

*The Prehistoric Exploration and Colonisation of the Pacific.* By Geoffrey Irwin. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992. 221 pp. Australian price: \$49.95.

THE SHEER SIZE of the Pacific Ocean and the distribution of people through this vast region has been a subject of discussion since the times of the first European explorers. Accompanying this discussion are all the different theories and ideas that gained or lost support as new ideas were hypothesized and published. The net result was that a number of people wrote books expounding their theories as to how the Pacific was colonized in prehistory, and whether or not sufficient skill and technology had developed to allow voyages to occur that, in the later stages of colonization, may have covered many thousands of miles.

This book deals with so many inter-connecting aspects of Pacific exploration and colonization that in a review it is difficult to look at each area closely. However it is sufficient to say that the range of discussion is such that a reader finds that a voyage is taking place as one reads, a voyage that begins some 50,000 years ago in Island Southeast Asia and culminates in modern experimental voyages both by canoe and computer.

Ultimately the author claims that the settlement of the Pacific was not by some lucky chance discovery of habitable land, but was the result of the development of skills and techniques over a long period of time. These skills were then implemented in a cautious strategy of sailing into the prevailing winds. This provided a form of insurance by which the canoe could return home easily if land was not found. As time went by and the information collected during these early upwind voyages accumulated, navigational and geographical knowledge developed to the stage where other journeys that did not proceed into the wind could be undertaken with some degree of safety and certainty. Along with this movement through the Pacific, the author recognizes that voyages between islands brought about changes in the culture of the Pacific peoples.

The book benefits from the fact that a lot of discussion on this subject has preceded its publication (including earlier work by Irwin), and therefore many different ideas can be discussed and utilized in supporting or refuting contrasting views and opinions. This in turn provides the reader with a mass of information from all kinds of sources from pre-historians to sailors. It then remains for the individual to make his or her own conclusions as to the viability of certain theories and ideas. The reader is able to test ideas against computer simulations, and archaeological data, as the author does to test his own hypotheses on exploration and colonization of the Pacific. Irwin has also sailed in some of these areas both by canoe and yacht, so the practicalities of his hypotheses could also be tested.

With the recent voyage of *Te Aurere* to Rarotonga and the subsequent controversy that surrounded the voyage, many people might not be fully convinced of the sea faring and navigational abilities of the first Pacific explorers and settlers. It must be remembered that that canoe made it fairly well intact and was trying to meet a deadline based on organized events. Colonization and settlement had no such time pressures. This book sets out many reasons why the Pacific was able to be colonized and why the direction of colonization proceeded in the way it did.

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