

THE ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT COLLOQUIUM SERIES
PRESENTS

**The Ancient Hawaiian State:
Telling a Book by its Cover**

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17TH, 3:00 PM, IN CRAWFORD HALL 115

The ultimate ancestors of the 200 nation-states that today span our world were a few small-scale societies--tribes or chiefdoms—that spontaneously organized themselves into primary states. The list of these far-flung “cradles of civilization,” has traditionally been limited to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, China, Mesoamerica, and Andean South America. However, the recently published book *The Ancient Hawaiian State: Origins of a Political Society* demonstrates that Polynesia, with primary states in both Hawai`i and Tonga, should be added to this list. The book describes the ancient Hawaiians' transformation of their Polynesian chiefdoms into primary state societies. The emergence of primary states is one of the most revolutionary transformations in human history, and Hawai`i's metamorphosis was so profound that in some ways the contact-era Hawaiian states, large-scale societies with politically-centralized, bureaucratic governments, are more similar to our world than to that of their closely-related Polynesian contemporaries. In sharp contrast to the other six regions, where states emerged in the distant, pre-literate past, the transformation of Hawaiian states is documented not only archaeologically but also in an extensive body of oral traditions preserved in written form and a rich literature of early post-contact eyewitness accounts by participants and Western visitors. One of these visitors was John Webber of Captain Cook's final expedition, whose painting, featured on the cover, serves as an invitation to the book, for it allows us to witness a magnificent procession of state in Kealakekua Bay on January 27th, 1779 that displays the power and wealth of Kalani`ōpu`u, king of Hawai`i Island and his royal court of chiefs, priests, and warriors, newly arrived from two recently conquered districts of the Maui kingdom.

ROBERT J. HOMMON, retired Archaeologist and Senior Cultural Resource Scientist for the Pacific Islands Office, National Park Service, has conducted research on seven of the eight major Hawaiian Islands, including work in Mākaha and Kahana valleys, O`ahu, the Kealakekua region, Hawai`i Island and island-wide surveys of Maui, Lāna`i, and Kaho`olawe. For Kaho`olawe he prepared the overview report for listing the entire island in the National Register of Historic Places. He served 10 years as president of the Society for Hawaiian Archaeology and eight years as a member of the Hawai`i State Historic Sites Review Board (1995-2002). His book *The Ancient Hawaiian State* (2013, Oxford University Press) is a much-evolved version of his University of Arizona 1976 doctoral dissertation.

Two reviews of *The Ancient Hawaiian State*:

"Hommon's masterful integration of archaeological and documentary records demands attention from scholars beyond Oceania who must interpret the world's early states without eyewitness accounts. Hawai`i offers a perspective that is rarely accessible to archaeologists who study complex societies solely through material records."

--James M. Bayman, University of Hawai`i at Mānoa

"Robert Hommon offers us not only a comprehensive description of the ancient Hawaiian state, but a model for state emergence that draws upon a wealth of comparative data from other Polynesian societies. Hommon moves longstanding debates over the nature of Polynesian political organization to a new level of understanding."

--Patrick V. Kirch, University of California, Berkeley

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