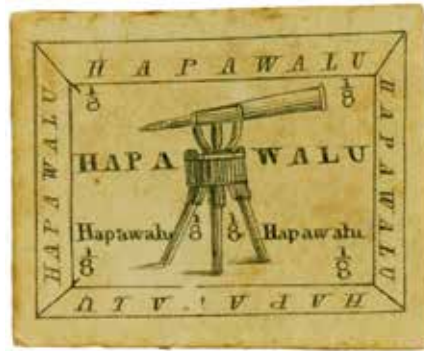


Fig. 8: Laihanaluna Seminary, Maui, 1843. Hapawalu (one-eighth dollar) scrip. 34 × 26mm (image enlarged). (Hawaiian Mission Children's Society Library & Archives).



Fig. 9: Republic of Mexico, Zacatecas, 1846. Silver real (1934.1.538, gift of J. Gutttag). 22mm.



Fig. 10: United States, 1847. Copper keneta (cent) (ANS 1940.160.1146, gift of J.F. Jones and E.T. Newell). 27mm.



Fig. 11: Iron die for Hawaiian keneta, 1847. Attributed to the mint of H. M. and E. I. Richards, Attleboro, Massachusetts (ANS 0000.999.53136).

The 1847 Hawaiian *keneta* (fig. 10) was similar to, but a bit slighter than a contemporary U.S. large cent. A portrait of Kamehameha III commonly attributed to Edward Hulseman was on the obverse, with an inscription noting he was KA MOI, i.e. “The King.” The reverse text simply designated the issuing authority, AUPUNI HAWAII, the government of Hawai‘i, and the denomination, *hapa haneri* (part of a hundred). The Hawaiian government ordered 100,000 coins at a cost of \$870, and it is supposed that they were struck at the private mint of H. M. & E. I. Richards in Attleboro, Massachusetts. Two different obverse dies and five reverse dies with a varying number of berries in the wreath were used; the thirteen-berry reverse die is in the collection of the American Numismatic Society (fig. 11). The coins arrived in Honolulu in May of 1847 and entered circulation soon after, but “owing to the prejudices of

17. Campbell 1822: 144. Kamakau’s near-contemporary history of this period is particularly critical of the *ali‘i*, and the ways in which they controlled trade to reap gains at the expense of the *maka‘ainana* (Kamakau 1992).
18. Freycinet quoted in Kuykendall 1938: 84.
19. Levi Chamberlin to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, August 27, 1825, quoted in Kuykendall 1938: 95 n45; Bishop 1916: 24; Ellis 1917: 310.
20. Woods 2011.
21. Billam-Walker 1940: 16–17.
22. Morse 1968.
23. Morgan 1940: 101–102; Kuykendall 1953: 138–39.
24. It has been argued that by severing the traditional connection of Native Hawaiians to the land, the *Mahele* was the critical event in the colonization of the islands by the United States (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992).
25. For somewhat divergent accounts of the impact that adoption of Western law and principles of political economy had on Native Hawaiians see Merry 2000 and Osorio 2002.
26. Kingdom of Hawaii 1846: 185.





Fig. 12: Mexico City, 1771. Silver 8 real of Charles III (ANS 1991.78.135, gift of James F. Nestor). 39 mm.



Fig. 13: Paul Emmert (artist), G. H. Burgess (engraver), View of Honolulu from the Harbor. San Francisco: Britton & Rey, 1854 (Library of Congress).



Fig. 14: United States, ca. 1854. Bronze medal of the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society (ANS 1913.79.2, gift of Rev. F. Ely). 64 mm (images reduced).

merchants against small transactions” they were not particularly well received or widely used.<sup>27</sup>

