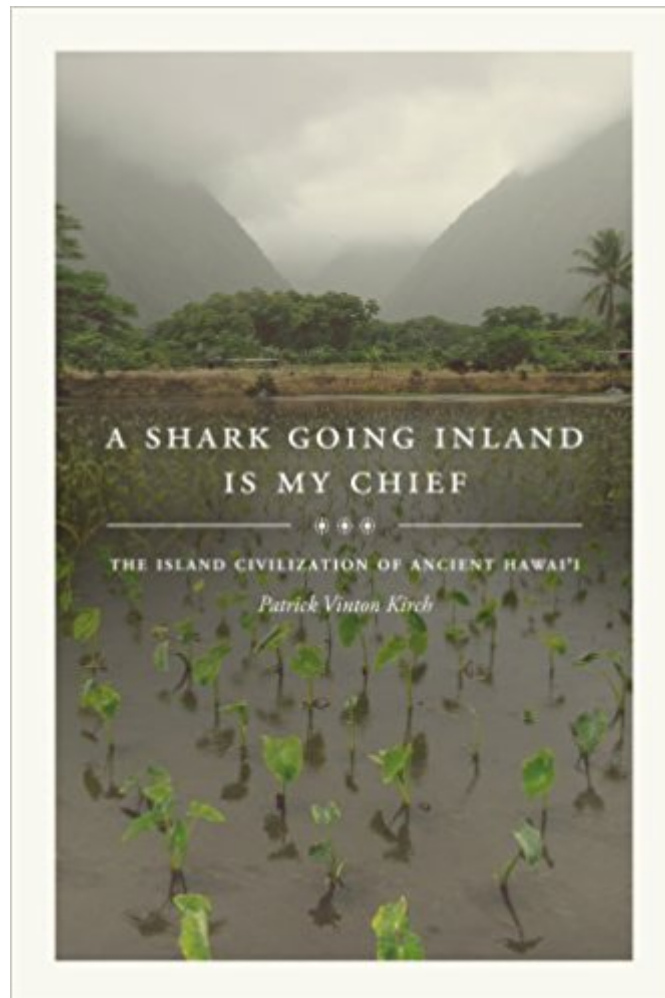


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A Shark Going Inland Is My Chief: The Island Civilization Of Ancient Hawai'i



Synopsis

Tracing the origins of the Hawaiians and other Polynesians back to the shores of the South China Sea, archaeologist Patrick Vinton Kirch follows their voyages of discovery across the Pacific in this fascinating history of Hawaiian culture from about one thousand years ago. Combining more than four decades of his own research with Native Hawaiian oral traditions and the evidence of archaeology, Kirch puts a human face on the gradual rise to power of the Hawaiian god-kings, who by the late eighteenth century were locked in a series of wars for ultimate control of the entire archipelago. This lively, accessible chronicle works back from Captain James Cook's encounter with the pristine kingdom in 1778, when the British explorers encountered an island civilization governed by rulers who could not be gazed upon by common people. Interweaving anecdotes from his own widespread travel and extensive archaeological investigations into the broader historical narrative, Kirch shows how the early Polynesian settlers of Hawai'i adapted to this new island landscape and created highly productive agricultural systems.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A tale told for everyone. . . . Engaging and accessible. . . . It is a fascinating narrative, impossible to put down." (R. Scaglione Choice 2013-04-19) "The writing, like the book's title, is engaging; it inspires reflection." (Emalani Case Journal of Pacific History 2013-12-03)

Patrick Kirch's new book takes the reader to many distant islands and pivotal moments of discovery that have helped shape our understanding of the human past. He recognizes the

important social experiments that Oceanic societies created through their epic voyages to explore and settle the most distant portions of the planet." –Peter R. Mills, Professor of Anthropology, University of Hawai'i at Hilo"A Shark Going Inland is My Chief combines captivating history with Kirch's own personal story. The result is an extremely powerful piece of scholarship and a tremendous read." –David Igler, Associate Professor of History, University of California, Irvine

This volume is incredibly well-researched and written by a man who has spent his entire life in researching the past of the Hawaiian people. It is well-written as a story and drew me in immediately. It covers from before the time of the initial Polynesians with the Lapita people until shortly after Europeans found Hawaii. The only difficulty I had was with the Hawaiian/Polynesian place and person names. I had to make myself say them out loud so that the differences in similar names were more pronounced and I could keep them straight. If you'd like to know more of the pre-European past of Hawaii including the people, how they lived and made use of the plants, animals, and geography, I cannot imagine a better single volume.

