

Culture



Ben FINNEY et al, *Voyage of Rediscovery: A Cultural Odyssey Through Polynesia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. xviii + 401 pages

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delineated as a process evolving over time in response to specific historical, cultural and biological influences. In conclusion, the authors suggest basic prerequisites for future improvements in aboriginal health including: 1) a public health perspective devoid of moralizing and/or racist undertones; 2) a greater sensitivity to the diversity among aboriginal cultures; 3) increasing control over health care services by aboriginal communities in order to ensure that needs are met in the most sustainable, and environmentally and culturally appropriate manner possible; 4) increased opportunities for aboriginal people to train and practice in all health professions; and 5) the siting of all these changes in the context of widespread improvements in socio-economic circumstances of aboriginal people.

Ben FINNEY *et al*, *Voyage of Rediscovery: A Cultural Odyssey Through Polynesia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. xviii + 401 pages.

by Linda M. Darby*

* This reviewer is a Canadian who sailed from British Columbia to French Polynesia, and from there had the singular adventure to follow the *Hokule'a* from Tahiti to the *marae* (ceremonial ground) of Taputapuatea on Ra'iatea Island. The congregation of dancers and chanters, with sailors and navigators from Tahiti, the Cook Islands and Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Hawaii made this meeting a rare and impressive cultural event. Upon sailing back to Hawaii, she joined the crew of an escort vessel for the Hawaiian canoes in the flotilla, and spent from February to May of 1995 as a radio operator on the escort vessel. Altogether eight double-hulled canoes took part in the voyage to Tahiti and the Marquesas. She observed the practice and teaching of indigenous navigation and experienced the rare thrill of making landfall using these non-instrumental methods.

Imagine a journey in a canoe through seven archipelagos, across 12,000 miles of the South Pacific, using only traditional, ancient means of navigation. The 62-foot double-hulled *Hokule'a* sailed the routes celebrated in the ancient legends of Polynesia, involving in its cultural odyssey many Hawaiian and Polynesian people.

Author Ben Finney and eleven contributors involve readers in this chronicle of the scientifically and culturally significant journey. The book

opens with a re-examination of the questions raised over decades by anthropologists and historians about the great Polynesian migrations. The canoe *Hokule'a* was built from sketches and drawings that survived from the Captain Cook era in the South Seas and then tested by sailing the very same routes that, according to the legends of the Polynesian people, their ancestors once sailed. This historical framework is established in the first chapter. The next two chapters define the research methods for learning how the early voyaging canoes were sailed and were navigated solely by reading the stars, winds, swells and currents.

Hokule'a was built in the early 1970s for scientific investigation and as an archeological experiment, and sailed on her maiden voyage in 1976. The original objective of the project was the rediscovery of ancient boat building and navigation techniques. However, with the resurgence of interest among native peoples in rediscovering their heritage, the vessel found a second purpose, as a vehicle for cultural revitalization among Hawaiian and other Polynesian peoples. The success of the project and of re-learning the old ways of navigating without instruments are revealed through the achievements and contributions of Hawaiian navigator Nainoa Thompson, a primary contributor to the book.

The actual voyage from Hawaii in a circuit of central Pacific archipelagos began on July 10, 1985 and ended on May 23, 1987. It is summarized in Chapter Four. Current thinking regarding Polynesian dispersal throughout the Pacific basin, as well as a few words about post-settlement history, provide a spatial and temporal framework for analyzing specific legs of the trip, and these discussions are contained in following chapters.

An analysis of the passage from Samoa to Tahiti demonstrates how a double-hulled canoe can be sailed against the Trade Winds that blow from central East Polynesia to West Polynesia. The next leg, from Tahiti to Aotearoa, shows how the early voyagers could have moved outward from the tropical heart of East Polynesia to reach this Polynesian outpost in the temperate zone. The ability of these navigators to duplicate this feat by accomplishing several passages amongst already-settled archipelagos is documented in Chapter Seven. The first and last legs of the voyage emphasize the problems inherent in maintaining two-way communications between widely-separated archipelagos.

The author and his collaborators provide an outline of Polynesian history prior to the arrival of Captain Cook and subsequent Europeans. Finney suggests the "pre-historic" voyages of the ancient Polynesians should be examined through language comparisons, studies of characteristic artifacts, and analyses of Hawaiian oral traditions.

The Polynesians of today, Finney says, have become a "Family of the Canoe" through the synergy of experimental voyaging and cultural revival, as exemplified by the voyage of *Hokule'a*. He and his co-authors reflect the philosophy of the Polynesian Voyaging Society, founded in the late 1960s, whose objective was to conduct experimental research into Polynesian voyaging and disseminate the results of that research. The reconstruction of a voyaging canoe, testing her over the legendary Hawaii-Tahiti route, and applying the results of this research to the debate over Polynesian migration, helped achieve the goals of the Society and the dream of its founders.

Finney argues that those who oppose the theory of systematic and deliberate Polynesian migration eastward into the Pacific focus primarily on the problem of sailing against the prevailing Trade Winds. Experiments such as the voyage of *Hokule'a* provide data on the performance of these canoes; these data, added to route charts and landfall records, together with material compiled with knowledgeable islanders descended from the early navigators, give evidence to support the feasibility of the first voyages. This research lends credence to the old tales contained in oral tradition of epic voyages and discoveries.

As mentioned earlier, *Voyage of Rediscovery* is a collaborative project that celebrates an ancient technology through the contributions of twelve key people who lived the adventure. Three appendices to the book list some of the other persons involved: the crew members for each leg of the voyage, officers, board members and volunteers of the Polynesian Voyaging Society, and acknowledges to the contributions made by the traditional and elected tribal and community leaders, government officials and other supporters.

Above all, the book furnishes a far broader picture of Polynesian voyaging and navigation than anything previously published. Three round trips have now been made between Hawaii and Tahiti reproducing the pattern of multiple, intentional voyages described in the legends and adding to the weight of evidence that Polynesians of old indeed had the skills and means for deliberate voyages.

If there is any fault it is the minor one of limited discussion on the creative roles played in *the entire project* by the particular voyaging societies in Hawaii, New Zealand, Cook Islands and Tahiti and by the mass media that stimulated response among islanders to the canoe's arrivals.

The book is handsomely bound and covered and is delightfully illustrated with Hawaiian woodcuts along with 84 charts, sketches and maps. It re-tells the history of Polynesian exploration and migration for a wider audience than previous writings have done; more than just a compilation of research on prehistory, it presents that research in the wider framework of Polynesian cultural group revival.