Origins Of The Pacific Essay, Research Paper

The Pacific is a place of mystery and savagery, and yet is know to many as paradise. The Pacific is ten thousand miles wide and holds twenty-three percentage of the world’s languages. What makes the Pacific so intriguing? The people and their culture have mystified so many people, and yet their history was never written down, instead it was orally pasted down from generation to generation. Thoughts on the natives’ origin, migration, and survival have puzzled other nations due to their lacking of western technology, for example the compass. So the question is: Where did they come from? and How did they get there? In this essay, we will examine these questions and try to seek out the answers.

In the search for these answers we mush first take a guess on how they arrived on these islands. Jacob Roggeveen thought that the Spaniards might have brought them to the islands, but they lacked any Spanish influence. Then he thought perhaps the “islanders might be direct descendants of Adam and Eve, who had bred there naturally from generation to generation, but finally decided that the ability of human understanding is powerless to comprehend how these people ever reached the island.

Another view was by Andrew Sharp, his hypothesis states “the islands of Polynesia had been settled accidentally by hapless canoe voyages driven randomly across the sea by stormy westerly winds. Wherever one of these lost canoes, or others containing people forced to flee their home islands because of war, famine or overpopulation, were randomly pushed by wind current onto the shore of an uninhabited island, a new Polynesian colony would result.” These guesses were good yet they lacked strong evidence. So the search continues and at the same time more questions arise to prove or disprove the hypothesizes. Questions pertaining to migration, and if they did migrated, from where did they travel and, how did they find the islands?

If one migrates, they need to know which way to go, and without the western technology, many thought navigating through the Pacific was impossible. In 1973, the Polynesian Voyaging Society was formed to raise money for a voyage from Hawai’i

to Tahiti, in which a Hokule’a would be reconstructed in it’s original form. The Hokule’a was rebuilt using ancient techniques and artifacts. The ship was navigated without western technology. As their navigation system, a man named Mau Pialug, “was to use the rising points of the stars, supplemented by observation of the sun, moon, and the ocean swells, as a natural compass to guild the canoe on it’s curving course. To

complete such a crossing in a reconstructed voyage canoe would therefore challenge a key tenet of Sharp’s theory.” The voyage was a success.

The voyage had two goals in mind: “first, to test Polynesian sailing technology and navigational methods over prehistoric migrations and voyaging routes in order to gain a better understanding of the extent in which intentional voyaging played a role in the colonization of Polynesia and subsequent inter-island relationships” and the second was to “gain first ahs knowledge and appreciation of the oceanic technology and achievements of their ancestors”.

The successful voyage wasn’t as simple as it might have sound. The voyage had many difficulties that it had to over come. One setback was trying to find someone that can still navigate with the stars. That was their only way of proving Sharp’s theory of accidental, to be wrong. Using the stars as navigation was not widely practices anymore. Yet to their fate, they found “ a traditional Micronesian navigator from the Carolinian atoll of Satawal, one of the few Polynesian islands where the traditional long distance navigation is still practiced”.

Another problem they had, was the trade winds. One of the first explorers of the Pacific, Captain Cook proposed: “ these islanders had been able to employ their primitive canoes and rudimentary ways of navigating to sail to the Marquesas from a continent lying not far to the south, or from a chain of closely-spaced islands located there, which stretched all the way to Asia and had provided the stepping-stones that enabled these primitive seafarers to expand so far into the Pacific”. “Cook saw only one obstacle to accepting the linguistic evidence…the route would have taken canoes eastward in the face of trade winds that blow from east-southeast. He evidently had doubts about the ability of the islanders’ canoes to sail directly into the trade winds. A Tahitian explained, during the Months of November, December and January Westerly Winds with rain prevail and as the inhabitants of the Islands know very well how to make proper use of the winds there will no difficulty arise in Trading or sailing from Island to Island even though they lay in an East and West direction”.

Then there was another argument made by Thor Heyerdahl, which made the Hokule’a voyage seem pointless. He purposed that the Polynesians cam from the west, South America, due to the trade winds and the similarity of the linguistics and culture between the American Indians and the Polynesians. Heyerdahl stated that “ permanent trade winds and forceful companion currents of the enormous Southern Hemisphere would have prevented canoe voyages from settling Polynesia directly from the west, while promoting colonization from the Americas by voyages pushed westward by wind and current”. But this theory soon died out, due to the “ Relationships evident in language and culture traits that pointed to a Polynesian derivation from the west, were not matched by island-to island archaeological excavations demonstrating that the ancestors of the Polynesians had in fact migrated eastward into the mid-Pacific”.

So what have we gathered? Polynesians came from the west, and they had canoes with well-equipped navigational technology to disprove their landings in the Pacific to be a mistake. But what made them leave their homes in search for another; researches have concluded their departure was perhaps due to over-population, war, natural resources or perhaps Manna. From one of the poems sited from Lali: A Pacific Anthology, “My Polynesian fathers who escaped the sun’s wars, seeking these islands by prophetic stars”, describes one of the reasons of departure with the help of celestial navigation.

With all this information, a thought comes to mind: Why would these islander want to be confined in to these little tiny islands? We, as outsiders, see the Pacific as an area of many little tiny islands. We measure the area by land surface. While the islanders have a different perspective of the Pacific. “ Their universe comprises of not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earthshaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named the stars and the constellations that people could count on to guide their ways across the seas.”

Yet one more question boggles the mind: How did they survive on these islands? For consumption, there were coconuts, breadfruit, and pigs amongst other things. They built homes and canoes out of trees and leaves. The islanders also had gods, which they gave offerings, and sacrifices. They were aristocratic people, with marriages only within your own rank.

All the research that were done by these explorer and scholars have help the Pacific define their origin, which has allowed the Island people to have a sense of belonging, and pride for what their ancestor have achieved. You can see how joyful the Polynesians were when the Hokule’a landed in Tahiti: “they even adopted a double canoe motif inspired by Hokule’a as their symbol of nationhood, placing it in the center of their new flag and in Hawai’i the voyage is credited with helping to spark a cultural renaissance”.

In conclusion, we come to realize that Polynesian celestial navigation and migrations from the west are the key points of Pacific history. Without the research and realizations of these facts, questions of origin and the sense of belonging would still linger.

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