



Finding a Path Forward

**ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS THEME STUDY**

Edited by Franklin Odo





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Essay 2



A Sea of Islands: Early Foundations and Mobilities of Pacific Islanders

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An essay tasked with introducing the Pacific Islands and its inhabitants might begin by acknowledging late 20th century constructions that coupled together Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. These range from political alliances, demographic initiatives, and socio-cultural formations that grow out of intersections of Asians and Pacific Islanders in island communities as well as within the continental United States. Among the earliest scholarly endeavors, the “P” or “PI” appears in variant namings, such as in the first iteration of the Association for Asian Pacific American Studies (now Association for Asian American Studies) and, at this writing, the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. In the United States context, it is not difficult to connect Asian and Pacific Islander peoples conceptually via the geographic contiguity of the Asian continent and the Pacific Ocean. While doing so comes at the

Portrait of Kaneena, a chief of the Sandwich Islands in the North Pacific Ocean. Drawn by J. Webber; engraved by A.W. Warren, n.d.; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

cost of effacing profound historical differences, an absolute adherence to maintaining those very historical distinctions also ignores more recent histories of intersection. Scholarship on Asia and the Pacific Islands is pursued in two distinctly separate interdisciplinary fields with attending professional learned societies, publication venues, and claims on academic and institutional resources. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, especially in the U.S. Possessions, fall in the gaps between *ideas* of homeland authenticity and diasporic disconnection, and contrasting narratives of immigration and indigeneity. The reception and representation of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. is also marked by juxtaposition. Asians have endured stereotypes of “yellow peril” and “perpetual foreigner,” while Pacific Islanders have historically been valued as desired objects of colonialist exoticness.

Three points of intersection between Asians and Pacific Islanders are relevant to this overview. First, systematic mass immigration from Asia to the United States, catalyzed by the 1848 discovery of gold in California, took place through the Pacific Islands, when transportation routes required provisioning stops between Asia and North America. Second, Hawai‘i occupies a pivotal point, as capitalist sugar and pineapple plantations brought Asian immigrant laborers in the 1860s, and the multiethnic plantation milieu became the basis for interracial marriage and a multicultural community formation already well rooted by the time of the U.S. acquisition of Hawai‘i in 1898. Third, following World War II, the migration of Pacific Islanders from American-administered areas—Native Hawaiians and Asian descendants from Hawai‘i, along with Samoans, Guamanians, and residents of the Trust Territory of the Pacific—to the continental United States produced various community formations. This was especially true along the west coast, in proximity to neighborhoods settled by Asian immigrants, U.S.-born Asian descendants, and Japanese Americans returning after internment.

The 20th century development of U.S. political and economic power in the Pacific region can be viewed in four steps. First, the U.S. possession of Guam and Hawai‘i in 1898 and a portion of Samoa in 1899 marked the formal establishment of U.S. colonialism in the Pacific. Second, during World War II, the U.S. military entered the war involving the Pacific Islands to curb

Japanese expansion eastward. Third, U.S. involvement in post-war economic reconstruction in Japan (during which time the U.S. also took control of the United Nations-mandated Trust Territory of the Pacific, comprising multiple island groups across the northern Pacific stretching westward from Hawai‘i), followed by subsequent Cold War geopolitics in Korea and Southeast Asia, carried over, even as Asian economies rebounded. Fourth, by the 1990s, the economic power of multinational corporations and transnational trade agreements operating beyond the reach of nation-based regulation were encompassed in the terms “Pacific Rim” and the touting, especially in the news media, of a “Pacific Century.” All of this took place despite the fact that the worlds now linked largely passed over the islands¹—a reality made possible by advances in jet transportation and the capacity to eliminate mid-Pacific refueling stops.

The incorporation of Pacific Islanders into a combined “Asian Pacific” construction has been uneven. Pacific Islanders have long protested the marginalization and invisibility by—as well as among—their more numerous Asian colleagues² and have since successfully negotiated incorporation into the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), formally constituted in 2009. However, federal government policy has been mixed. While Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders have been disaggregated from the “Asian American” racial category on the U.S. Census, the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders has maintained a coalition approach, and heritage month celebrations for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders continue to be observed in May with Asian Americans, rather than in November with Native Americans.

