

# POLYNESIAN MIGRATIONS

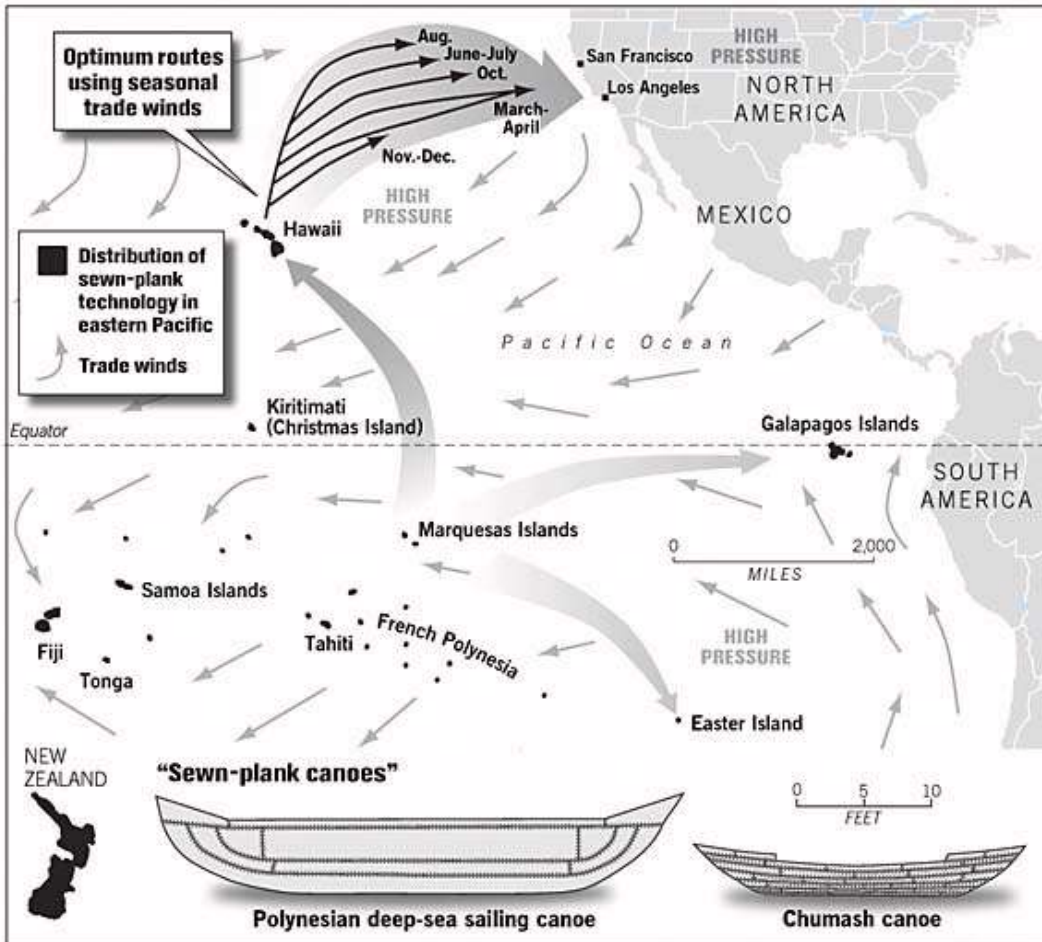


## FROM MALAY TO MAORI: LANGUAGE LINKS

All Polynesian languages belong to the Austronesian language family, now the most widely dispersed in the world – from Madagascar to Easter Island. Words for outrigger canoes with sails and paddles can be traced from near Oceania back through the ancestral languages of island South-East Asia. The Māori words waka (canoe) and ra (sail) have the same origin as the Malay words – wangka and layar.

## RECENT VOYAGING INTO REMOTE OCEANIA

Around 1200 BC migration into Remote Oceania began. Remote Oceania lies to the east and south of Near Oceania, and consists of Melanesia south-east of the Solomons, Micronesia and Polynesia. The islands are generally smaller, with fewer food resources, and were beyond the reach of simple water craft. However, the migrating people had Neolithic (New Stone Age) technologies, and food-producing economies. Known as **Lapita**, they had learned to explore the open sea and survive. After millennia of developments in boat building, and accumulated experience of seafaring in Near Oceania, skilled navigators began to explore in sophisticated canoes. Migrants voyaged east across the tropical Pacific into Remote Oceania, carrying with them domesticated plants and animals, to sustain settlement in their new island homes.



## REACHING SOUTH AMERICA

Ultimately explorers arrived at South America, and then returned to their home islands in Remote Oceania with the **kūmara** (sweet potato) and a species of gourd. Radiocarbon dates for kūmara found on Mangaia in the southern Cook Islands show that Polynesians had reached South America and returned by 1000 AD.

## VIKINGS & POLYNESIA

According to Icelandic sagas, Vikings from Greenland found Labrador and briefly settled in Newfoundland around the same time. The circumstances in both North and South America were similar for Vikings and Polynesians. Both travelled in small parties to the extreme limits of their range, encountering populated continents. There is little archaeological evidence of these contacts.



