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Speculations on Polynesian Origins

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Abstract: The author believes that the Polynesians are of the blood of Israel and that they journeyed from the American continent at the time Hagoth built his ships.

By HAROLD CHRISTENSEN



SUNSET, LAKE WAIKAREMOANA, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND
Photo: New Zealand Government Publicity Photo

THERE are over twenty-eight thousand Mormons among the Polynesians of the South Seas! This fact carries with it at least two significant questions: Why is the Church so particularly interested in Polynesia, and why are the Polynesians so much more receptive to the Gospel than other Islanders? Perhaps such questions can best be answered by inquiring into the origin of these peoples. If the conclusions of the following speculations on the subject be accepted, we shall have reached at least a partial explanation for the relationship between Mormonism and Polynesia.

In the Book of Mormon is related the story of Hagoth and his numerous sailing expeditions along the western shores of America (See Alma 63). He built at first a large ship and took a company of Nephites from the Land Bountiful into the Land Northward. Then some returned to induce more of their people to go north. More and larger ships were built and another company of Nephites set sail for the north country, this time never to be heard of again. It was known that they did not reach the other people in the Land Northward, and it was therefore supposed that they were lost in the sea.

Now if we should assume from this incident alone that the Polynesians are descendants of Hagoth and the Nephites of his time, we would be guilty of "faith without

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In this article the author has stated briefly but clearly several of the theories connected with the origin of the Islanders. Naturally, he has been influenced by his faith in the Book of Mormon and the Gospel, nevertheless, he presents the data and allows his reader to draw his own conclusions.

works." But if we back that assumption with the logic of feasibility, of native tradition, and of recent ethnological research, we shall have gone a long way in the process of proof and shall have

made the proposition worthy of earnest consideration.

Hagoth's ships sailed "forth into the west sea by the narrow neck which led into the land northward." In other words, the point of sailing must have been somewhere on the western shores of Central America. In that event, it is highly possible that the lost expedition was caught in an ocean current and carried by it from the mainland to the Hawaiian Islands. Oregon pine frequently found on the Hawaiian shores as driftwood is evidence that this strong Pacific current exists. Conclusive evidence is on file with the United States Geological Survey at Washington, where there is record of a note in a bottle being picked up on the coast of the Hawaiian Islands just six days after it was deposited off the coast of Southern California.

IT is feasible, then, to believe that some of Hagoth's ships may have drifted westward to the Hawaiian Islands, and that later expeditions left from there to the more southern Polynesian Island groups of Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, and New Zealand. It may be seen from what follows, that the reasonableness of such a suggestion is not

TOP: WINNERS OF 1933 HUI TOA.
BOTTOM: CHOIR OF THE 1932 MISSION
CONFERENCE (HUI TOA).



LATIONS ON POLYNESIAN ORIGIN

only apparent, but is highly probable.

The study of tradition is only one method of determining race origin—and it is a very inexact way if taken alone—but is a method that may reveal much interesting data to support a given theory. Let us see how the traditions of the Polynesians support the origin theory given above.

All of the Hawaiian traditions on origin point to the east and infer that their people came from the "land of the rising sun." This could only mean the Americas, for these two great western continents stretch almost from pole to pole. Other Hawaiian traditions say that some of their people sailed southward to other Islands. Maori legend supports this contention by claiming a voyage from "Hawaiki," a term which is very similar to "Hawaii." The pronunciation of these two words is nearly the same, and slight changes could be expected during long time separations. Legends of Samoa, Tonga, and Tahiti are similar in many ways. Curiously enough, all Polynesian traditions seem to support the theory of American origin.

An interesting example of this is found among the Maoris of New Zealand. An odd custom of addressing the dead is practiced here to a large extent. In it the speaker tells the departed to go back to where he came from, and in doing so he uses the following words, "I haere mai matou i tawhiti nui, i tawhiti roa, i tawhiti pamamoa, i te hono i wairua," which means, "Go back a long distance, another long distance, and another long distance, to the joining of the spirit." This tradition is interpreted by nearly eight thousand Mormon Maoris today in two different ways, but each interpretation ties up with the American continent and the Book of Mormon. The one explanation is that the first long distance is from New Zealand to Hawaii, the second long distance from Hawaii to America,

the third long distance from America to Jerusalem, and the joining of the spirit is the connection or affiliation with the Church at that place. The other explanation is that the first long distance is from New Zealand to Samoa (or Tahiti or Tonga), the second long distance from Samoa to Hawaii, the third long distance from Hawaii to America, and the joining of the spirits is the place of Hagoth's departure where the two great American continents are joined.

THERE is almost universal agreement on the general homogeneity of the Polynesians. This does not mean that their stock is absolutely pure, for there have undoubtedly been a few contacts and mixtures with other peoples, but it does mean that the Polynesians are related to each other in a greater degree than they are related to other races or groups. Language similarities are very common; a good example of this is "Aloha" from Hawaii, "Talofa" from Samoa, and "Aroha" from New Zealand, all terms meaning the same thing. Some words are identical with several of the Islands. It is common for a Maori to be able partially to understand a speaker from one of the other Polynesian groups, and visa versa.