With an ever-decreasing attention span, I've got bookshelves full of good intentions, and a few of my bookmarks are currently languishing a third of the way into books full of things I thought/still think would be great to learn. The fact that this book did not end up with that fate is a testament to the fact that, while it is certainly factually comprehensive, it is also written with a narrative that kept my attention from straying. Who would've thought that asides detailing the evolution and progress of South Pacific archaeology would improve a book's narrative? They do, in large part because the author is able to provide many first-person anecdotes of that progress. Combine that with what the author gleaned from the Hawaiian oral tradition as transcribed in the early/mid 19th century (before that history was significantly altered/lost through contact with Europeans and our diseases) and it's really a great book. I'm not at all a scholar of Polynesia or an archaeologist. My knowledge is limited. This book provided exactly the pre-Cook cultural background I was having a difficult time finding, helping to put the comparatively common histories of post-Cook Hawaii into context. For the good of the common man, one can only hope it gets another publishing run...

The author brilliantly weaves together the story of Polynesian settlement, with the story of the development on archeology and Pacific archeology in particular and his own career in Hawaiian and Pacific archeology. He tells the story of how the knowledge and focus of inquiry changed as different tools and technologies became available to archeologists as well as how the prevailing

prejudices of the times directed and misdirected the search. What he gives us is an excellent history of the settlement of the Hawaiian islands beginning with the emigration of malay-polynesian ancestors out of Taiwan and South China. He incorporates the best scientific evidence with the traditional memorized oral histories of Hawaii. It is a masterpiece. A few qualms. He does not mention the DNA evidence that confirms the Taiwan origin of the people who would ultimately become Hawaiian. It may not be archeology, but he is otherwise so universal in his approach to the tools for finding history that it seems an odd omission. He refers to "Aikane" as "favorites" without mentioning the accepted homosexual nature of such relations (and the relevance it would have had to the single reference) that was common and accepted in pre-contact Hawaii. These are small quibbles with an excellent book.

I have to admit that this book was sitting on my shelf for years before I finally took it down to read it. Wow! I can't remember when any book so thoroughly exceeded my expectations. Kirch ably covers the period from the prehistoric origins of the Polynesian people until European contact. He integrates oral history, archeology, economics, ecology, sociology, and personal experience into one compelling narrative. Nearly every detail that I thought I knew was present, with much, much more that was new to me. More importantly, he zooms back out to the big picture view to help us see what it all means. I am going to start recommending this to my friends and giving copies away as presents.

I've read my share of Hawaii history books and this was by far one of the most enjoyable...nothing against the others, you just have to be a very clear and straightforward writer to easily document the rich and complex history of a people with really long and complicated names. This was also the first that looks back far beyond initial settlement of the islands. I found the stories of the Lapita people spreading across the Pacific to be fascinating! Also very thought-provoking to hear about how the initial Polynesian settlers also impacted the ecology of the Hawaiian Islands. Thanks, Pat, for putting so much of your life into unlocking these stories!!

excellent research & history of Island peoples. best research book on subject I've ever read. Also an entertaining read.

Unusual in that this well researched and documented historical work becomes as readable as a fast-to-read novel. A must read for anyone who loves Hawaii and the greater South Pacific

archipelago and its history.

If you are interested in Hawaii, then BUY THIS BOOK! It's the whole story. Plus it's an enjoyable read, not at all nerdy or academic. I'm nominating this book for big prizes, even though the votes of mere citizens don't carry much weight. This book is a classic.

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