Beyond considerations about how Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans have been grouped together bureaucratically, an orientation to Pacific Islanders and their oceanic world inevitably casts light on Pacific Islander distinctiveness from Asian cultures and histories. It also illuminates a key epistemological fault line between systems of knowledge through which Pacific Islanders have come to be known outside the region. From the advent of western European presence in the Pacific in the early 1500s, the conduct of scholarship and the circulation of knowledge about the region were monopolized by the tenets of western European

Enlightenment rationality and empiricism. It has taken several generations of Pacific Islander-centered scholars since the later 20th century to place islander worldviews alongside those documented by outsiders.³

The epochal perspective proposed in this essay takes European presence and Euro-American colonialism as simply another era during which Pacific Islanders have continued to exist. This is in contradistinction to generations of scholars who have figured the moments of “first contact” between islanders and outsiders as constitutive of radical rupture and irreversible alterations in island societies after Euro-American colonialism.⁴ Even the Pacific-centered perspective proposed by Australian scholars in the 1950s simply shifted the locus of island histories from metropolitan centers to the islands⁵ but still maintained the structural separation of colonizer and colonized. It is instructive to view the eras of Euro-American colonization and decolonization as equally constitutive of Pacific Islands societies in order to begin to understand how historic preservation must not be limited only to marking the presence of others in the region, but more fundamentally must acknowledge the worlds and worldviews of Pacific Island societies themselves.

CARTOGRAPHIES (SEE TABLE A)

The first problem that anyone new to the study of Pacific worlds encounters is how that space is defined. Does it include all continental rims along the edges of the ocean? Is it limited to islands within the ocean? Are we to draw distinctions between indigenous settlers and subsequent waves of migrants, including descendants of European, American, and Asian settlers? A cartographic perspective helps to bring this complexity into view.

The Pacific Ocean, at 162.25 million square kilometers (63.8 million square miles) comprises approximately one-third of the earth’s surface and nearly half of its oceanic waters. Its boundaries are Asia and Australia in the west, the Americas in the east, the Arctic Ocean in the north, and Antarctica in the south. The floor of the Pacific Ocean is made up of multiple tectonic plates, atop of which sit islands numbering in the tens of thousands.

Studies of paleogeography and biodiversity suggest that insular land masses result generally from two processes: 1) breakaways from continental crust; and

2) volcanic activity as plates move over hot spots in the earth’s core, and volcanic activity results in mountainous underwater ranges whose peaks rise above sea level.⁶ Where volcanic activity ceased, many islands eroded, pushing up coral reefs ringing the island above sea level until only coral atolls remained.

Within geological boundaries of the oceanic region, multiple approaches to defining “Pacific Islands” over centuries of habitation have shifted based on migration and settlement patterns, along with the ebb and flow of empires with their structures of trade and tribute. Through various methods of reckoning, the “Pacific Islands” has been narrowed from all physical land masses touching the Pacific Ocean to a subset of islands within the ocean that excludes those archipelagoes that are deemed socioculturally and linguistically more closely allied with continental Asian and southeast Asian societies. Among the islands usually excluded from discussions of the Pacific Islands are the East Indies (which includes present-day nations of Indonesia and the Philippines), as well as the Bonin Islands, Okinawa, and Taiwan.

The most widely adopted geographic schema is that imposed by the French explorer Jules Dumont d’Urville, who commanded the *Astrolabe* on a global scientific and cartographic expedition from 1826 to 1829. In the Pacific, he spent time in New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji, the Loyalty Islands, coastal New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and the Caroline Islands. In an 1832 article, Dumont d’Urville proposed classifying the Pacific islands into four broad regions: Malaysia—referring to the islands of the East Indies; Melanesia—referring to the islands in the southwest Pacific islands populated by racially dark islanders; Micronesia—referring to the thousands of small islands across the northern Pacific from the Marianas to the Marshall Archipelago; and Polynesia—including the islands within the triangle bound by Hawai’i in the north, Rapa in the east, and New Zealand in the west.⁷ This schema continues to organize regional and scholarly endeavors.

Knowledge-making about the Pacific is also complicated by two other commonplace cartographical conventions. First, world maps conventionally place the Atlantic Ocean at the center, which requires dividing the Pacific Ocean in half, placing the eastern Pacific on the left side and the western Pacific on the right.

Scholars of the Pacific who adopt a Pacific-centered world map work in a context where such maps are considered “alternate” to the “standard” representation of the world that centers the Atlantic Ocean. Second, the placement of the International Date Line in the Central Pacific (at the antipode of the Prime Meridian in Greenwich, England) underscores how dividing the world on world maps is logical and, thus, naturalized. Both frameworks function similarly to national borders on continental landmasses for which political purposes often operate at odds with the networks of kin, communities, and circuits of relations along such borders.

EPOCHAL CHRONOLOGIES

I propose five epochs of peopling in the Pacific islands that ultimately account for present-day multicultural islander populations on and off islands.⁸

1. The modern landmasses of Australia, Tasmania, and New Guinea were settled between 30,000 and 60,000 years ago, as people moved from mainland Sunda (a continental landmass covering the present-day Malaysian peninsula and the islands of western Indonesia) across a now-submerged land bridge into the Pleistocene-era continent of Sahul (a connected landmass



Map of Sunda and Sahul. Made by Maximilian Dörrbecker (Chumwa) for Wikimedia Commons, 2007.

now separated into Australia, Tasmania, New Guinea, and islands in eastern Indonesia).⁹ Nomadic bands entering the area that comprises Australia’s Northern Territories are considered to be ancestors of the Aborigines. Settlements in river basins, jungles, and mountain valleys became the basis for the cultures of Papuan-speaking peoples. Further Pleistocene-era voyaging extended settlement into the island archipelagos off Sahul, comprising the present-day Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Islands.