Culture-trait similarities are so numerous among these peoples that it will be unnecessary here to discuss them all. To say that these similarities are conclusive enough to well establish the inter-relationship of the various Polynesian groups is sufficient.

A striking proof of the blood relationship between the Maoris and the Hawaiians was found in 1920 when a party of fourteen New Zealand natives went to the Hawaiian temple to do work for their dead. Through a peculiar custom of singing genealogies in their meetings, the Maoris have had wonderful success in preserving a knowledge of their ancestors and their lines of descent. Wiramau



TOP: MAORI MEETINGHOUSE.

SECOND: 1930 HUI TOA, HAWKS BAY, NEW ZEALAND

THIRD: THE MAORI HONGI (NOSE PRESSING).

BOTTOM: TYPICAL MAORI CARVING.



Duncan, one of those to go to the Laie temple in 1920, succeeded in tracing his genealogy back for over one hundred generations. In going over some of the Hawaiian genealogies and comparing them with his own, he discovered that the name "Hema" appeared in both lines back sixty-five generations. This was a startling discovery, and in continuing the comparisons he found that one of the parents of Hema was "Whaetiri" in Maori and "Aekiri" in Hawaiian, the word being the same one even though it had undergone slight changes due to the separation of the tribes. Then he found that these two genealogies coincided from there on back as far as they were compiled. These and other

discoveries at that time and later have given convincing evidence that the Maoris came from the Hawaiian Islands. The first discovery of this fact in 1920 caused such a sensation in Hawaii as to capture the headlines of the newspapers and cause the Hawaiians to celebrate in royal fashion throughout the Islands.

IF we admit that the Hawaiians came from America and that all of the Polynesians are closely related, we are likely to conclude that all of the Polynesians came from America, probably at the time of Hagoth. But there are other ethnological considerations to make before closing the subject.

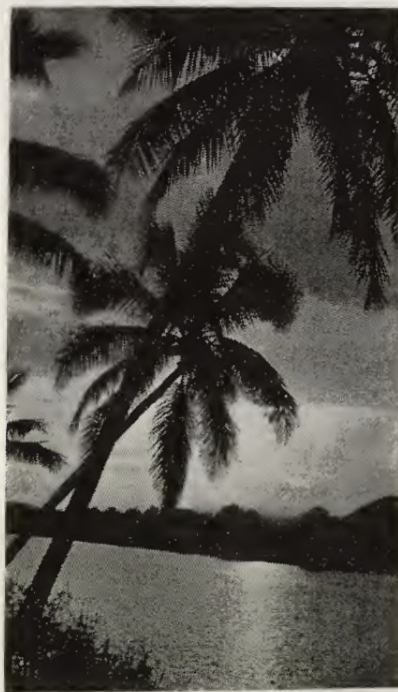
The linguistic approach to our problem is full of possibilities. It would be interesting to see the Maori "Maia" compared with the American "Maya." These words have similar meanings and are pronounced exactly the same. Scholars may some day find a connection among the Biblical "Tekel," the Maori "Tiki," and the Mexican "Tikol." Certain studies have shown a possible connection between the names of Maori tribes and the Arawa, Arawaki, and Iroquois tribes of America. I will not burden this article with more examples of word similarities because as yet only a mere start has been made in this particular study, but I will say in passing that there is much evidence of a linguistic nature in support of the American Origin theory. Certain Maori dancers that have visited this country claim that they were able to understand the spoken language of some of the American Indians and the sign language of nearly all they contacted.

Clifford E. Gates in an article found in the *Scientific Monthly* of September, 1922, speaks of the Polynesians as the "Caucasians of the Pacific." He says: "The appearance and characteristics of the people point at once to a Caucasian lineage." G. Albin Matson, in his recent *Improvement Era* discussion of "Blood Groupings Among the Indians," points out the significant fact that the Polynesians have a very similar blood test to that of the American Indians. Such studies as these are encouraging.

However, some scientific theories of the day on race origin give little

support to the conclusions I have drawn above. But, while they do nothing to prove these conclusions, they also do nothing to disprove them. Clark Wissler says the following in speaking of the similarities of American Indians and Polynesians:

"With the Polynesians the agreements are chiefly in pigmentation and to some extent the hair. . . . Among such traits as blowguns, plank canoes, hammocks, lime chewing, head-hunting cults, the man's house, and certain masked dances common to the New World and the Pacific Islands,



IN THE ISLANDS OF THE SOUTH SEAS
Photo by Author

there appears the tendency to mass on the Pacific side of the New World. . . . There are abundant data to show that the Polynesians are recent arrivals in the Pacific."

Wissler is here speaking of the origin of the American Indians, and he concludes that even though they had contacts with the Pacific Islands they did not originate from there. However, Wissler says nothing to disprove the theory of the Polynesians coming from America. In fact, he infers that the Polynesians are later arrivals than the American Indians and he admits contacts between America and the Pacific Islands. It is still reasonable to believe, then, that the Polynesians came from America.