The failure of the copper cent led the Hawaiian government to abandon its plan to mint silver coins, and the confusing status quo prevailed. In a seemingly fruitless attempt to bring some clarity to the currency situation, the government compiled and published an official “Table of Coins” in 1848 that showed “the comparative intrinsic value of some of the principal Coins current in the Hawaiian Islands, or that may be offered in exchange.”<sup>28</sup> The resulting table befits the status of the islands as the commercial entrepôt of the mid-nineteenth-century Pacific, listing 53 gold coins and 104 silver coins from around the world, with information about their assay, weight, and rate of exchange. The table was based on English coinage, rating the assay of each coin as better or worse than the English standard, giving its content of pure gold and silver grains, and then expressing its exchange value in sterling. For example, a Mexican dollar “with globes and pillars” (fig. 12) was listed with an assay 4 ½ pennyweight worse than the English standard, and with a total of 377.4 grains of pure silver it is valued at 4 shillings and 4,79 pence. The majority of the currency specified was from the United States, England, France, Denmark, Russia, and Spain, but miscellaneous coins from India, the Dutch East Indies, Japan, and German cities such as Hamburg and Hanover were also listed. The practical application of such a table was questionable, particularly in everyday transactions, and visitors continually remarked on the peculiar exchange system. English visitor Willim Elwes noted that in every exchange there was “sometimes a heavy loss, and sometimes a heavy gain,” which depended almost entirely on how locals valued the currency (and not on government-issued tables).<sup>29</sup>

One byproduct of this complicated and polyglot monetary system was the opportunity it created for counterfeiters. In 1847 a visiting vessel passed a large amount of counterfeit Bolivian coin in Honolulu, a crime that a local newspaper complained struck “at the very root of honest dealing” in the community. A few years later a panic about the veracity of certain Mexican dollars threatened to bring business in the bustling port to a halt (fig. 13). In response, the legislature devoted an entire chapter of the “Penal Code of 1850” to counterfeiting, specifying a penalty of “imprisonment at hard labor for life” for counterfeiters and anyone caught “uttering” counterfeit coin.<sup>30</sup> One of the more unusual incidents in this vein concerned scrip made by Linton L. Torbert, who owned a sugar plantation on Maui. His solution to the lack of currency there was simply to issue a one-inch square piece of *tapa* (barkcloth) with the number twenty-five in both Roman and Arabic

numerals and his initials in between. When a local tax collector was caught counterfeiting the quarter-dollar squares and brought to trial, he was freed on the basis that Torbert’s scrip was too easily counterfeited.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever the issues were with the monetary system, the Hawaiian government had more pressing problems, most simply and significantly maintaining its sovereignty amidst the rising tide of imperialism sweeping the Pacific. In 1843, the French takeover of Tahiti and the so-called “Paulet Affair,” during which Kamehameha III was forced to temporarily submit to British rule, underscored the precarious position of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Although the government was able to negotiate treaties in the 1840s with the leading powers, including the United States, that recognized the independence of the islands, this was hardly a guarantee of their future autonomy. The California Gold Rush and the subsequent growth of American activity in the Pacific led some influential *haole* and expansionists in the United States to advocate for annexation.<sup>32</sup> From the 1850s forward, the defining issue for the Hawaiian Islands was its evolving colonial relationship with the United States, which culminated in the American-backed overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1893.

Amongst a number of interrelated factors contributing to this outcome was an ongoing demographic shift that saw the *haole* population rise from 1,500 to almost 20,000 between 1850 and 1890, while the Native Hawaiian population fell by half, from 70,000 to 35,000, over the same period.<sup>33</sup> The growth of the Hawaiian economy was reflected in the establishment of a local Chamber of Commerce and the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society, which promoted agricultural enterprise and provided a forum for the *haole* elite to address assorted economic issues, including the vexing currency situation. In a speech to the Society, the powerful government minister Robert C. Wyllie stated that the “three fundamental elements essential to our progress” were “cheap land, cheap money and cheap labor,” which gives an idea as to the priorities of its members.<sup>34</sup> The Society also held an annual competition at which medals (fig. 14) manufactured at the United States Mint in Philadelphia were awarded to worthy agricultural producers

27. In 1862, there were still 88,000 unissued coins in the treasury, meaning that less than 12,000 ever even entered into circulation. Medcalf and Russell 1991: 37; Breen 1988: 672.

28. *The Polynesian*, February 26, 1848.

