

# ANCIENT HAWAI'I

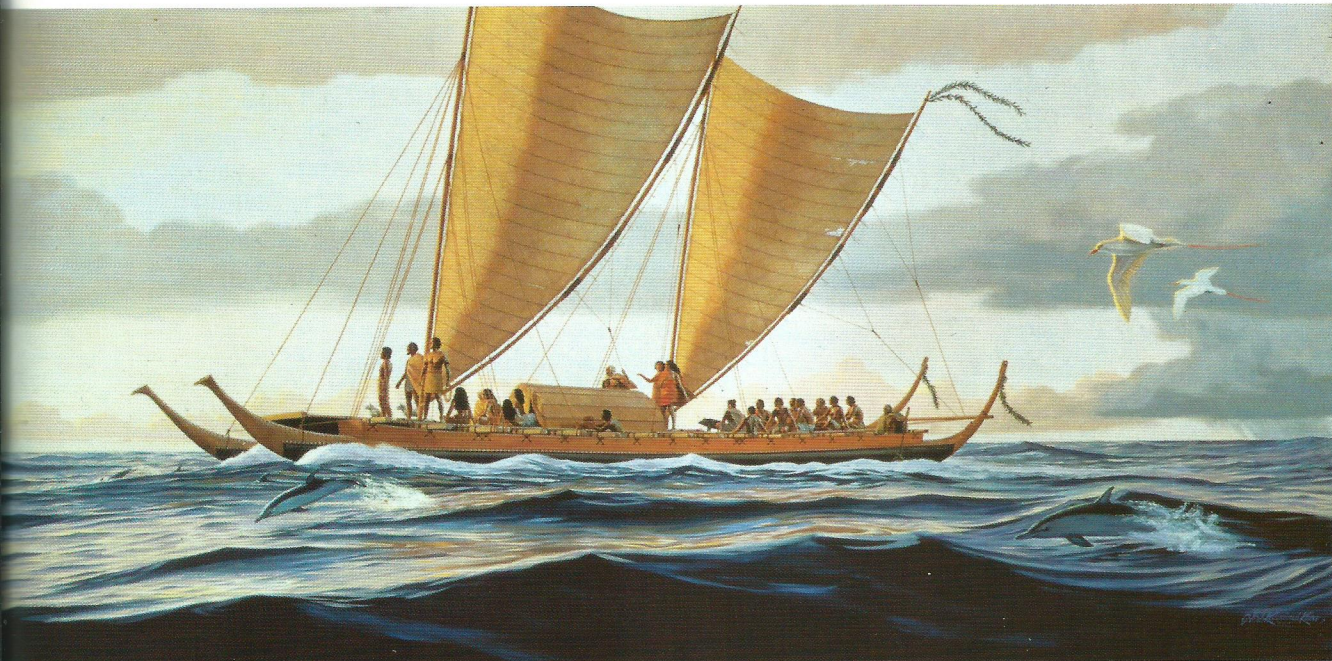


WORDS AND IMAGES BY  
HERB KAWAINUI KĀNE

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## PRONUNCIATION

To readers who have not heard the spoken language, Hawaiian words can be as daunting as shoals to a sailor in uncharted waters. This guide does not address all the intricacies, but it may help you sail your way.

Every syllable ends with a vowel, and every vowel is sounded.

The *ōkina* (‘) is a glottal stop, like the sound between the two *oh*'s in the English *oh-oh*. In some words it marks where a consonant has been dropped from the ancient Polynesian language.

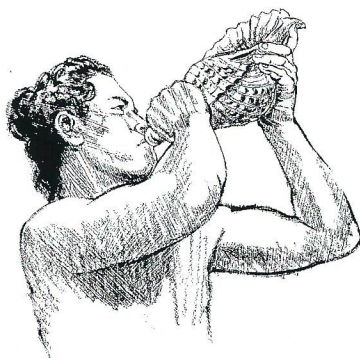
Stress (or accent) all vowels marked with macrons: *ā, ē, ī, ō, ū*.

When pronouncing combined vowels (ae, ai, ao, au, ei, eu, oi, ou) stress the first vowel and glide to the next. *Eu* will sound *ay-oo*. *Aia* will sound *ai-ya*.

Most words accent the next to last syllable and alternating preceding syllables: *HĀ-ma-KU-a*. Words with five syllables, accent the first and fourth syllable: *KU-ku-i-PĀ-hu*.

Vowel sounds: *a* as *a* in above; or if stressed, as in far  
*e* as *e* in bet; or if stressed, as ay in day  
*i* as *y* in happy, or if stressed, as ee in see  
*o* as the *o* in sole  
*u* as the *oo* in moon

Consonants are the same as in English except for *w*, which is as in English, except after *i* and *e* when it is sounded as *u*. Before and after an *a* it's sometimes sounded as *u*.



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## CANOES

**P**OLYNESIA BEGAN WITH THE VOYAGING CANOE. PROVEN SEAWORTHY upon Earth's largest ocean, it must rank as the finest product of any culture that knew no metals.

