

Will the real aumakua

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As far as I can recall, during the more than 20 years that I have written for The Honolulu Advertiser, not once have I ever devoted an entire column to answering criticism that had been leveled at me. Instead, I always chose to let my words stand or fall on their own merit.

But when such criticism approaches the impertinent and when it involves a subject matter with which I am probably excessively familiar, then do I need make reply. For me not to do so would be to allow mistaken information to circulate with the air of authority.

I refer to a column last Sunday in which I said that the Bishop Museum was utterly mistaken when it called a hideous wooden idol an aumakua. In that column, I said that the idol was instead an unihipili or at least the container for an unihipili and that in no way could it have possibly been an aumakua.

Asked for a comment by my editors, the Bishop Museum through one of its employees replied that I "obviously did not know what an aumakua was" and that sorcery gods were aumakua.

Let me say that my family has had aumakua for over a thousand years, and we are quite familiar with what they are. And especially with what they are not. The aumakua were never carved into idols. They were never portrayed in any form. They were spirits. In most cases, spirits of animals in much the same way as are the totems among the northern American Indians.

My family, the Keawe-Kamehameha-Lu-



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nalilo, had three aumakua. First of all, the shark or what the Hawaiians called Ka Mano Au i ka Moana—the shark that swims in the deep seas. This is the oldest aumakua in our family. We inherited this aumakua by virtue of our descent from Wahieloa, the great adventuring prince of ancient Hawaii. In his many travels, he was accompanied by a large white shark whom he adopted as aumakua. That shark still lives in the form of Keahupalau, the famed shark god of Puuloa.

Our second aumakua is the owl, or what the Hawaiians called Ka Pueo Kea Hoolewa in the Po — the white owl that flies by night. This aumakua we inherited from Kanipahu and descends to us through Akahi-a-Kuleana, the mother of the great Umi-a-Liloa and through Koihalawai, the consort of the first regent and Kuhina Nui, Keawenui-a-Umi. When Kanipahu was overthrown by his half brother, Kamaiole, the unfortunate prince and king fled into exile at Pukoo on the island of Molokai. With him went a white owl. It was after this owl that he named Kalapana, his younger son, Kaioiomoa — the fledgling. It is from this Kalapana-Kaioiomoa that the royalty of Hawaii descends. The owl is precious to us.

The reptile or lizard is the third of our aumakua. By the Hawaiians, it is called Ka Moolani Eli i ka Honua — the reptile that digs in the earth. We inherit this aumakua from the great Umi-a-Liloa himself, the peasant prince who killed his brother, Hakau, and thereby succeeded to the throne of Hawaii. Umi-a-Liloa lived in the valley of Laupahoehoe, and it is said that when the forces of Kahau came into the valley to slay Umi-a-Liloa, the reptiles came out of the soil, killed the invaders and saved Umi-a-Liloa.

Actually, I weary of those who come amongst my people to study our customs and ways, our history and culture, and then have the pure gall to act as authorities in areas where they are not authorities at all.

As a matter of fact, the Bishop Museum has absolutely no basis to call it authentic. It could just as easily been carved in the early 19th century by some Hawaiian fisherman who wanted to use it to trade for nails from some haole sailor. They are forever carving tiki dolls and idols right now, and you can buy no end of these in any one of a number of Waikiki shops, most of them carved in either Taiwan or in the Philippines.

These have just about as much authen-

please sit down?

— ticity as that ridiculous little doll for which the Bishop Museum was willing to pay a quarter of a million dollars. And for which some other even more foolish bidder paid almost a half million. Astonishing. In fact, I probably could carve a better doll for a lot less money.

I certainly do not wish to leave the impression that I disdain the men and women who toil at the Bishop Museum. This is far from true. I have a great respect for Dr. Kenneth Emory, primarily because he is a Punahou graduate. I also have the greatest respect for Kawena Pukui, who is easily the only intellectual in history who has ever come out of Ka'u. But I learned a long time ago that the museum is not always the most reliable source when it comes to matters involving the Hawaiian race.

The museum very often invents theories out of whole cloth and then bends history, legend and tradition to fit its new theories. Of course, this fault can be forgiven because it is one that is quite common among anthropologists.

But as a word of caution to the great authorities at the Bishop Museum: be more than careful when you question a Hawaiian on matters that involve Hawaiian things. He probably knows more on the subject than anyone in the museum. Just tread lightly. And do not act as if you know it all because you probably do not and you end up sounding terribly foolish.

In conclusion, let me only say that there was never an aumakua carved into an idol. At least not by any Hawaiian. Aumakua are purely spiritual, and the sooner that Bishop Museum knows this, the better off it will be.



Aumakua — or hideous wooden idol?