2. Several waves of migration by Austronesian-speaking peoples moved eastward from the region around Taiwan. Linguistic analysis classifies the languages of these peoples in the Austronesian language family.¹⁰
 - Some migration trails moved through the northern Philippines and into the northern Pacific islands, into the southwestern region of Micronesia.
 - Other migration routes moved through Papua and intermixed Austronesian people with earlier Papuan settlers. Their descendants included the anthropologically renowned “Kula ring” circuits of long-distance voyaging canoes carrying tributes of shell necklaces and bracelets across hundreds of miles.
 - Yet another migratory trail of Austronesian speakers moved south through the present-day Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa. These settlers are known for the production of ceramic “Lapita” pottery (named after an excavation site in New Caledonia). Importantly, these people had produced the technology to sail and navigate great distances, with the intention of finding habitation by bringing along domesticated animals.
3. After the demise of the technology of Lapita pottery, voyages eastward from the central Pacific archipelagos of Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa carried settlers into the island archipelagos of Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands.
4. From this eastern Pacific center, the final great voyages of settlement across the longest stretches of open ocean were accomplished:

- Eastward to Rapa;
- West-southwest through the Cook Islands to Aotearoa (New Zealand); and
- Northward to the Hawaiian Islands.

5. European presence, dating from Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch interests in the so-called “East Indies,” followed by British, French, German, American, and Japanese colonizations.¹⁰

Even as the three settlement sequences of Austronesian-speaking peoples account for the peopling of islands and landmasses in the southwest, northern, and eastern Pacific, histories accrued as intra- and inter-regional trade networks, migrations, warfare, and empire waxed and waned. Through much of these epic epochs of initial settlement, the central, northern, and eastern oceanic island groups had little or no interaction with the island archipelagos adjacent to the Malay Peninsula, where sea lanes enabled trade and travel between the

Indian and Pacific oceans. The continuity of Indian cultural influences is expressed in the label “East Indies,” one of many identifiers applied to the region over time. This world of trade and tribute empires drew in imperial ambitions from the Arab world and China, and this is the “Pacific World” that drew mercantile interest from Europeans and, eventually, Americans. So despite the fact that the islands of present-day Indonesia, the Philippines, and Okinawa (among others) are inhabited land masses within the boundaries of the Pacific Ocean, the moniker “Pacific Islands” also draws a watery boundary between those island archipelagos directly engaged in wider trade relations outside the Pacific and the remote islands settled by Austronesian-speaking peoples that remained outside the circuits of Indo-Pacific trade until the arrival of Europeans.

The advent of European presence beyond the East Indies area began with the Spanish connecting colonial conquests in the Western Pacific with its possessions in the Americas through a trade circuit between the



Indigenous people from the Upper Ten of Tonga, c. 1918-1920. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Philippines and Mexico starting in the 1500s. It was not until the 18th century that Britain, France, Germany, and eventually the United States joined Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch presence in the Pacific by launching scientific expeditions of exploration. During this epoch, the islands throughout the Pacific were gradually sighted, visited, and charted. Fascination with published accounts from these voyages contributed to two developments: 1) interest in islands in support of expanding trade circuits; and 2) interest in islanders' salvation. In the first schema, islands became nodes within global capitalist developments that sought products for markets in Asia that could be traded for goods in demand in Europe and the Americas. Islands were valued for strategic locations as provisioning stations—including food, rest and recreation, and labor recruitment, especially in the 19th century fur and whaling industries. Island natural resources harvested into these trade circuits included exotic woods, beche-de-mer, and coconut products. In the second schema, islanders residing in lush tropical climes fueled continental European philosophers' fascination with ideas of "noble savages;" these depictions were refigured by Christian revivalists into fallen primitives to whom Christianity must be delivered. Simply put, European and American colonization in the Pacific Islands resulted out of European and American naval policing of European and American economic and religious interests.

Christianity was delivered to the Pacific by missionaries primarily from England and the United States and, slightly later, from France. Missionaries followed traders into island ports and communities; they, in turn, were followed by settlers. While austere beliefs promulgated by missionaries frequently clashed with libidinous recreation sought by naval and mercantile ship crews, both missionaries and traders enjoyed the protection of their home governments in the form of colonial agents who were quick to use military force (often referred to as "gunboat diplomacy") to resolve conflicts between Euro-American nationals and islanders.

The web of benign protectorates and pugilistic conquests across the Pacific is both intricate and unsystematic. Some islanders sought the protection of one government to check aggression by another government; some islanders waged protracted warfare against colonial agents and militaries; some island

groups were passed from one government to another as spoils of war; some islanders were left out of diplomatic negotiations altogether as jurisdictions were divided among colonizers. And so it is that by the early 20th century, the sovereignty of every island group except the Kingdom of Tonga passed over to European, American, or Japanese control.

