

Foreword

The indigenous societies of Eastern Polynesia have long held a central place in anthropological and archaeological theory on the political transformation of fragmented and antagonistic chiefdoms into unified, centralised states. Eastern Polynesia is generally understood to include the islands encompassed by contemporary French Polynesia, Cook Islands, Hawai'i, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Rapanui. These small, relatively discrete islands or archipelagos are populated by peoples of common ancestry and have been viewed as ideal social laboratories for fieldwork to study social and political evolution in a comparative perspective. Prominent Pacific scholars in these disciplines used their Eastern Polynesian research to make influential interventions into wider theoretical debates within their fields — most notably in the past generation, Marshall Sahlins on culture contact and adaptation in the 1980s and 1990s, and transitions from simple to complex social and political organisation from the 1950s onwards; Douglas Oliver on constructions of cultural realities from the 1950s until the 1980s; and Patrick Kirch on ecological circumvention as a factor in the evolution of chiefly power from the early 1980s onwards. Underlying these debates have been the longer term, fundamental issues about the relative influence of ecological and cultural factors in human activities, and the interactions between these two sets of variables. To what extent do our environmental habitats channel our thinking and actions, and to what extent are our uses of potential natural resources influenced by our cultural views of ourselves as members of human communities with broadly shared and learned values and perceptions of our physical world?

Another important body of scholarship on Eastern Polynesian societies, which emerged parallel to these streams from the 1980s, has received less recognition globally, but may influence the future of the region in far more telling ways. In this era, over a century of Aotearoa

New Zealand Maori protest at land alienation and breaches of faith by the Crown finally led to the formation of the Waitangi Tribunal to investigate injustices against Maori to assist the Crown's attempts to address grievances. A great deal of research on indigenous histories and ways of viewing land, sea and social relations was conducted to make the case for compensation and restitution before the work of the tribunal, combined with a renaissance in Maori assertions of cultural identity, and this produced a profound cultural and academic revolution. In Hawai'i, another body of long-stifled but long-remembered indigenous knowledge and practice gained increasing official recognition in state education institutions in this period, with a parallel and interacting cultural renaissance to that of Maori. Hawai'ian representation on state decision-making bodies on resource allocation and use still remains far from satisfactory. Cook Islanders are the only Eastern Polynesians with the dominant say in use of their lands, seas and economy, while indigenous French Polynesians still struggle to have a voice in political, economic and environmental decision-making bodies; although momentum for meaningful change and just representation is gathering. Across Eastern Polynesia, indigenous scholars and community leaders are emphasising that political power was always more consensus based than most academics claim, and that the exercise of this community-based, consensual power required a strong basis of environmental guardianship.

This message of the interrelationship between environmental guardianship and consent-based political power across Eastern Polynesian indigenous societies pervades the chapters of this book in ways that are compelling, credible and intellectually revolutionary. Indeed, this collection may well turn out to be one of the most important works on Eastern Polynesia to emerge in a generation in that it addresses four major divisions and shortcomings in scholarship on the region. First, all contributors have spent a great deal of time working with specific indigenous communities and the result is a collection of rich and never-before-published studies of local environmental management techniques in which politics and ecological management merge. This is particularly true for the material relating to the Marquesas, Tuamotu, and Austral islands. Second, this material reveals the continuous and ongoing importance of local *rahui* as central components of locally based institutions for resource management and social relations throughout the colonial era down to

the present day, and their central importance in cultural revivals and reassertions of community *mana*. In so doing, this volume questions many of the ideas about the efficacy of centralised institutions at the core of much political centralisation theory on pre-European state formation and community and state discourse in contemporary Pacific nations. Third, this is a reassertion of the importance of comparative studies in that the sum is greater than the individual parts combined. The combination of common themes and specific solutions and configurations works well and the differences reveal much about the underlying assumptions and practices. Lastly, this collection represents a long-overdue and welcome combining of francophone and anglophone Pacific scholarship in an accessible format. Most Pacific scholars are aware of and influenced by top French scholars of the Pacific who write in English, such as Maurice Godelier and Serge Tcherkézoff. Here, readers gain English-language access to a host of French scholars working on francophone Pacific communities about which little has been written in English. The result is stimulating and vitally important.

Eastern Polynesians mastered environments that were initially less well endowed than those they sailed from, but yet flourished in the majority of cases. Locally controlled *rahui* have been at the heart of environmental management and consensus-based social relations for generations across Eastern Polynesia. The current revival and reassertion of *rahui* across the region have lessons for all of humanity in this era of rising environmental degradation and looming climate-induced displacement.

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