29. Elwes 1854: 239–40.

30. *The Polynesian*, November 6, 1847 and June 22, 1850; Kingdom of Hawaii 1850: 76–78.

31. Medcalf and Russell 1991: 14.

32. Kuykendall 1938: 383–88.

33. Lind 1980.

34. Wyllie 1852: 41.

and innovators.<sup>35</sup> The sugar barrel featured amidst the bounty on the obverse design pointed to the rapid rise of the sugar industry, which was inextricably linking the islands to U.S. markets and capital.

The negotiation of an 1875 reciprocity treaty revamped commercial relations between the United States and the Hawaiian Islands, most importantly removing the tariff on Hawaiian sugar. Coinciding with the adoption of the reciprocity treaty was an 1876 act that declared “the gold coins of the United States of America shall be the standard and legal tender in this Kingdom in all payments of debts, at their nominal value” and made U.S. silver coins legal tender for “any amount not exceeding fifty dollars.”<sup>36</sup> Up until this time, American coinage was simply one of many that were current in the islands, but this elevated the U.S. dollar to a privileged position in commerce. Keeping actual gold coins in the islands, however, proved more problematic because the exchange rates fixed by the government created opportunities for banks and speculators to profit by hoarding gold from the islands and either exchanging it for silver in San Francisco or charging gold-needy individuals and businesses in the islands a premium.<sup>37</sup> In 1880, the longtime newspaper editor Henry M. Whitney decried the gold standard as a chimera, bemoaning the fact that “our currency still consists, as it did when the law was enacted, wholly of silver coins and silver certificates; the business of the metropolis being transacted chiefly with paper, and that of the country with coin.”<sup>38</sup>

As Whitney alluded to, paper money had assumed a prominent role in the business community, and it fueled the expansion of the Hawaiian economy. The civil code of 1859 included a provision that allowed the Hawaiian Treasury to issue “certificates of deposit” to facilitate financial transactions by sparing citizens the convenience of counting out large amounts of coin. The Treasury simply issued a rather plain-looking note for the amount of funds received and set the coins aside until the note was redeemed. While many businesses took advantage of this service, there was evident public skepticism about even this sort of fully backed paper money as an 1868 assessment by the Minister of Finance C. C. Harris reported that the currency of the kingdom remained “excessively metallic.”<sup>39</sup> One result of discussions surrounding the reciprocity treaty and the accompanying move to a gold standard based on the U.S. dollar, was an effort to revamp the paper money system.

In 1877, the American Banknote Company was contracted to produce new certificates, but when the cost of producing unique designs was deemed prohibitive, stock vignettes were used for the \$20, \$50, and \$100

denominations (fig. 15). The only exceptions were the \$500 bill, for which a portrait of the reigning monarch King Kalākaua was engraved, and the reverses, which featured the coat of arms of the Hawaiian kingdom. The notes entered circulation in 1879 and proved so popular that the government ordered a new \$10 note less than a year later.<sup>40</sup> As before, individuals simply took their silver coins to the treasury, where they were given a note that had been attached to a stub retained by the Department of Finance recording the serial number and other particulars of the transaction. By 1884, eight hundred thousand dollars worth of certificates were outstanding, backed by “special deposits” consisting of \$244,000 in Hawaiian silver coin, \$299,000 in American gold coin, \$45,500 in American trade and standard dollars, and \$210,500 in mixed foreign coin.<sup>41</sup> The introduction of paper money by the Hawaiian government cleared up a number of problems with the currency system, particularly for larger transactions, but it did little to solve the cumbersome coinage situation.