Reforms in land tenure opened the way to capitalist agricultural development, which in turn necessitated the importation of labor. Capitalists turned to Asia, where socioeconomic conditions produced push factors alongside the pull factor of economic opportunity. Asian peoples made their way eastward to plantations across the islands as well as toward the Americas. Islanders, too, increasingly took advantage of new opportunities available in metropolitan centers. And thus traceable is a colonialist logic in the emigration of Pacific Islanders and the formation of diasporic communities along pathways of colonial transits.

Throughout the 20th century and early 21st century, Pacific islanders responded to regionally distinct colonialisms in varied ways. Christianity was widely embraced, and mission stations administered from colonial metropolises morphed into independent synods. Education at primary and secondary levels was delivered via Eurocentric curricula in colonial languages, in turn weakening indigenous languages. Anthropological, archaeological, and historical research on Pacific Islanders, couched in the frameworks of westernization, acculturation, and cultural loss, effectively figured islanders as objects and separated them from the production of knowledge about them.

Island groups began attaining independence from colonial control beginning in 1960. At this writing, France still claims possession of French Polynesia and New Caledonia; Rapa Nui or Easter Island is still claimed by Chile; the country of Tokelau remains a dependent of New Zealand; and the United States has incorporated Hawai'i as a state and still claims possession of the territories of American Samoa and Guam.

Processes of decolonization in the later 20th century are marked by both top-down and grassroots development. The South Pacific Commission (SPC), founded in 1947 by the six then-active colonial powers (Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States), laid the foundation for regional



Indigenous people of Rarotonga, Cook Island, located in the South Pacific. Note Cook Islander native in indigenous clothing and headwear, c. 1930-1940. Photo by Alfred T. Palmer, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

inter-governmental cooperation in scientific and economic development. Its membership currently includes all 22 Pacific island countries and territories." (See Table B for a list of Pacific Islands countries as of 2015.) Hawai'i is excluded since it has gained full membership in the United States through statehood in 1959, but American Samoa and Guam, still U.S. territories, are members.

Grassroots activism, however, is the impetus among islanders for the assertive groundswell of sociocultural self-determination that swept across the Pacific in the late 20th century. Islanders across the Pacific embraced indigenous cultural practices and connections, much of which had been disrupted by—and devalued during—colonial territoriality. Islanders asserted their social and cultural relationships to their environment, which in all cases was impacted by the

ocean. While the precise impact varied from one location to the next, what they all shared was ways of life in which the ocean and its bounty figured into transactions of daily living and community cohesion. And finally, Islanders reaffirmed cultural kinship with each other. These ties had been presumed broken after indigenous long-distance voyaging ceased several centuries before the arrival of Europeans. Perhaps ironically, it was European explorers who noted commonalities of language and lifeways as they carried island adventurers among island archipelagos.

The epistemological paradigm shift that emerged is best captured in the essay published by scholar 'Eveli Hau'ofa, titled "Our Sea of Islands":

The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought on it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters, and the spirit to traverse even the few large gaps that separated their island groups.

Theirs was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled, unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers. From one island to another they sailed to trade and to marry, thereby expanding social networks for greater flows of wealth. They traveled to visit relatives in a wide variety of natural and cultural surroundings, to quench their thirst for adventure, and even to fight and dominate.¹²

From this islander-centered perspective, contemporary sociocultural developments are a logical extension of millennia-old lifeways around seafaring, environmental knowledge and stewardship, and the varied social organizations that emerged to support survival and manage natural and cultural resources. Although local distinctions emerged among linguistic and cultural groups over centuries and millennia, those distinctions have accreted over a deep shared experience of understanding how to survive and prosper in a world dominated by the ocean and limited—initially—to the natural resources of volcanic islands and coral atolls.

CULTURAL RUBRICS

Two rubrics capable of schematizing Pacific Islander cultural histories are mobility and place. Each has the capacity to frame discussions of islander experience; together they offer capacious perspectives to understand cultural commonalities that trace back to shared Austronesian ancestry. Importantly, these perspectives also offer ascending constellations of possibility to conversations on historic preservation in the Pacific’s long duree.

The rubric of mobility enables a conceptualization of the ocean as a means to move among islands. It is then possible to survey the range of technologies involved in traveling across the ocean, from the oceangoing vessels to the means of navigating them across the water. While canoes could be sufficient for everyday utilitarian sailing and moving along coastlines, seafaring vessels gained expanded scope through primarily three basic structural configurations: the addition of a single outrigger, the addition of double outriggers, and the joining of two canoes into one double-hulled vessel. Throughout the Pacific, basically three types of woven pandanus-mat sails are classified as the rectangular lugsail, the triangular spritsail, and the triangular lateen sail. Spirituality, respected through ritual practices, entered into many facets of canoe building and sailing from the identification and gathering of raw materials, through the construction processes, and to the preparations for embarking on journeys and ensuring the safe passage of those aboard. The ocean, as the realm of the god most widely known as Tangaroa, thus required obeisance marked by ritual practices that governed conduct on the ocean, as well as harvesting of its resources for human use and consumption.