HRDLICKA, noticing the similarity in culture traits between American Indians and Polynesians, makes a similar observation to Wissler:

"It is probable that the western coast of America, within the last 2,000 years, was on more than one occasion reached by small parties of Polynesians."

He is also speaking of the origin of the American Indians and he concludes that in the main they did not come from Polynesia, but he says nothing to disprove the theory of the Polynesians coming from America. In fact, by admitting that culture traits are similar, and by denying that the American Indians came from Polynesia, he only strengthens the argument that the Polynesians came from America.

Ettie A. Rout, in her recent book on "Maori Symbolism," contends very strongly that the Maoris are Israelites and even suggests that the migration started somewhere in Assyria (The Maori word for the starting place is "Ihira"), went from there to the American continent, and then to the Islands of the Pacific ocean. She served as government reporter in New Zealand and gathered her material by first-hand methods without relying upon previous European writings. This is a fact that makes her conclusions even more valuable. There will not be space in this present article to review all of her splendid material, most of which gives support to what we have been saying, but I commend the book itself to those who are interested.

Culture-trait similarities between America and Polynesia are numerous. The geometric design, which is found in both places, is an outstanding example of this. Mexicans of the Cordilleras use the same type of war-gong as the New Zealand Maoris. Customs and traditions are in many cases almost identical. All of these facts help to establish our contention of the probable connections among these lands and peoples.

Of course there are always the indigenists—those who claim that the same culture trait may develop naturally in more than one place, and that finding the same trait in two or more places does not necessarily mean that there have been contacts. The indigenistic expla-

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nation is good for many problems, but when there are as many similarities in culture as we have just seen, it seems difficult to explain all away by a separate development theory. The theory of diffusion through human contacts is much more satisfying.

The indigenist especially runs into difficulty when he gets into the biological field. This can best be illustrated by a study of the potato. According to William E. Safford in his article "The Potato of Romance and of Reality," nothing was known of our cultivated potato before it was grown by the Aranco Indians of Chile and the Incas of Peru. The sweet potato preceded all other varieties, and its original home has been proved to be America. Now, besides this original home, the only other places in the world where this sweet potato has been found to be growing natively are Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa, and Tahiti. If we are to believe that this potato developed separately in each place then we would expect it also in other parts of the world; but since we find it only in Polynesia and America, and since it originated in America,

we are to conclude that the Polynesians came from America and took the potato plant with them to the Pacific Islands.

When the white man first landed in Polynesia he was astounded by the existence of many Israelitish customs and traditions. In New Zealand, the ordinance of baptism by immersion was administered by authorized priests called Tohungas. A form of temple (Whare Wanaanga) existed, in which only men were permitted. It received high reverence, and was for the purpose of giving training for the priesthood. In Hawaii there seemed to be a knowledge of Christ and of His coming. All of these things are as we would expect if we accept the theory of American origin for the Polynesians.

The evidence is not all in yet, but from what we have, it seems logical to assume that the Polynesians are of the blood of Israel and that they left the American shores at the time Hagoth built his many ships. From this conclusion we can readily understand the answer to our questions: the Mormon Church is interested in Polynesia, and the Polynesians are responsive to Mormonism, both because of a divine promise made many years ago to a "chosen people."

Sauce for a Number of Ganders

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gent requests that poured in upon her for money. Bob's suggestion that he be allowed to accompany the football team on a trip met with a mild but firm refusal and Janice was finally convinced that there was a limit to the number of pairs of shoes that a college girl might reasonably be expected to get along with. Elaine arrived at the point where she would wear a remodeled dress without too prolonged rebellion and Ken eventually, if ungraciously, gave up the idea of buying a new football.

Now that she was dressed up, Edith began looking about for some place to go and found that it was not at all difficult once she had made up her mind to venture forth.

A literary club and a civic improvement group both welcomed her in. She found it thrilling to be able to tell some of her own experiences of the day at dinner time instead of merely listening to what the others had to say.

Of course this new freedom for the mother meant that the girls had to take over a share of the housework but in time they learned to accept even this innovation as inevitable and to wash dishes without a great deal of murmuring.

The family had adjusted comparatively well to the new mode of living until Thanksgiving day drew near when Edith threw a real bombshell into their midst by announcing that she was not going to cook a big dinner—in fact, she was going to cook scarcely any dinner at all.

"But, Mother!" cried Kenneth, "Thanksgiving is the main holiday of the whole year and the dinner is the main part of the day. Who

ever heard of going without a big dinner on Thanksgiving?"

"Just what I'd like to know," added Bob. "Things have come to a sorry pass around here if we have to go without a Thanksgiving dinner." He thought it wiser not to mention for the present that he had already invited a school friend who was staying in town for the holiday to have dinner with them.

Even James was shaken out of his usual mildness enough to say, "If it's expense that is bothering you, Mother, we can always get the means for this particular occasion."

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