One of the best examples of the essentially ad hoc character of the monetary system was the saga of the American dime. The 1846 currency law adopted the American model of one hundred cents to a dollar, but only valued coins in Spanish-derived denominations, with the Spanish eighth of a dollar or *real*, valued at 12½ cents. The want of coin was such that an American dime (fig. 16) was initially accepted as par with the *real* (see fig. 9), despite their ostensibly lower value, which led unscrupulous speculators to import them in volume. The Hawaiian government responded to this by mandating the value of a dime at one tenth of a dollar in July of 1850, but by this point so many were in circulation that there was an uproar from the community. The reaction of Native Hawaiians to the devaluing of the dime was particularly strong, and thereafter most simply refused to accept them. The lack of “counters” was so acute that the government passed a law in 1859 explicitly stating that dimes and half dimes were “current coin of this kingdom,” but “so inveterate was the hatred of the native population towards these coins,” that they still failed to circulate. It was not until 1867, when merchants convinced the government to debase the *real* to 10 cents that the now undervalued Spanish coin was driven out of circulation and replaced by the American dime.<sup>42</sup>

While small change was a persistent annoyance, an even greater struggle was ensuring that the fixed exchange rates in the islands were aligned with those of other ports around the Pacific, most importantly San Francisco. Changes in the valuation of foreign coins in California were a constant source of consternation for Honolulu merchants and the Hawaiian government, who had to adjust





Fig. 15: United States, 1879. Hawaiian Treasury \$100 Certificate of Deposit. American Bank Note Company (Hawaii State Archives). 198 × 94 mm (images reduced).



Fig. 16: United States, 1849. Silver dime. (ANS 0000.999.4796). 15.5 mm (images enlarged).



Fig. 17: Australia, 1865. Gold sovereign. (ANS 0000.999.38144). 22 mm (images enlarged).

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- 35. The dies were engraved by Francis S. Mitchell and the number minted is unknown, but 1857 is the last year in which they were produced (Julian 1977: 190).
  - 36. Kingdom of Hawaii 1876: 114–16.
  - 37. Julian 1981: 81, 86.
  - 38. *Hawaiian Gazette*, July 21, 1880.
  - 39. Kingdom of Hawaii 1959: 104; Kingdom of Hawaii 1868: 7–8.
  - 40. The first printing cost \$1655.42 and include 9,000 twenties, 4,500 fifties, 2,900 hundreds, and 200 five hundred dollar notes (Medcalf and Fong 1966: 5–10).
  - 41. Kingdom of Hawaii 1884: 11.
  - 42. Kingdom of Hawaii 1859: 358; *The Polynesian*, October 20, 1858; Hodge and Ferris 1951: 6–8.



*Fig. 18: Three hula dancers, ca. 1890. (Hawaii State Archives).*



*Fig. 19: After P. J. Rennings. "Ski-ing the Waves at Waiki," from William Sabin, Hawaii. Honolulu: Paradise of the Pacific Publishing Co., 1921.*



*Fig. 20: After Jules Tavernier, "Burning Lake of Kilauea, Hawaiian Islands" from The Wasp. December 1884. Schmidt Label & Litho. Co.*



their own rates or risk being caught out with overvalued currency. In the summer of 1859 for example, news arrived of a new table introduced in San Francisco that lowered values on many coins, inducing a citywide panic as businesses and citizens all tried at once to rid themselves of the affected currency. The Australian sovereign (fig. 17), one of the more common gold coins in circulation, was revalued from \$5.00 to \$4.75, causing a widespread loss, but keeping away a flood of debased gold.<sup>43</sup> The success of Honolulu as a commercial port, its position at the crossroads of the Pacific, and what might charitably be described as its dynamic currency situation turned the islands into a working example of Gresham's law as shifting exchange rates drove different currencies in and out of the islands.