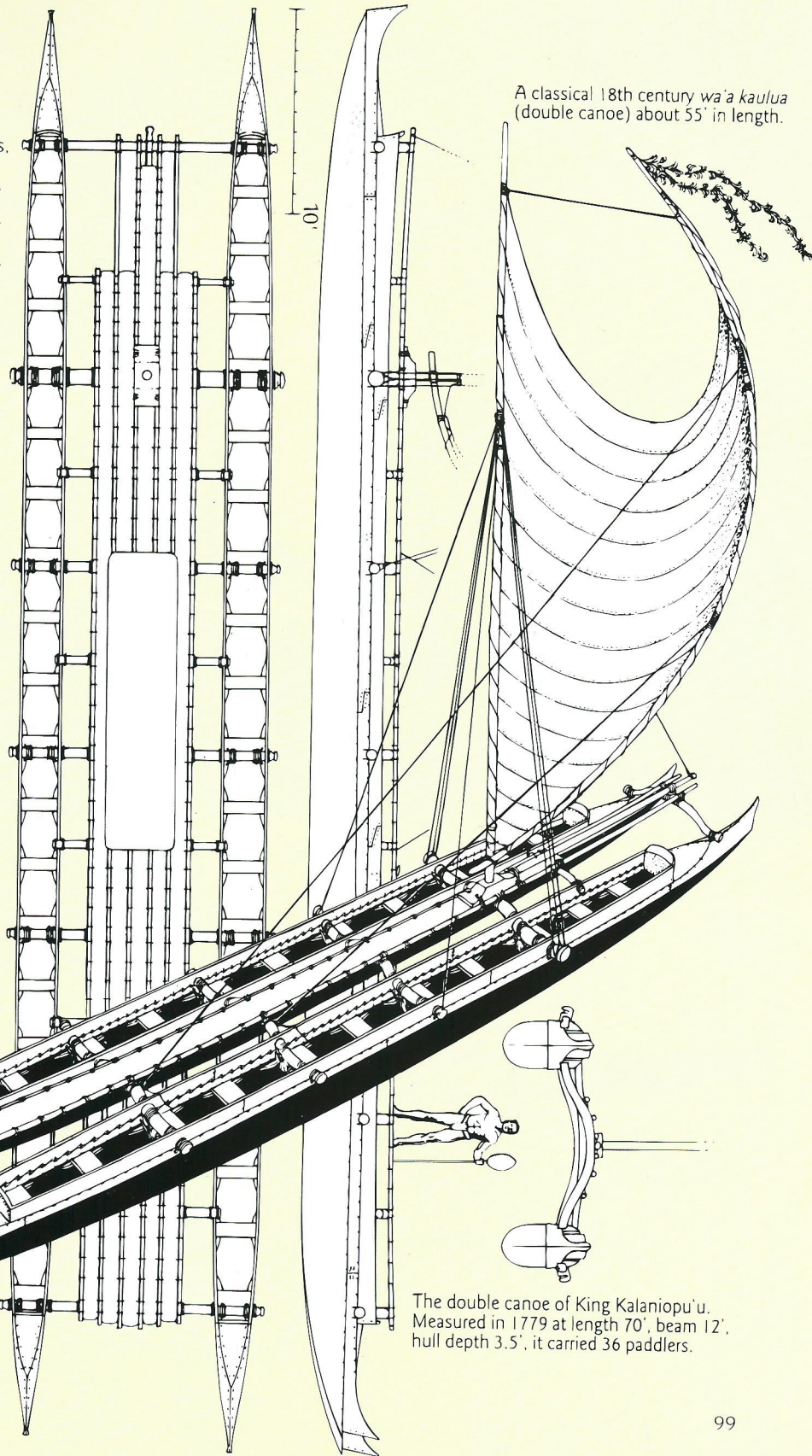
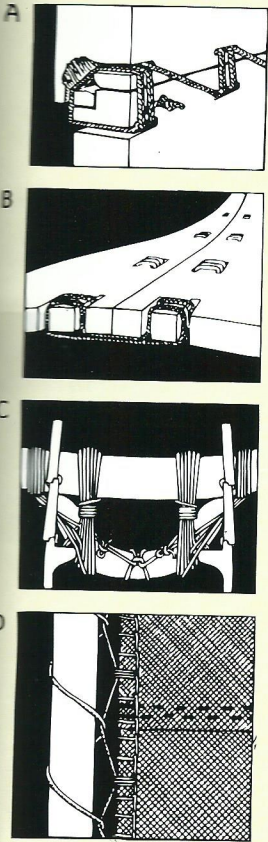
Among Pacific Islanders the canoe (Hawaiian *wa'a*, Maori *waka*) is the symbol of their mutuality. It lies at the heart of their culture, for all know that their very existence is owed to successful voyages in ancient canoes. The canoe reminds them of the courage, resourcefulness and skills of their ancestors—qualities worthy of emulation today, and upon which survival may once again depend.