Knowledge systems of celestial navigation and wayfinding provide the means by which landfall could be attained, and return voyages could be accomplished: “Oceanic seafarers look to heavenly bodies, ocean swells, winds and other signs supplied by nature to set their course, steer, track their canoe, make course corrections and home in on islands before they can be seen.”¹³ Navigators use their knowledge of the rising and setting positions of the sun, moon, and stars to set their course and check their position. Throughout the northern Pacific, navigators organized their knowledge into local variants of star compasses. Those systems are the basis for the late 20th century revival of celestial navigation and renaissance of long-distance voyaging.

Traditions and knowledge related to long-distance voyaging went on hiatus when voyaging ceased between the most remote landmass outposts (especially Hawai‘i, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Rapa Nui/Easter Island) and the Central Pacific island groups. Following what appears to be several centuries of isolation, those landmasses were reconnected by European and American ships in the epoch of colonial presence. Throughout this period, traces of epic voyaging and interactions remained in oral tradition as well as in linguistic and archaeological evidence. That evidence was the basis for theories of original human settlement across the Pacific in eastward movements from the western Pacific. This evidence met with a formidable competing thesis of human settlement by accidental drift from the Americas on prevailing counterclockwise ocean currents in the southern hemisphere by people who lacked technologies of seafaring and navigation.¹⁴

In response, an American anthropologist based in Hawai‘i launched an initiative to replicate a Hawaiian voyaging canoe and conduct a voyage navigating celestially without western scientific instruments. The double-hulled canoe constructed for this venture was named Hōkūle‘a. Although celestial navigation was no longer practiced in Hawai‘i or proximate island groups, an unbroken tradition of celestial navigation had continued in the islands across the present-day Federated States of Micronesia. The navigator Mau Piailug was brought from Satawal to Hawai‘i, where he studied star locations in the eastern Pacific at the Bishop Museum Planetarium, apprenticed Native Hawaiian waterman Nainoa Thompson in his techniques of wayfinding,

and successfully sailed Hōkūle‘a to Tahiti and back in 1976.¹⁵ In 1980, Nainoa Thompson successfully navigated Hōkūle‘a on the same route using celestial means of wayfinding.¹⁶ Hōkūle‘a’s successes sparked the revival of canoe building, celestial navigation, and long-distance voyaging across the Pacific islands.¹⁷ More importantly, indigenous wayfinding was a powerful trope for assertions of stepping away from colonialist knowledge regimes and asserting universal human rights of cultural sovereignty and self-determination.

From the deck of a double-hulled sailing vessel, the material traces of mobility of interest to historic preservation efforts extend beyond archaeological sites where artifacts have been unearthed, to consider sites of living activity—sites significant for ensuring the continued supply of raw materials, sites that accommodate the construction and maintenance of oceangoing vessels, and sites upon which knowledge is transmitted across generations.

In addition to documenting the record of mobility on the ocean, there is the more fundamental matter of appreciating the very ocean that is traversed. In this context, marine national monuments, administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), are raising awareness of the ocean as a focus of preservation. The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was first established in 2006 over 140,000 square miles. Declared by UNESCO a World Heritage Site in 2010, its citation states the following:

The area has deep cosmological and traditional significance for living Native Hawaiian culture, as an ancestral environment, as an embodiment of the Hawaiian concept of kinship between people and the natural world, and as the place where it is believed that life originates and to where the spirits return after death. . . . Much of the monument is made up of pelagic and deepwater habitats, with notable features such as seamounts and submerged banks, extensive coral reefs and lagoons.

In 2016, President Barack Obama extended the monument to the limit of the exclusive economic zone to encompass 583,000 square miles of ocean waters surrounding the islands and atolls of the northwestern

Hawaiian Islands.

In contrast to the rubric of mobility, the rubric of place encompasses the physical geography and ecology, and the systems of stewardship to support all aspects of daily living. Intimate knowledge of the environment, combined with keen awareness of the limitations of natural resources on and surrounding islands, was manifest in systems of stewardship that could ensure survival and sustainability. Shelter, attire, and sustenance were drawn from endemic natural resources, as well as the pigs, chickens, dogs, and plants transported initially by settlers and subsequently by residents and visitors; cattle, sheep, goats, and other animals came with Europeans and Americans (in many cases to great environmental destruction). Needs to support growing populations led to the development of systems of cultivation and irrigation. Needs to regulate the management, accumulation, and distribution of resources were closely aligned with the development of political systems. And ultimately, the mysteries of life itself gave rise to a panoply of gods, demigods, and other deities of varying divine status, as well as rich sets of cosmologies and mythologies. Linguistic analysis has demonstrated that the major gods Tane and Tangaroa, the superheroes Maui and Rata, and the cosmology of a Skyfather and Earthmother were shared across much of the Eastern Pacific.