## TO NEW ZEALAND & THE CHATHAM ISLANDS

Around 1300 AD Polynesian settlers used subtropical weather systems to navigate their way to New Zealand. These migrants were the ancestors of New Zealand's Māori people. At about the same time, they reached the northern satellite islands of Norfolk and the Kermadecs. Later still, early Māori exploring eastward from New Zealand discovered the Chatham Islands, just a few centuries before the first European expeditions reached the Pacific.



## SEARCH & RETURN

Lapita navigators explored in only one direction – south-east, against the prevailing trade winds. All island groups in island Melanesia and West Polynesia that lie in a south-east direction have Lapita settlements. None of these settlements have been found on other islands. At predictable times each year the trade winds would reverse from south-easterly to westerly. At these times canoes could set off with the wind behind them, and explore to the east. When the winds reverted to south-easterly, a safe return could be made. The exploration strategy was to search and return. All the occupied island groups acted as broad safety nets for returning canoes.

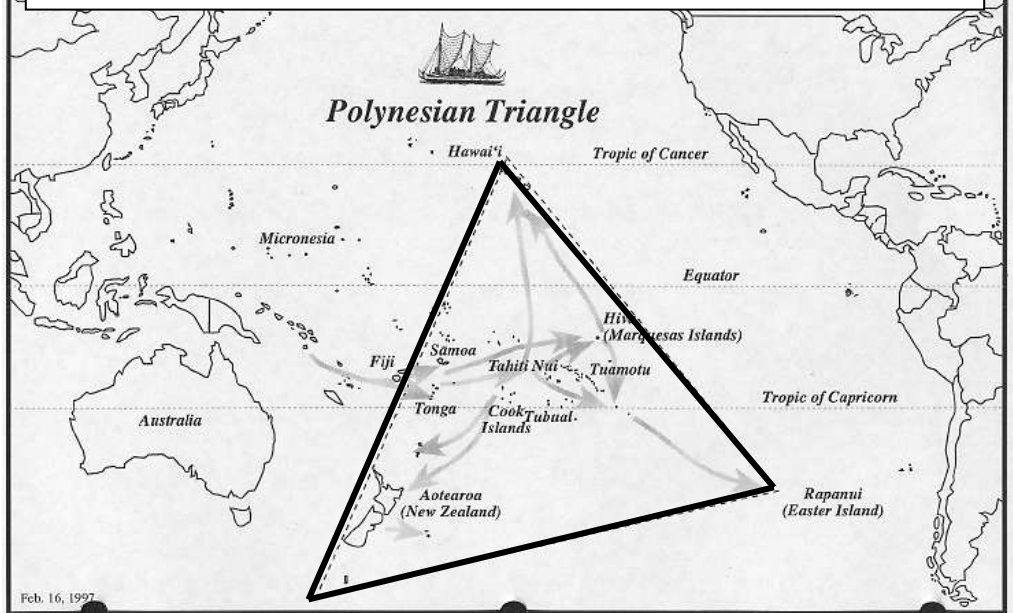
## EARLY THEORIES

The first explorers had no maps or navigational instruments, and there has been spirited debate among sailors and scholars as to how they settled the region. Early theories ranged from mythical hero navigators who discovered new lands and returned home with sailing directions, to accidental voyagers who drifted away from islands to which they could not return. Complicating the argument was the myth of a South American origin, advocated by some 19th-century scholars and popularized in the 20th century by the archaeologist Thor Heyerdahl.

## RECENT UNDERSTANDING

We now know that migrations were deliberate, because they involved taking the people, plants and animals needed to establish sustainable colonies. There have been many experimental voyages in replica canoes and rafts, as well as other 'computer voyages'. Computer experiments using data for winds and currents show that the major voyages could not have occurred by drift.

*In central and eastern Pacific is a large triangular area where the world known "Islands of Wonders" live the happy and charming Polynesians. They inhabit the Polynesian Triangle which includes such popular groups as Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti (or Society), Cook and Marquesas Islands.*



## SURVIVAL, NOT SPEED

*The human instinct for survival meant that exploration almost certainly occurred in stages, using different sailing strategies:*

- **Against the wind** – this was the initial search-and-return voyage, to find out whether there were islands on the exposed side of the home island.
- **Across the wind** – once navigators had found new islands, they could then begin to sail safely across prevailing winds. They would know that on their return they could stop at these islands if they could not make it all the way home
- **Downwind** – this happened at a later stage. Sailing downwind usually requires returning by a different route, and it took time for explorers to discover the intermediate islands that made these routes possible. Sailing downwind also indicated that navigators understood how to use the various weather systems.

1. What are kumara?
2. How were Viking & Polynesian migration experiences similar?
3. Were the Polynesian migration to South America:  
Accidental or Deliberate?

4. What sailing strategies did Polynesians employ during their voyages?
5. What is the Polynesian Triangle?

6. What were the 3 stages of Polynesian Migration?