Chiefs slept within the hulls of new canoes to invest them with *mana*. A story tells of a war party forced to escape back to sea after an unsuccessful landing. One chief had beached his canoe some distance from the others and was cut off; he reached it, but with neither time nor crew to launch it. Friends urged him to swim out to them, but he shouted, "Go! I will die here rather than abandon my canoe."

Smaller canoes used for fishing, surfing, and racing were of a single hull (*wa'a kekāhi*) with a stabilizing float of light weight wood. Now called "outriggers" because the float is rigged out from the hull, the float (*ama*) is carried on the left side of the hull throughout most of Polynesia. In a double-hulled canoe (*wa'a kaulua*), if hulls are not of equal length, the smaller hull rides on the left and is called the *ama*, and the larger hull the *'ākea*. Throughout Polynesia, crossbooms (*'iako*) connecting the hulls were made from straight poles, but in Hawai'i curved crossbooms were invented which held the center deck (*pola*) higher above the water, and gave greater strength. In groves of *hau*, a tree which produces naturally curving branches, canoe builders shaped the growth of young limbs with splints and ropes so the next generation might harvest perfectly formed crossbooms for double canoes. 70 feet seems to have been a typical length for a double canoe of a Hawaiian ruling chief. The greatest recorded hull length was 108 feet.

During the exploration of Polynesia, canoes venturing outward from the same center must have been of the same design; but when Europeans arrived many centuries later, regional differences in weather, seas, and available materials, as well as local cultural changes and inventions, had resulted in designs and ornament unique to each island group. Ships being as mortal as their makers, the earlier "archaic" design vanished as designs evolved which became "classical" to each island group. Except for pieces of preclassical Maori canoes excavated

- A. Assembly of gunwale strake to hull by a running line of sennit through chiseled holes, interior view. Lashings are concealed from exterior view.
- B. Assembly of an end piece.
- C. Double canoe lashing. Cross-beams are lashed to a U-shaped thwart set in cleats inside the hull.
- D. Attachment of the mat sail to the mast.



A classical 18th century *wa'a kaulua* (double canoe) about 55' in length.

The double canoe of King Kalaniopu'u. Measured in 1779 at length 70', beam 12', hull depth 3.5', it carried 36 paddlers.

on New Zealand, and pieces of an ancient seventy-foot canoe from a bog on Huahine, there is no hard evidence. Except for a petroglyph on Easter Island, and a 19th century Marquesan model said to be of an earlier design there is no descriptive record.

To develop a conjectural design for the ancient Polynesian voyaging canoe in order to depict it in paintings, the "age-distribution" method was used. Hull and sail design features, found to be most widely distributed throughout "Eastern" or "Marginal" Polynesia when Europeans arrived (including Hawai'i, the Marquesas, Tahiti, the Cook Islands and New Zealand) were taken to be most ancient because they must have been common features in the era of exploration and settlement. These also formed the functional basis for the author's design of the 1975 voyaging canoe replica *Hōkūle'a*, with the addition of some distinctively Hawaiian stylistic elements.

Long distance voyaging was made under sail, the distances being far too great for paddling. In Hawai'i, as long distance voyaging to the South Pacific declined, paddling replaced sailing as the major power mode for the shorter trips within the Hawaiian Islands. Chiefs prudently traveled with large numbers of bodyguards who, put to work as paddlers, provided freedom of mobility, the ability to move canoes against the wind or through calms. The shift to paddling brought a change in hull design from deep hulls that tracked well against the wind to shallower, round-bottomed hulls which were more maneuverable under paddles or sailing off the wind. Sails, no longer needed for working upwind, evolved to a full-bellied "crab claw" shape useful for running with the wind or on a broad reach.

The ancient, less specialized and more versatile triangular sail set on straight spars survived in the Marquesas, Tuamotus, Cook Islands and New Zealand, as well as in the sails of some Hawaiian fishing canoes. I used it on my first conceptual drawing for *Hōkūle'a*, but bowed to pressure to make the sails look "more Hawaiian." However, after years of experiment with sails cut to resemble the classical Hawaiian profile, the simpler, ancient triangular shape has proved to work more efficiently to windward or on a beam reach, and is now the sail that *Hōkūle'a* carries. Voyages between Hawai'i and Tahiti must be sailed slightly against the wind either way to overcome leeway.

No culture can long exist without its objects. The loss of an important object results in the loss of psychic as well as material benefits derived from it. Memory and meaning fades, and cultural disintegration occurs. Perhaps this is why canoes, as realities that link them to their ancestors, are still important to Pacific Islanders.



**A FISHING CANOE OFF NORTH KONA**

In the foreground a gannet dives for a flying fish. Forested Mount Hualalai rises to 8,200 feet in the background. Although the scene is ancient, this view from the sea has not radically changed. Two popular resorts now stand on the depicted shoreline: The Kona Village Resort and The Four Seasons Resort, Hualalai; but both are "low-rise" and esthetically compatible with the landscape. *Collection of William and Diana Holland*