The land-based rubric of place is more directly linkable with discourses of historic preservation. Where in the landscapes are the traces not only of settlement, but of interaction in circuits of transit, exchange, conquest, and tribute? One model to look to is the archaeological ruins of Nan Madol along the eastern shore of Pohnpei Island, in what is presently the Federated States of Micronesia. Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1985 when Pohnpei was still part of the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific, Nan Madol was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2016. The citation reads in part:

Nan Madol is a series of more than 100 islets off the south-east coast of Pohnpei that were constructed with walls of basalt and coral boulders. These islets harbour the remains of stone palaces, temples, tombs and residential domains built between 1200 and 1500 CE. These ruins represent the ceremonial centre of the



Native people of the South Sea Islands, c.1918-1920. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Saudeleur dynasty, a vibrant period in Pacific Island culture. The huge scale of the edifices, their technical sophistication and the concentration of megalithic structures bear testimony to complex social and religious practices of the island societies of the period.¹⁸

Nan Madol bears witness to social relations and political systems operating on an imperial scale centuries before the arrival of Euro-American imperial projects, when islanders were moving among and between places using indigenous technologies and epistemologies to order their worlds and their places within.

In conclusion, a historical overview of the Pacific Islands before the arrival of Europeans and Americans

must account for settlement and habitation as well as mobility and transit. While settlement and habitation will always be examined in relation to place, the concept of mobility will always bring with it possibilities of encounter and exchange with others. Pacific Islanders enact relationships of indigeneity to island homelands, and these relationships are always going to render them distinct from Asians who have established multi-generational communities—over multiple generations—in the United States. But Pacific Islander histories of mobility also offer possibilities of interaction with Americans of Asian ancestry across centuries of circulation and transit. We would do well to be open to witnessing such moments, places, and movements of Pacific Islander experience.

Endnotes

- 1 For critical discussion on “Pacific Rim” constructions, see the essays in Arif Dirlik, ed., *What Is In a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (Taipei: Westview Press, 1993).
- 2 See, for example, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, “Asian American Studies and the ‘Pacific Question,’” in *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass*, edited by Kent A. Ono (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 123-144.
- 3 See Damon I. Salesa, “The Pacific in Indigenous Time.” In David Armitage and Alison Bashford, eds, *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 31-52.
- 4 This is the prevailing perspective developed particularly among anthropologists, who viewed much of their early 20th-century fieldwork as salvage ethnography. Archaeological scholarship buttressed perspectives of cultural loss after European arrival by pointing out the material differences between then-contemporary islanders and the evidence of lifeways being dug up. Because the technology of literacy in the Pacific is largely due to the efforts of Christian missionaries whose agenda was directed at preaching the word of God in the Bible, anthropologists and historians alike privileged the written documents of voyagers and government administrators over orally-transmitted systems of knowledge, and even, in places such as Hawai‘i and New Zealand, where indigenous-language presses flourished by the late 19th century.
- 5 J. W. Davidson, “The Problem of Pacific History,” *Journal of Pacific History* 1 (1966), 5-21.
- 6 For a succinct overview, see Vincent E. Neall and Steven A. Trewick. “The age and origin of the Pacific Islands: a geological overview.” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 363 (2008), 3293-3308.
- 7 Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d’Urville, “Sur les îles du Grand Océan,” *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 17 (Paris: Société de Géographie, 1832). Translated by Isabel Ollivier, Antoine de Biran, and Geoffrey Clark, “On the Islands of the Great Ocean,” *Journal of Pacific History* 38 (2003), 163-174.
- 8 For an overview, see the essays in *Vaka Moana / Voyages of the Ancestors: The Discovery and Settlement of the Pacific*, edited by K. R. Howe (Auckland: David Bateman, 2006).
- 9 For a synthesis of archaeological scholarship on which theories of settlement are based, see Patrick Vinton Kirch, *On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands Before European Contact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- 10 Scholarship on European presence in the Pacific divides into two foci. On Dutch and Portuguese activity in the western Pacific as well as Spanish activity that links the western Pacific and South America, see Matt Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On Island-focused histories, see Howe, Campbell, *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, edited by Donald Denoon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

11 “Pacific Community,” Wikipedia (acc. September 10, 2016).

12 See Epeli Hau‘ofa. “Our Sea of Islands” in *The Contemporary Pacific* 6/1 (1994), 148-61. Reprinted in Epeli Hau‘ofa, *We Are the Ocean* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008), 27-40.