By the 1870s, the Hawaiian Islands were well connected to the world via steamship, which helped insulate the economy from wild currency swings and also led to an increase in visiting travelers. Tourists were lured there by the tranquil delights of the islands, which encompassed a range of "exotic" experiences, from *hula* dancing and surfing to the chance to see an active volcano and flowing lava (figs. 18–20). Narratives of these tours almost invariably have a numismatic element. Most frequently of course, as with our bewildered New Zealand traveler, were complaints about the confusion that the range of currency caused. Since at least the 1850s, a group of Native Hawaiian youths along the wharf had been showing off their swimming prowess by diving for coins thrown into the harbor by sailors and other visitors. In his youth, eventual king David Kalākaua had been one of them, and he imparted that the trick was to get underneath the coin and catch it as it descended before it hit the bottom.<sup>44</sup> Business only increased with the arrival of transpacific steamships, and the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* reported that "kanaka" boys (a colloquial term for Native Hawaiians) diving for coins thrown by passengers of the *City of New York* collected almost thirteen dollars during a brief stopover. Actor Edmund Leathes reported that he had "thrown a coin some distance in the water, which must be quite thirty feet deep, and immediately several Kanakas have dived in the sea, and sometimes have remained underwater so long that I have scarcely expected to see them come to the surface alive." Leathes suggested that "the coins cast into the bay are almost always found," but when the harbor was dredged in 1902, a veritable treasure of old coins from around the world was discovered.<sup>45</sup> Another popular pastime was a visit to Kilauea on the island of Hawai'i to observe the lava flows. Tourists would often make a numismatic memento by working coins into a lump of red lava and then allowing it to cool, leaving the coin embedded in lava rock.<sup>46</sup>

The need for workers in the rapidly expanding sugar industry also brought a new group of immigrants to

the islands in the form of contract laborers. Initially, the workers recruited were Chinese, but this shifted to Japanese and Portuguese as the century progressed. Salaries were set by contract, and one way that owners contrived to keep profits high was by forcing workers to shop in company stores, for which tokens were created to serve as small change. The Wailuku plantation struck tokens in *real* (12 ½ cent) and half-*real* (6 cent) denominations at its blacksmith shop; a first series in 1871 (fig. 21) and then a more elaborate set in 1880 (fig. 22). The use of Spanish denominations points to the continued familiarity of that currency among workers around the Pacific, even if U.S. coins were by then predominating on the islands. The Haiku (fig. 23) and Grove Ranch (fig. 24) plantations on Maui likewise employed tokens, with those of the former likely to have been minted and imported from the United States.<sup>47</sup>

While the prosperity of the plantations buoyed the Hawaiian economy, it also exacerbated internal differences between an American-oriented sugar elite and a loose alliance of Native Hawaiians and *haole* who were more invested in the independence of the island kingdom. When King Lunalilo died in 1874 without having named a successor, a tumultuous election saw David Kalākaua installed as the new *mo'i* (king). He rewarded supporters with a small diamond-shaped medal, the first in a series of increasingly elaborate decorations that were issued during his reign to commemorate events and recognize service to the Hawaiian Kingdom.<sup>48</sup> King Kalākaua (fig. 25) was an exponent of "Hawai'i for Hawaiians," and was at least perceived to be less friendly to American interests than his rivals. As part of a broader effort to reassert Hawaiian sovereignty, he sponsored a revival of traditional Hawaiian culture and traveled abroad to bolster the kingdom's standing with nations around the world. One direct outcome of the resurgence of Hawaiian nationalism was to bring the issue of a national coinage back to the fore.<sup>49</sup> The missionary-educated Kalākaua might have been familiar with Thomas Jefferson's famous comment: "Coinage is peculiarly an Attribute of Sovereignty. To transfer its exercise to another country, is to submit it to another sovereign."<sup>50</sup> Whether or not that was the case, it was clear that Kalākaua and his principal

43. *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, June 2, 1859.

44. Bird 1875: 269–70; Armstrong 1904: 173.

45. *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, May 17, 1879; Leathes 1880: 109–10.

46. Nicholson 1881: 256–57.

47. For the best introduction to plantation life in the Hawaiian Islands see Takaki 1983. On plantation currency see Medcalf and Russell 1991: 52–54, 57.

