

The Pacific as a Field for Ethnological and Archaeological Investigation



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As will be seen, I have assumed that the exploration should last several years. A hurried trip with short stops at a few remote points is not enough at the present day. What we wish is a more detailed knowledge so that the fragmentary facts which we now possess may be fused into a more complete picture of the Pacific Marine Flora. Then and not until then shall we be able to discuss intelligently the question of the distribution and general character of the insular floras and their relation to those of the nearest continents.

The exploration of the marine flora is of course only one of the numerous objects of an expedition to the Pacific, but it is an important object when one considers the great extent of the coast to be studied. The work in this important field should be intrusted to an expert well trained in the study of algae and not left to the chance work of a general collector who, although he might bring back valuable material, could not be expected to recognize the smaller species which are quite as interesting, often more interesting than the larger species.

THE PACIFIC AS A FIELD FOR ETHNOLOGICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

By J. Walter Fewkes

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In the following suggestions regarding the Pacific as a field for anthropological investigation the valuable work already accomplished in this branch of study has not been overlooked. The contributions which, from time to time, have been published by local students have been most important, and the admirable reports of expeditions sent out by the different governments of Europe and by local museums, have revealed a wealth of material on the aboriginal inhabitants of the Pacific.

But the field for anthropological investigation in the Pacific is so vast that many additional laborers are needed to gather the plenteous harvest it offers. There is an urgent call for coöperation of many more specialists so that this work may be carried on as part of a coördinated plan, systematically followed. This necessitates more observations on the migrations of the Polynesians, Melanesians, and dark races of the Pacific, to determine their center of origin and diffusion from island to island, a study directly connected with geographical phenomena. Investigations of the colonization of the Pacific islands, of the migration of man from island to island, and of the effect of insular environment on human culture, are very attractive fields of research. Much remains

to be investigated in this line of study. Many direct observations are desirable to advance our knowledge of the Melanesians, Papuans, and especially those Polynesians, if any, that are still uncontaminated by civilization and missionaries, with a view to discover ways of primitive thought. We need a comprehensive study of the linguistics of the Pacific islands by linguists trained in modern intensive methods, in order to determine the relationship of the Melanesians and Polynesians. We have no collections of texts, few myths and only a fragmentary knowledge of the material culture of these peoples.

One of the most important lines of work among Pacific islanders is to gather from natives data of this kind which is rapidly being modified and will be lost forever if not gathered in the immediate future. Much remains to be done on the sociology of the Polynesians and Melanesians, notwithstanding the important observations that have already been made. There is an urgent call to collect material on terms of family relationship as a contribution to primitive society. The observations already made should be verified and augmented by new facts regarding the sociology of these fast disappearing natives.

There are many islands which offer facilities for determining the antiquity of man on the Pacific islands. Throughout Polynesia are scattered many prehistoric ruins of which comparatively little is known. Megalithic monuments occur not only on Easter Island, but also on Tahiti, the Marquesas, Tonga, the Carolines and Ladrões. Although Pitcairn island was uninhabited when discovered, huge carved pillars, massive walls and images, indicate the former existence of a characteristic culture. The great stone temple at Atahura in Tahiti, said to be 270 feet long, by 94 feet wide and 50 feet high, was approached by a flight of steps hewn out of coral and basalt rock, showing artistic skill beyond that of the present inhabitants. There are ancient stone platforms in the Marquesas constructed by people of mixed Polynesian origin which rank among the largest in Oceania. On Ponape of the Carolines carved stone images over eight feet high are reported; and at sacred Tonga there is a trilithon monument, consisting of two massive upright stone blocks into which is morticed a sculptured transverse megalith on which is a circular stone basin. Our knowledge of these monuments is very limited. Field work on them is very desirable.

Mr. Christian has published an entertaining account of the so-called Pacific Venice, an architectural marvel, situated in the Caroline Islands. This monument consists of ancient platforms and massive walls made of hewn basalt. It measures 185 feet in length, and from 20 to 40 feet in height. Within its enclosure on a raised inner terrace is a stone

mortuary chamber in which ancient chiefs of the island are said to have been buried. The work thus far done by archaeologists on these great monuments is comparatively superficial. Further investigations promise much additional material.

The islands of the Pacific present most instructive problems in physical anthropology. There is every evidence that renewed study in this line would reveal much new material.

The strongest appeal that the anthropologist can make for additional field work on the prehistoric inhabitants of the Pacific and their culture is their bearing on the unity or plurality of origin of man. Culturally the aborigines of America and those of the Pacific islands were in the Stone age when discovered. We naturally look to the Pacific for the cultural kin of the American race. It is desirable that extended observations be made on the Polynesians to supplement what is known of the Stone age of the continents, especially America.

I would naturally lay great stress on a systematic survey of the aboriginal monuments in the Pacific islands to discover their history. The first step would be to make an archaeological reconnaissance to determine the distribution and character of antiquities. Having determined in this way which one of the many sites of human occupation shows superficial evidences of the greatest age, excavation should be made upon it to ascertain its age, history and relation of former inhabitants, as shown by skeletal material, remains of architecture, minor artifacts and other archaeological material.

MID-PACIFIC LAND SNAIL FAUNAS

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It may seem presumptuous to infer from the distribution of little land snails on scattered Pacific islands, that large Pacific land areas have disappeared in Tertiary time; but if we accept the general principle that similar organisms have evolved from a common ancestry, this hold inference seems justified. Briefly, the reasons are as follows:

The land snails of the Pacific islands, as far as now known, may be divided into two groups: those living on low islands and on the shore zone of high islands, and those inhabiting the forests of high islands. Many of the first group have a wide distribution suggestive of dispersal by human or other adventitious agency and are therefore not significant in the present problem.