13 Ben Finney and Sam Low, “Navigation,” in *Vaka Moana: Voyages of the Ancestors*, edited by K. R. Howe (Auckland: David Bateman, 2006), 155.

14 These speculations were fueled further by the 1947 drifting of the balsa raft named “Kon-Tiki” from Peru to Rarōia in the Tuamotu islands by the Norwegian ethnographer and adventurer Thor Heyerdahl, documented in his best-selling book *The Kon-Tiki Expedition: By Raft Across the South Seas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950).

15 Ben R. Finney, *Hōkūle‘a: The Way to Tahiti* (NY: Dodd, Mead, 1979).

16 The process by which Hawaiian navigator Nainoa Thompson learned from master Satawalese navigator Mau Pialug is related in Sam Low, *Hawaiiki Rising: Hokule‘a, Nainoa Thompson, and the Hawaiian Renaissance* (Honolulu: Islands Heritage, 2013).

17 Ben R. Finney, *Voyage of Rediscovery: A Culture Odyssey Through Polynesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and *Sailing in the Wake of the Ancestors: Reviving Polynesian Voyaging* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 2003).

18 “Nan Model: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia (1503)” at UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, accessed on Dec. 12, 2016, at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1503>.

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TABLE A

Major European & American Scientific Expeditions in the Mapping of the Pacific Islands

COMMANDER	DATES	NATIONAL FLAG	PACIFIC LANDFALLS
Antonio de Abreau & Francisco Serrao	1512	Portugal	Moluccas Islands
Ferdinand Magellan	1519-1522	Portugal	Guam
Toribio Alonso de Salazar & Diego de Saavedra	1525-26	Portugal	Caroline Islands
Alvaro de Saavedra	1528	Spain	Ulithi Islands
Alvaro de Mendana	1568	Spain	Solomon Islands, Tuvalu
Alvaro de Mendana	1595	Spain	Marquesas Islands
Pedro Fernandes de Queiros	1606	Spain	Vanuatu
Willem Schouten & Jacob Le Maire	1616	Dutch	Tonga
Abel Tasman	1643-1644	Dutch	Tasmania, New Zealand, Australia, New Guinea, Fiji
Samuel Wallis & John Byron	1764-1766	British	Tuamotu archipelago, Tokelau
Samuel Wallis	1766-1768	British	Tahiti
Louis Antoine de Bougainville	1766-1769	French	Samoa, Tahiti
James Cook	1768-1771	British	Tuamotu & Society Islands, circumnavigation of New Zealand, New Holland
James Cook	1772-1775	British	Easter Island, Marquesas Islands, Tahiti & Society Islands, Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga Islands, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Norfolk Island, Palmerston Island
James Cook	1776-1780	British	Tasmania, New Zealand, Mangaia, Palmerston Island, Tonga Islands, Tahiti, Hawaiian Islands
Laperouse	1785-1788	French	Hawaiian Islands, Samoa Islands, Tonga Islands, Australia
D'Entrecasteaux	1791-1793	French	Australia, Solomon Islands
William Bligh	1787-1789	British	Tahiti
William Bligh	1791-1793	British	Tahiti
George Vancouver	1791-1795	British	Australia, Hawaiian Islands
James Wilson, missionary ship Duff	1797	British	Gambier Islands
Adam Johann von Krusenstern	1803-1806	Russia	Marquesas Islands, Hawaiian Islands
Otto von Kotzebue	1815-1818	Russia	Society Islands, Samoa Islands, Hawaiian Islands, Marshall Islands
Louis Claude de Saulces Freycinet	1817-1820	French	Western Australia, Timor, Moluccas, Samoa Islands, Hawaiian Islands
Louis Isidore Duperry	1822-1825	French	

Table A Continued

COMMANDER	DATES	NATIONAL FLAG	PACIFIC LANDFALLS
Otto von Ktozebue	1823-1826	Russia	Society Islands, Samoa Islands, Hawaiian Islands, Mariana Islands, New Caledonia
George Anson Byron	1824-1825	Britain	Hawaiian Islands
Jules Dumont-D'Urville	1826-1829	French	Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Loyalty Islands
Charles Wilkes	1838-1842	American	Tuamotu Islands, Samoa Islands, Australia, Fiji, Hawaiian Islands