48. Medcalf and Russell 1991: 152–57.

49. On Kalākaua's embrace of the "arts of kingship," see Kamehiro 2009.

50. *Gazette of the United States*, New York, April 21, 1790.



adviser Walter Murray Gibson believed that a national coinage would “add to the prestige of the Kingdom,” and “inspire the confidence of the people” by demonstrating its independence from the encroaching influence of the United States.<sup>51</sup>

The new coinage was authorized by the Coinage Act of 1880 and financed by the National Loan Act of 1882, but implementation was delayed by political maneuvering.<sup>52</sup> The US Mint was contracted for the work and Charles E. Barber engraved the dies, which were then forwarded to the San Francisco mint where production was begun in November 1883. The original mintage was for almost two million pieces with a total face value of one million, the cost for the design and production of which came in at around twenty thousand dollars (figs. 26–29):

Denomination		Minted	Face Value
<i>akahi dala</i>	one dollar	500,000	\$500,000
<i>hapalua</i>	half dollar	700,000	\$350,000
<i>hapaha</i>	quarter dollar	500,000	\$125,000
<i>umi keneta</i>	ten cent	250,000	\$25,000

There was some confusion between the Hawaiian government and the mint because the original authorization specified a one-eighth dollar while the contract called for coins that were the same weight and fineness of United States coins, i.e., a dime. Hubs were engraved for both, but only the dime entered production. A very few *hapawalu* (one-eighth dollar) were struck in proof, and a silver type can be found in the American Numismatic Society’s collections (fig. 30). A portrait of Kalākaua adorned the obverse of each, with his full title, “Kalakuau I King of Hawai’i,” as the legend. The reverses varied, but each included a legend of the phrase “Ua Mau ke Ea o ka Aina i ka Pono,” an expression of Hawaiian sovereignty that is commonly translated as “the life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness.”<sup>53</sup> The reverse of the *akahi dala* featured an impressive design of the complete coat of arms of the kingdom, while size considerations limited the half and quarter dollars to just the crest. The reverse of the *umi keneta* was engraved with a wreath that recalled the 1847 Hawaiian cent, topped with the small crown from the crest. All twenty-five sets of the dies (five for each denomination), with obverses defaced, were turned over to the Hawaiian government in 1888 and are now held at the Hawai’i State Archives.

The first shipment of coins was received in December 1883, but ongoing political machinations and the opposition of Honolulu businessmen who feared the surfeit of silver would destabilize the economy slowed its introduction. The Legislative Assembly of 1884 took up the issue, and a new currency act reconfirmed U.S. gold

coins as the standard legal tender and limited silver coins to those of the United States and Hawaiian Kingdom. All other foreign silver coins in circulation could be exchanged at the treasury for their nominal value in Hawaiian coins, but after the first day of December 1884, they no longer had legal tender status and would only be valued as bullion.<sup>54</sup> While a motley mix of coins continued to circulate as small change, the act seemed to have finally brought order to the long-jumbled currency situation of the Hawaiian Islands.

Unfortunately, the debate over the new currency became part of a larger power struggle between Kalākaua and a *haole* elite intent on exerting its influence in the islands.<sup>55</sup> The government’s fiscal affairs were fiercely disputed, and a troubled financial outlook caused by a drop in the price of sugar only exacerbated tensions. Matters came to a head in 1887, when a cabal called the Hawaiian League, backed by an armed militia, subverted the government by forcing Kalākaua to sign a new constitution that severely limited his power and curtailed the rights of Native Hawaiians more generally. The so-called “Bayonet Constitution” was the beginning of the end for the Hawaiian kingdom, and it was an attempt by Kalākaua’s sister and successor Queen Lili’uokalani to promulgate a more equitable constitution that led to a coup d’état in January 1893. The overthrow was accomplished with the aid of U.S. military forces and put an American-oriented regime in control of the islands. Although a nominal Republic of Hawai’i was formed, the ultimate goal of the *haole* elite that took power was annexation by the United States. Against Native Hawaiian resistance and in the face of challenges from anti-imperialist Americans (fig. 31), the Hawaiian Islands were formally and arbitrarily annexed by the United States on July 4, 1898.<sup>56</sup>

Despite now being a colony of the United States, the Kalākaua coinage and Hawaiian paper money continued to circulate. The currency was an obvious reminder, particularly to those that opposed annexation, of the