TABLE B

2015: Contemporary Political Entities

NAME	STATUS	NOTES
Australia	Independent nation; member of Commonwealth of Nations	1788 – British colony of New South Wales established 1901 – Federation of colonies into Commonwealth of Australia as a dominion of the British Empire 1942/1939 – 1931 Statute of Westminster formally ended constitutional links between Australia and United Kingdom 1951 – Australia establishes military alliance with United States under ANZUS Treaty
New Zealand	Independent; member of Commonwealth of Nations	1840 – Treaty of Waitangi empowers British colonization 1907 – New Zealand proclaimed a self-governing dominion of the British Empire 1947 – New Zealand adopts Statute of Westminster formally ending constitutional links
Hawai'i	State of the United States of America	1795 – Unification of major islands into Kingdom of Hawaii 1840 – First constitution ratified 1893 – Overthrow of independent kingdom 1894 – Republic of Hawaii declared 1898 – Annexation to United States as incorporated and organized territory 1959 – Statehood granted
Guam	Unincorporated territory of the United States of America	1565 – Spain claims Guam and Northern Marianas 1898 – After Spanish-American War, Spain cedes Guam to United States
Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands	U.S. Territory with Commonwealth status	1565 – Spain claims Northern Marianas islands 1899 – Northern Marianas Islands sold to Germany 1919 – Northern Marianas included in South Pacific Mandate granted by League of Nations to Japan 1947 – League of Nations revokes South Pacific Mandate and establishes Trust Territory of the Pacific, to be administered by United States 1986 – Trust Territory terminated; Northern Marianas negotiates new status as commonwealth in political union with United States
Federated States of Micronesia	Independent; in free association with United States	1528 – Spain claims Uliti islands 1885 – Spain declares sovereignty over Caroline Islands 1899 – Caroline Islands sold by Spain to German Empire 1914 – Japan invasion and occupation 1920 – Caroline Islands included in South Pacific Mandate granted by League of Nations to Japan 1947 – League of Nations revokes South Pacific Mandate and establishes Trust Territory of the Pacific, to be administered by United States 1986 – Trust Territory terminated;

NAME	STATUS	NOTES
Republic of Belau (formerly Palau)	Independent; in free association with United States	1574 – Incorporated into Spanish East Indies 1899 – Northern Marianas Islands sold to Germany 1920 – Palau included in South Pacific Mandate granted by League of Nations to Japan 1944 – US took control after Battle of Peleliu 1947 – League of Nations revokes South Pacific Mandate and establishes Trust Territory of the Pacific, to be administered by United States 1981 – Republic of Palau established 1994 – Trusteeship terminated; full sovereignty achieved under Compact of Free Association with U.S.
Republic of the Marshall Islands	Independent; in free association with United States	1528 – Incorporated into Spanish East Indies 1884 – Sold by Spain to German Empire 1920 – Marshall Islands included in South Pacific Mandate granted by League of Nations to Japan 1943-1944 – US took control as part of Gilbert and Marshall Islands campaign in World War II 1947 – Marshall Islands included in Trust Territory of the Pacific, established by League of Nations to be administered by United States 1986 – Trust Territory terminated; full sovereignty achieved under Compact of Free Association with U.S.
Samoa	Independent	1899 – Tripartite Convention formally partitioned Samoan archipelago; western islands became a German colony, and the eastern islands became a U.S. territory 1920 – League of Nations conferred a Class C Mandate over the former German Colony of Samoa to the Dominion of New Zealand, and named “Western Samoa Trust Territory” 1962 – Independence gained as Western Samoa 1997 – Name changed to Independent State of Samoa
U.S. Territory of American Samoa	Unincorporated territory of the U.S.	1899 – Tripartite Convention formally partitioned Samoan archipelago; western islands became a German colony, and the eastern islands became a U.S. territory
Cook Islands	Independent; in free association with New Zealand	1888 – British Protectorate established 1901 – Cook Islands included in Colony of New Zealand 1965 – Independence granted by New Zealand
Tonga	Kingdom	1900-1970 – Kingdom entered into a protected state under a Treaty of Friendship with Britain 1970 – Tonga joined the Commonwealth of Nations 1999 – Tonga became a member of the United Nations
Republic of Fiji	Independent	1874 – Cession to Britain 1970 – Independence granted from Britain
Kiribati	Independent nation; Commonwealth of Nations	1892 – British protectorate declared over Gilbert & Ellice Islands 1916 – Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony 1979 – Independence from Britain
Tuvalu		1892 – British protectorate declared over Gilbert & Ellice Islands 1916 – Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony 1974 – Independence
Tokelau	Territory of New Zealand	1877 – British protectorate declared 1916 – Annexed into Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony 1926 – Removed from Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony and placed under jurisdiction of New Zealand 1949 – Sovereignty transferred from United Kingdom to New Zealand
Niue	Independent; in free association with New Zealand	1901 – Niue included in Colony of New Zealand 1974 – Independence gained

NAME	STATUS	NOTES
Solomon Islands		1893 – British protectorate declared 1978 – Independence gained
New Caledonia		1854 – French 1946 – French territory 1999 – Special collectivity status extended
Republic of Vanuatu		1906 – British-French Condominium established to administer islands jointly 1980 – Independence gained
French Polynesia/ Polynesie française	French overseas collectivity	1842 – French protectorate declared over Society & Marquesas Islands 1880 – Status changed from protectorate to colony; France claimed Tuamotu archipelago 1889 – Austral Islands claimed 1946 – Status changed to overseas territory 2003 – Status changed to overseas collectivity