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51. Kingdom of Hawaii 1880: 16.  
52. For the best account of the particulars and the furtive involvement of sugar baron Claus Spreckels see Adler 1960.  
53. The quote is from the speech given by Kamehameha III on July 31, 1843, after Hawaiian sovereignty was restored after the abortive British takeover of the islands known as the Paulet Affair. The phrase was adopted at the state motto and appeared on the official Hawaii state quarter issued in 2008.  
54. Kingdom of Hawaii 1884: 20–23.  
55. For a detailed account of debates over the currency and financial affairs of the Hawaiian Kingdom see Adler 1960; Andrade 1977; Kuykendall 1967: 86–94.  
56. For a full account of the politics and process of annexation see Kuykendall 1967: 582–650; on the Native Hawaiian role and resistance to the same see Silva 2004.



Fig. 21: Wailuku Plantation, Maui, 1871. Copper 6 cent token (ANS 1940.160.1147, gift of J.F. Jones and E.T. Newell). 18 mm.



Fig. 22: Wailuku Plantation, Maui, 1880. Copper real (12 ½ cent) token (ANS 1940.88.324). 23 mm.



Fig. 23: Haiku Plantation, Maui, 1882. Copper 'rial' token (ANS 0000.999.20267). 22 mm.



Fig. 24: Grove Ranch Plantation, Maui, 1886. (Copper 12 ½ cent) token. (ANS 1918.999.166). 21 mm.



Fig. 25: J. J. Williams (photographer), "King of Hawaii David Kalakaua," ca. 1882. (Hawaii State Archives).



Fig. 26: United States, 1883. Silver akahi dala (ANS 1933.122.4, gift of Howland Wood). 38 mm.



Fig. 27: United States, 1883. Silver hapalua (ANS 1933.122.3, gift of Howland Wood). 31 mm.



Fig. 28: United States, 1883. Silver hapaha (ANS 1933.122.2, gift of Howland Wood). 24 mm.



Fig. 29: United States, 1883. Silver umi keneta (ANS 1933.122.1, gift of Howland Wood). 18 mm.



Fig. 30: United States, 1883. Silver hapawalu (ANS 1933.122.5, gift of Howland Wood). 19 mm.



Fig. 31: Taylor, Charles Jay. "Another shotgun wedding, with neither party willing," Puck. December 1, 1897. (Library of Congress).

prior independence of the islands, and the United States Congress took steps to remove it from circulation in early 1903. The law provided for the redemption of silver certificates until January 1, 1905, after which it became "unlawful to circulate the same as money."<sup>57</sup> It also declared that Hawaiian silver coins would not be legal tender after January 1, 1904, though they could be exchanged at par for American currency until then. The balance of Hawaiian silver was subsequently shipped to San Francisco and recoinced as United States coins. Many Hawaiians, whether simply as a memento or as an expression of solidarity with the subverted kingdom, made their Kalākaua coins into necklaces, pins, and other decorative objects.

Historian Jonathon Osorio has observed that colonialism came to the Hawaiian Islands "through a slow, insinuating invasion of people, ideas, and institutions," and the introduction of coins and currency was part and parcel of this process.<sup>58</sup> Money undermined the traditional basis of Hawaiian society and facilitated the ongoing, if not always forthrightly acknowledged, colonization of the islands by the United States. In 1893, Eleanore Pendergrast, a friend and companion of the recently deposed queen, wrote a song, *Kaulana Nā Pua* ("Famous are the Flowers"), in support of members of the Royal Hawaiian Band who refused to take an oath of loyalty to the new provisional government.<sup>59</sup> One verse in particular captures something of the fraught role that coins and currency played in the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and poetically expresses the resilience of traditional Hawaiian culture.

<i>A'ole mākou a'e minamina</i>	We do not value
<i>I ka pu'ukālā a ke aupuni</i>	The government's sums of money
<i>Ua lawa mākou i ka pōhaku</i>	We are satisfied with the stones
<i>I ka 'ai kamaha'o o ka 'āina</i>	Astonishing food of the land

57. United States Government 1903: 770–71.

58. Osorio 2002: 3.

59. Nordyke and Noyes 1993.

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